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Alice Chai

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THE NWSA CONVENTION: CR SESSIONS

An Asian-American Woman’s View of the CR Sessions

Alice Chai

As a resident of Hawaii for almost twenty years and the only Asian and woman of color on the faculty of the Women’s Studies Program at the University of Hawaii, I have been isolated from both mainland and Third World, especially Asian, women’s studies academicians. Consequently, when I went to the first meeting of a “women of color” consciousness-raising group, I looked for Asians and was disappointed to find only a few others. There were only six at the “Asian Women Only” workshop, and we formed the Asian caucus.

The first item brought up among us was the fact that the Convention was mainly focused on white and Black women. We also noticed that every Asian woman who attended the Convention was a presenter of a workshop.

Upon learning that the decision to form separate CR groups for “white women” and “women of color” had been made by Third World women in the New England region, and after observing that it was unfair that the “white women” category was broken down into several choices of subcategories, while “women of color” failed to reflect our diverse racial, ethnic, class, and national backgrounds, we voted nevertheless to continue with our group.

We then divided into eight random groups consisting of eight members each. However, we could only devote half an hour to consciousness raising due to limited time on the first day.

On the second day, some of us felt that we were concerned with special issues and formed three more small groups: (1) immigration, (2) racism/sexfism, and (3) how we perceived one another among ourselves as women of color. After about an hour, all the small groups came together to share their experiences as women of color. We came to feel a strong sense of solidarity through the realization of having had the common experience of multiple oppressions. As a result, a solidarity group of women of color, based on a female culture of nurturance and mutual support, was formed. A proposal to have an international Third World women’s conference was unanimously accepted. On the third day, we discussed strategies for planning and organizing such a conference under the leadership of women of color and elected ten secretariats.

It is ironic that although some of us did not like to be labeled as “women of color” in the beginning, later it became a unifying symbol. I sincerely hope that we do not repeat the same mistakes as white and Black women in planning and organizing our conference, because many of the Third World women’s conferences which I have attended in the United States have been dominated by U.S.-born Blacks and Hispanics, and many of the Pacific/Asian women’s conferences which I have attended have been dominated by U.S.-born Japanese and Chinese.

Alice Chai reaches anthropology and women’s studies at the University of Hawaii. Her “Oral History of a Korean Picture Bride” appeared in our Fall 1979 issue (Women’s Studies Newsletter, Vol. VII, no. 4).

Members of the Third World Caucus, including Alice Chai, second from left, leaving a workshop.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE CONVENTION

What About “The Rest of Us?”

Leila Ahmed

One had assumed that it was well known that American history with respect to slavery and race was (apart from South Africa) uniquely racist, and that people from, for instance, Asia or the Middle East perceive human races, human complexions and their significances, in ways that differ profoundly from American perceptions and understandings of race. And so one had assumed too that at a feminist conference on racism, it would not be we non-Western peoples who must unlearn our attitudes and speak of races in the terminology of the currently globally powerful and dominant Americans.

Sadly these proved unfounded assumptions, as one incident in particular brought home. An Indian who had come to America specifically to attend the NWSA Convention, shocked at being required to register for workshops according to her color, declared...