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Editorial: The Convention Issue: A Time to Reflect and to Look Ahead

The Feminist Press
THE CONVENTION ISSUE: A TIME TO REFLECT AND TO LOOK AHEAD

For the first time since we began publishing in 1972, we have devoted an entire issue to a single subject: the First Annual Convention of the National Women's Studies Association. Our motivation was dual: this was an historic occasion and we felt a responsibility to record history; this was the first of a series and we wanted to begin the necessary reflection for the Second Convention, to be held May 16-20, 1980, on the Bloomington campus of Indiana University.

We made this decision only slowly, as the events of the Convention came to life, and then as reports and "impressions" began to arrive at our office in the two weeks that followed. We have tried to publish as much as possible of what we received, though we had to cut some pieces sharply both for reasons of space and to avoid repetition. In the end, we decided to add four pages to the issue, in order to include what we had collected, as well as to offer readers a taste of the formal closing session, called Visions and Revisions: Women and the Power to Change.

For women's studies — the educational arm of the women's movement — most conventions have meant "add-ons," like women's studies courses in schools or colleges: the special programs of women's caucuses and commissions at union or professional associations' conventions or regional meetings. Only rarely have women's studies practitioners had space and time in national meetings of their own: in this case, 246 sessions, four and one-half days of meetings.

The sections devoted to reporting research, to discussions of theory, of interdisciplinary or disciplinary perspectives, of the nuts-and-bolts development of women's studies courses and programs, of curricular design and development, and of pedagogical questions, generally received high praise. Those who attended only such sessions pronounced the Convention an unqualified "success": "the most scholarly and the most stimulating meetings I've ever attended"; "dynamic, exhausting, stimulating — all at the same time"; "beyond belief" and "too much"; and, highest of compliments, "better than the Berks [the Berkshire Conference on Women's History]." All those sessions — and the music, the poetry readings, the theatre — signal the decade's achievement: the restoration of women's history and culture to the classroom and to the consciousness of feminist educational workers.

But all conventions have a second purpose — to inspire the orderly growth of the sponsoring Association, to increase its membership, to do its annual business. Here the First Convention's accomplishments are mixed, as the "impressions" within indicate. With the single exception of Rayna Green's report on the meetings of American Indian women, each report at some point reflects disappointment that NWSA is not further along the path to being a national Association; to understanding and making use of its diverse constituency; to considering that diversity and disagreement may be strengths, if the Association is to reflect the concerns of "every educational level" and "every educational setting."

The utopian vision that informs NWSA's goals, this desire to serve all feminist educators, in all disciplines, or beyond them in a variety of interdisciplinary approaches, or outside of traditional educational institutions altogether, makes essential still a third purpose of NWSA's conventions. They provide an annual occasion to link this diverse membership, socially and politically, to build not simply bridges over but roadways through heretofore suspicion-filled territory. The symposium on Women and the Power to Change centers on this need, and many of the writers of "impressions" within provide their sense of the future here.

We'd like to know — from Convention-goers and from those who had to stay at home this time — how you read this issue. Deadline for Fall: September 30. Deadline for Winter: December 1.