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IMPRESSIONS OF THE CONVENTION

The 1981 Storrs Convention signals, to my mind, NWSA's coming of age. For the first time the Delegate Assembly, indeed the entire organization, has come to grips with the fact that even the most worthy expenditures of either time or money depend on available resources. Before, like a kid in a candy store, we had concentrated on the most satisfying ways to spend; now we are mature enough collectively to face fiscal limitations. Rather than be discouraged by financial responsibility, however, we are accepting it as a challenge which we are self-reliant enough to meet. . . .

Virginia Cyrus, a member of the NWSA Coordinating Council, teaches English and women's studies at Rider College.



Vinie Burrows, left, who presented her one-woman show, "Sister! Sister!," to an enthusiastic Convention audience, conversing with Paule Marshall, author of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, available from The Feminist Press in October.

Feminist Community Education at the NWSA Convention

Betsy Brinson

As a community organizer, I came to Storrs to meet others committed to feminist education in the community. At the same time I hoped to learn from the research and reflections of feminist sisters who teach in college programs and in our public school system. . . .

Films offer a vehicle for community education. In "Fundu" I viewed the story of Ella Baker, a Black woman organizer who has been influential in civil rights struggles since the 1920s. Funded by a variety of sources described in one of the Convention workshops, this documentary can be used as an educational tool to stimulate discussion of organizing techniques and leadership roles at the grassroots level.

In a second workshop, "Community Organizations and Community Education: Urban, Rural, and Suburban Programs," I heard librarians discuss the development of community reading and discussion programs in feminist education, such as the Women in Literature project funded by the Vermont State Humanities Foundation. This weekly book discussion program reaches over 1,200 women statewide at a cost of 40¢ per person. (Project director Pat Bates, Rutland Free Library, Court Street, Rutland, VT 05701, has packet material available for those wishing to conduct similar discussion groups elsewhere.)

Other workshop panelists presented information on community education projects offered by the National Congress of Neighborhood Women, a Brooklyn-based organization founded in 1975 to build a network to provide information, support, recognition, and technical assistance for low- and moderate-income women. A major component of the program is the community-based college which offers special curricula and courses on family life, neighborhood studies, ethnic cultural heritage, labor history, and women's leadership. Most courses are interdisciplinary and problem-oriented, relating theoretical materials to concrete personal, family, and community needs. Students are granted academic credit for a degree-granting AA program through the local community college. (For more information, write to NCNW, 11029 Catherine Street, Brooklyn, NY 11211.)

A similar program based in California is the 8-month, 18-credit program operated by the Center for Self-Reliant Education that focuses on training women for community organizing through short, intense learning experiences on domestic abuse, legal concerns, housing issues, peer support, and other feminist educational concerns. (Contact Celeste Brody, 850 West McKinley, Sunnyvale, CA 94086.)

As a result of this session, a network of community educators within NWSA was begun, with representatives of twenty-two organizations present. (Others wishing to participate are invited to contact Betsy Brinson, 1525 Westbury Drive, Richmond, VA 23229.)

Finally, in the workshop "Racism in Labor Education," NWSA Convention participants joined with sisters attending the first national women's meeting of the International Service Employees Union, also meeting on campus. The workshop panelists gave presentations on the historical contributions of Black women to the trade union movement, information on current strategies for dealing with racism and sexism in trade unions, and women's courses being developed in labor settings to assist women in networking.

Following the panel presentations, the group shared painful understanding, tears, anger, and finally their resolution to confront openly the racism and sexism within their own organization. When I left, they were engaged in preparing resolutions and strategies for a free conference meeting that afternoon. . . .

Betsy Brinson, a member of the NWSA Coordinating Council, works with the ACLU Women's Rights Project.