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EDITORIAL

WOMEN'S STUDIES QUARTERLY

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Controversy, Crisis, and Commitment within NWSA

The NWSA Convention and the Berkshire Women's History Conference were held on two eastern campuses in June, with approximately 1300 in attendance in each case, mainly but not only academic women. And yet, no two meetings could have been more different. No one expected the Berks, on Vassar College's campus, to solve the endemic problem of racism; no one expected the Berks to discuss, take positions on, much less work to resolve other political questions of the day. People came to the Berks for its *program*: for history, broadly interpreted, covering almost all aspects of what we have come to call women's studies. Participants could choose to attend eight sessions beyond the keynote, eight out of a total of 144. The keynote address by Joan Scott, printed within, focussed on the hostility of the world outside of the Berks to the prospect of women assuming their rightful place in the world of academe.

Focussed not on the enemy outside, but on racism within the women's movement, NWSA's Convention on the campus of the University of Connecticut at Storrs opened to swirls of discontent that, even from the beginning (see keynote addresses by Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde within) sprang into controversy. Aside from the huge campus and the awkward distances to be traversed between dining hall and sessions, there was the diffuseness of the program: even with many last-minute cancellations, there were too many sessions—more than 250; too many were poorly attended, sometimes because of their inaccessibility, sometimes because of conflicts with the "business" of the Association. But the main controversy focussed on the brave attempt to provide a daily consciousness-raising experience for more than one thousand persons, and on racism. No one thanked the conference organizers or the New England regional members who worked for months to prepare the 50 facilitators needed for this effort. No one thanked the facilitators. Only afterwards did some individuals recognize the enormity of the undertaking, and some of its successes as well as its failures.

Beyond the Convention's controversies were the Association's crises. Like many feminist organizations, NWSA has financial problems. In addition, there was a search for a new National Coordinator, since Elaine Reuben has indicated that she will not continue in that office. (The next issue of the *Quarterly* will feature a report on the National Office.) Thus, the question at Storrs, and since, has become: *Do we want a National Women's Studies Association?*

NWSA is an organization of women's studies practitioners aimed both at advocacy for the new profession and at expansion of its hold on educational institutions, formal and informal. Given the Berks, given the other thousand-strong groups of women's studies practitioners in such organizations as Sociologists for Women in Society and the Association for Women in Psychology, NWSA ought to have 10,000 members, not fewer than 2,000. In our view, we need NWSA more than ever, for we are in increasing danger of fragmenting those accomplishments of the past fifteen years, and of being unprepared for the decade's battles ahead. We need to maintain a strong national office; we need an annual conference focussed on major interdisciplinary breakthroughs in women's studies; we need strong and stable leadership in the Association willing to work on fundraising as well as on Convention programming, on advocacy, and on publications. Women's studies practitioners in Japan, in Canada, in Latin America, in India, and in Europe look to NWSA as a model for network-building.

We know the commitment is out there. We have recently visited the 1982 Convention organizers on the beautiful and comfortable Humboldt State University campus and will report program plans in the next issue of the *Quarterly*. NWSA's new fundraising appeal (see within, the One Hundred Dollar Fund) is underway. And we urge all of you reading this editorial not only to pledge your hundred dollars, and not only to renew your membership at once (or join the Association for the first time), but to convince at least one colleague to do likewise. You may promise that person what we are promising you: in addition to the four issues of the *Quarterly*, and a free copy of the first International Supplement, the lower registration rate at Humboldt, and the mailings from the National Office, you will have unequivocally voted to support the continuation of the National Women's Studies Association.

Florence Howe