

## **SCRIPT OF VIDEO**

### **Women, Organizing and Diversity: Struggling with the Issues**

[See *Women on the Advance* (pgs 2-6) for affiliation of women in the video]

BethRichie: Diversity means that people don't just sort of get all mixed up, but that people really have a sense of home. And when we think about becoming diverse organizations, I expect everybody to leave home, not just me.

Laura Unger: You can't stop and self-examine forever because then you never get anything done, but on the other hand, if you don't stop and self-examine periodically, everything gets screwed up.

Barbara Joseph: There is no position of safety. If you really accept that to be a whole human being and to be personally transformed you cannot be in a safe position while somebody else is being attacked.

SUSAN LOB (voice- over scenes from the conference; participants are dancing and exercising)

In February, 1989, fifty women organizers with diverse backgrounds from across the United States, met for 3 days in Stony Point, New York. This event, called *Women on the Advance*, celebrated the Strengths and Struggles of women organizing for progressive social change.

What follows in this type are a few snapshots from the conference. We see women coming together to discuss, to explore, and to reflect on their struggles to end racism, sexism, and heterosexim - struggles central to women's organizing.

We show women grappling with how to create organizations that are diverse and meet the needs of women.

Yolanda Sanchez: I am Yolanda Sanchez, a Puerto Rican woman born and bred in New York City and as someone said, I didn't know I was organizing, but I've been involved in my community since having left college. And I've always acted and reacted as "a Puerto Rican" on nationalist terms and most recent}y have shifted that energy, that focus to think of myself as a Puerto Rican woman and begin to gather that energy and do on that. So Alice Cordona and about 4 other

- women, we've come together and done the National Latinas Caucus.
- Crystal Lee Sutton: I'm proud that I helped 3,000 workers to organize into a union to help themselves to a better way of life in North Carolina.
- Kapp de Villar: I was working on a gay and lesbian hotline just answering the phone out of my room or rather my home and so many people started calling that they didn't have anywhere to go that we organized getting a community center together and when we finished we ended up about a year and a half later with a \$400,000 gay and lesbian community center.
- Barbara Joseph: I currently direct a labor/liberal arts college program for working people, primarily women people of color, white working class people. Workers who never thought that they could go to school, not necessarily to get a college degree, but to put theory behind their practice so that they would be empowered for the long run.
- Kathy Acey: Saying I'm a feminist means that I am doing organizing that is talking about all people cause I don't think you can do anything that will benefit women that's not going to ultimately benefit all of our society. So while my focus is mostly on women, another thing that I've gotten involved with in the past couple of years is more the global issue, particularly doing some work around Central America and most recently around the Middle East, which is for me cause I am of Arab background is very important.
- Charlotte Dickson: I think what I'm most proudest of is that I think as an organizer I have a very, I have extremely good relationships with people and I think that I have a talent for organizing across through the different ages and also across race lines and I'm very proud of that.
- Madonna Beard: I serve on the Tribal Action Planning Committee and what we're trying to do is, one of the big things we're working toward is having sober leadership and so that makes us unpopular. And trying to make a tribal action plan that addresses alcoholism among our people.
- Karen Artichoker: The big focus right now that I'm real pleased about in our country, Sioux country is the tribes beginning to pass tribal ordinances against elderly abuse, against child sexual abuse and battering. Mandatory arrest for any violence committed against anybody else and one of our goals, our visions as a

people is that those kinds of issues are not inherent nor traditional for us that we didn't treat each other like that and so our vision is that some day, we can repeal all of those ordinances because we 11 know how to live and walk in harmony again.

Guida West: I was proud of having taken my first step in 1960 to help organize in the north in the civil rights movement and that was a real even though it may not seem so, it was a real step of courage for me to take that step for me. Then I went to help organize welfare rights and then continued. I've stayed with welfare rights for many years and also joined the feminist movement.

Andrea Hill: I guess the thing that I'm most proud of is what I did, what I'm been able to do on a somewhat volunteer basis. And that is in Washington, D.C. for about 4 years, I've served on a board of something called Housing Opportunities for Women, where we established permanent housing for homeless women and that's something that I got into out of the work I was doing with housing and also out of the reality that "there but for the grace of God go I."

Title: STRUGGLING WITH DIVERSITY

Stephanie Roth: I grew up in a middle class white suburb in California and did not have the experience of growing up in a diverse community and did not have the experience of growing up with messages about racism being something to struggle against or work on. And what happened was that I got involved with the women's movement and women's organizations and was involved in one organization after the another that either self-destructed around racism or just the work just couldn't move forward as a result of racism.

Beth Richie: Diversity is different than charity. Trying to figure out how to do anti-racism work, for example is very different than saving people of color and until there is sort of an acceptance of diversity as something that enriches all of our lives then I think we won't make very much difference.

Barbara Joseph: If you really understand that all of the "antis" really hurt whoever is not experiencing it, there is no position of safety.

Beth Richie: And so one of the first things that I think is important is for white women to understand what women of color can offer to you - skills, incredible skills, and history and organizing ability and culture and strength. And straight women need to understand what lesbian and culture can offer.

Stephanie Roth: It's really important that you don't bring women in saying work on our issue. I think that's sort of an obvious lesson, but what does that actually mean, I mean what does it mean to bring women in an organization where you have very strong ideas, I mean we're very opinionated women in this room. Right, we have clear ideas about what is the correct way to do things, what's the correct way to think about things. And so you open your organization up to difference, well that means difference in terms of how people want to do things, how people think about things and how open are we to that.

Beth Richie: Diversity means that people don't just sort of get all mixed up, but that people really have a sense of home. And when we think about becoming diverse organization, I expect everybody to leave home, not just me. And I think that's one of the things we hadn't figured out very well in terms of working with diverse organizations. We've figured out how to open our doors somewhat to other people, but we haven't figured out how to move into their homes in the same way.

Guida West: This is critical because if we don't learn how to live together and work together, we're never going to get anywhere. This is what our opponents want us (to do). Our enemies want us to fight and I don't want it. We have to learn to work together and we have to learn the things that pain us and to learn how to heal.

Stephanie Roth: I think it's important to understand that we can do anti-racism work even in times and within our organization situations where there aren't a lot of women of color there. I think it's also important to realize that some of the reasons that we find ourselves in organizations and situations where we are mostly white, I mean it's ultimately about racism but sometimes, in a particular time and place, it's about women of color not wanting to be there. Now why they don't want to be there is partly about racism but it's partly about what their priorities are at that time.

Caroline Pezullo: What we keep before our eyes is that we're all so

interconnected and we have a natural base to work with who are facing in a hopeful way some of the solutions of those problems.

Beth Richie:

I also think that we need strategies and models that it's not enough for you to care about racism or care about homophobia or for me to care about anti-semitism. It's critical that we figure out what to do with the good intention. What to do with the care.

Title:

A MODEL FOR DIVERSIFYING ORGANIZATIONS  
*Presentation* by Beth Richie:

There are 3 different sort of phases or sets of organizational action that have to happen in order for organizations to become and maintain diversity. One is you have to do outreach, which means you have to change the appearance of the organization so that one of one things that I assume went into planning this conference is outreach to women of color to let them know that his conference was happening and what was available in terms of how to get here, etc. And outreach changes appearance. That means that you have more diversity. More. You sort of color it up a little bit if you use the example of women of color. Outreach also includes self-education about other cultures. But, you don't have to change your organization very much just to do outreach. That's the kind of open the door c'mon if you want to and be with us.

That needs to be supported by a multi-cultural atmosphere. This is when you really change what it feels like to be here. It includes things like development of affirmative action strategies like we're going, for example, some organizations will plan a conference and say we're going to have a quarter women of color and there aren't a quarter women of color then we're going to reduce the number of white women that come. Also included in being multi-cultural are things like when we have entertainment on, we have music. What kind of music gets played? So it's really about sort of the cultural environment, so it's not the same place with just a little color added; it's a different place.

Outreach and multi-cultural activities are internal to the organization. They need to be supported by the third process, which is external. What can we talk about here at this conference that doesn't necessarily have to do with this

group, but is creating oppression for women of color outside of this group that we can make a public statement about, for example. So that's when we start to take on racism in the larger society as it not only affects us, but affects people who aren't here and perhaps, why they're not here. Okay, so this is a really external kind of set of activities. I think that organizations if they're going to create and maintain diversity, need to do some of this, each one, and need to do it all the time.

And sometimes you need to do a little more outreach and a little less anti-racist and sometimes there's a particularly racist issue in the community and so you need to focus on that and not worry so much about multicultural. But because we're working so much against, to create diversity we're absolutely working against every force in this society. We have to be vigilantly and vigorously involved in activities that support primarily these three areas.

Heather Booth:

In the work that I do and in the organizations that we consult with, we are filled with examples that don't work. Where the staff is overwhelmingly white with a few exceptions, where the base may be black. There was an organization described in the Bronx here that I, not fully familiar with, but that's apparently doing extremely effective work in the community. All the staff was white. Well, it says something about the organization. Then you're facing conflicting goals. One goal is embodying the future society and the other goal is transforming the lives of the people in that community, not just their consciousness, but also their lives by getting them housing.

Charlotte Bunch:

What I feel we haven't fully taken in is the way in which diversity is central to everything we want to see in the future. I know many groups that never get to action because they're so consumed with trying to do outreach and multi-cultural correctly, that they can never get to action because they think you have to do 1 and 2 before you can do 3. And that's where I agree with Heather that if the group is so consumed with it, they have to get 1 and 2 right before they can do 3, then you get in to this if you don't embody the future and you're not perfect now, you ought to disband. Now there are moments when you probably should disband, but by and large I think, the struggle is constantly to keep the vision and figure out what you can do to move toward it, not to think that you can already be there.

Heather Booth: Even things that don't work, in terms of prefiguring the future society may also help to achieve the goal of providing a base for the transformation of the society and for other activity that will work.

Stephanie Roth: It takes an incredible amount of commitment, of time, of organizational resources, of thinking about it, of constantly reevaluating the work. One year the women of color in the organization wanted to do, have the annual conference be for women of color only. Well, this was very controversial and there were a lot of white women in the organization who said "Wait a minute this is a conference for all women in New York that we do every year and it is not right to exclude anyone. But, there was enough organizational support for the conference to happen and what it meant was not, not just that the white women didn't get their conference, but it meant having to spend organizational resources on something that they weren't going to be part of

Laura Unger: You can't stop and self-examine forever because then you never get anything done. But on the other hand, if you don't stop and self-examine periodically, everything gets screwed up. I work in New York City and I have a, my local is divided between mainly, we used to have operators, but mainly black women clerical workers and mainly white men technical workers, you know, with the normal wage disparity and we're all in this organization. Now this is the first time, I mean we just ran a slate, I just became president last year when we ran a slate that was consciously, I mean, I'm the first woman president in about thirty years. My secretary treasurer, which is traditionally the woman's, the woman's role in union leadership is a white man and my vice president is a black man and my board is very mixed so, and I mean that was a conscious thing.

But, the difficulty is a question of that the union has always been seen and because that's the history of the American trade unions as to protect the most skilled, basically the white men jobs and crafts. And we're in a situation where we're just beginning to grapple with how do we organize the clerical workers and then you to tie that to how do we organize the, that's it's not just that they're clerical workers and they're underpaid and they feel the difference between the plant workers, but they're black clerical workers, who have a whole other set of ties within their community that have nothing to

do with the union and all their major ties are either with the churches in their community, with organizations within their community and the union is about the last thing on their list. On the other hand, to be able to defend everybody's rights if we don't begin to build some unity in that organization, the unions are dying anyway. If we don't begin to build some unity in that organization, we're all dead.

(Photographs and music)

- Susan Kaiboni: Ourselves, as women whether we are in Africa, Latin America, United States, we have to be able to start getting together and discuss these problems and come up with solutions to the problems. The men are the ones who are trying to find problems for us, but if we don't find the problems and find ways of getting these problems looked at by ourselves at the same time, we won't get anywhere. So, I feel we should continue organizing. I did not know I was and I think I am organizing.
- Beth Rosenthal: I found a way to bridge a lot of experiences and get into situations like this where connections can be made amidst a lot of diversity and it's a very great interest of mine and something that I hope to be able to foster more.
- Susan Perlstein: I feel so happy to be here and really what I think I'm most proud of and glad I've lived to see this moment is that I persevered because I must tell you that just three months ago, I was almost ready to cash in my chips because you know, between funding and life pressures, I'm a single parent just, I didn't know how I was actually going to make it through. And I feel like I'm glad I made it to come here. And I'm really proud that I've managed to hang in there for twenty years.
- Jan Peterson: I've spent some twenty some years coming out of being born in the civil rights movement and going through the peace and the neighborhood movement and the women's movement and have never lost the feeling that change is possible.
- Stephanie Roth: I'm proud of having survived some organizational splits and stayed and stayed committed to activism and social change.
- Susan Kinoy: I've been doing this for 49 years; I can't believe it.
- Barbara Joseph: Us coming together is part of my vision. Women need time to theorize. People are afraid to talk about theory because they forget that theory is the stimulus to action. And if you don't have a correct theory your action is not going to fail cause I loved what you said; it's just going to take us a longer time. So my vision would be that we have enough time, and this is why this meeting is hopeful to me, so that all the agendas flare up and get

highlighted for us that we begin to think of the theories and the concepts that hold people for the long range. A lot of us in here, most, all of us in here are here because we have committed ourselves for the long range and we do that because we have ideology and principles. They've been said in other movements before and they need to be articulated again by the women of the 80's so that we can sustain beyond the 90's, so that we can carry out the meaning of the women's movement, the meaning of the black movement, the meaning of the human revolution movement for the basic needs of people to be met and for a kind of collective solidarity of people to be one so that real cultural human living can occur. We want to go to the human revolution where we can all live as human beings to our capacity.

\*SINGING

\*GOOD-BYE / HELLO Exercise

(Voice-over Narration by Susan Lob)

In the two years since the conference, racist violence has increased. And civil rights have eroded. In this climate, multi-cultural organizing is even more important but also more difficult.

Feminists need to include a strong anti-racist position in all their organizing efforts. Also the issues we choose to work on must address the devastation of communities of color.

We hope this tape can act as a springboard for analysis, action, and change.

*\* See Session 6 for more on the role of culture and rituals.*

*The Women on the Advance* Conference on which this video is based, took place in 1989. Susan Lob's voice over narration was recorded in 1991.

©1991,

Education Center for Community Organizing  
Hunter College School of Social Work  
129 East 79 Street  
New York, NY 10021 (212) 452-7112 ecco@hunter.cuny.edu