

NCRW Conference 2008: Researchers, Advocates, Analysts Propose A Big Five Policy Agenda for Women

New York (June 10, 2008) – The National Council for Research on Women held its annual conference June 5-7 at the Kimmel Center at New York University. It rallied researchers, advocates and policy experts around *The Big Five* issues that matter most for women during this election year: **economic security, health, immigration, violence and education.**

“The primary campaigns of two strong candidates: one a woman and the other an African American, reflect a particularly exciting moment in U.S. history. We now have a real opportunity to place issues that intersect race, gender and class on the national agenda not only before a new Administration, but before policymakers at the state and local levels as well,” said Linda Basch, President of the National Council for Research on Women.

Many of the topics covered during more than 50 roundtables, working groups and workshops, coincided with *The Big Five*. The conference not only offered comprehensive analysis of *The Big Five* but also took a gendered look at human security, global and domestic issues, such as poverty, trafficking, and the latest feminist scholarship. Each session examined its subjects in-depth and proposed strategies for improving the lives of women and girls.

The opening plenary, “*What’s at Stake for Women in the 2008 elections?*” featured Kathy Bonk from the Communications Consortium, Kim Gandy from the National Organization for Women, Barbara Lee of the Barbara Lee Family Foundation, Diana Salas from the Women of Color Policy Network at NYU and Marie Wilson, President of The White House Project. Ruth Mandel, Director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics moderated an overview of the challenges that lie ahead for the next administration. One speaker emphasized that while Republicans in the 2004 election had representatives in every state working to win over women voters, Democrats had traditionally failed to invest resources and energy targeting women’s support.

The opening plenary preceded a presentation by author Paula J. Giddings who introduced her latest publication, *IDA: A Sword among Lions, Ida B. Wells and the Campaign against Lynching*. In the book, Giddings described Wells as a black feminist way ahead of her time who refused to accept conventional views about race or gender. She planted herself firmly in the abolitionist and suffragist movements with groundbreaking writings attacking lynching as an instrument of political intimidation.

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On Day Two of the conference, Charlotte Bunch, Director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University, led an exploration of global feminism today. The panel emphasized that women and girls faced similar challenges worldwide but that the dynamics and dimensions changed in culturally specific ways.

During a luncheon plenary, former news anchor Carol Jenkins interviewed Patricia Williams, the "Mad Law Professor" and columnist for *The Nation* on the significance of the primaries and the challenges leading up to November. Applauding Senator Barack Obama for the historic speech on race he delivered in Philadelphia, Williams said there was a missed opportunity for Senator Hillary Clinton to speak out with the same frankness earlier in the campaign about gender. Although Williams voiced support for the Democratic nominee, she emphasized that women voters will choose the candidate they feel best supports the needs and concerns of women.

Diversity and inclusion was another important theme running throughout the conference. In the panel on diversity in the corporate and academic arenas, Ana Duarte McCarthy of Citigroup said that less than 3% of senior managers and corporate officials today are people of color. Other panelists, including Anne Erni from Lehman Brothers, Rosemary Killkenny from Georgetown University and Melinda Wolfe of American Express, emphasized the power of incentives and effective mentoring to advance women into leadership positions.

"Diversity has different meanings among different groups and in different countries. We need to avoid a U.S.-centric model when our companies are drawing from a global talent pool," said Subha Barry, Managing Director and Head of Global Diversity and Inclusion at Merrill Lynch.

Other roundtables on Friday spotlighted the economic downturn and its impact on women, the devastating impact of poverty on families and communities, diversity in science and technology, philanthropy and the rise of women's funds, health disparities and the health needs of women, immigration reform, education, and violence against women both domestically and internationally.

Many of the day's themes intersected during a special evening presentation by Leymah Gbowee, the pioneering peacemaker portrayed in the award-winning documentary film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. Gbowee described her paralyzing anger over the civil war that ravaged Liberia. It was only when she joined together with other women and mobilized in protest against the war, that she was able to move her life forward.

"Women around the world are looking towards the United States, and the women's movement in the U.S. for leadership, we need you to stand up against violence and injustice," Leyman Gbowee said.

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The last day of the conference was dedicated to skill-building workshops for NCRW members on fundraising, communications, and diversity best practices. In the closing plenary, panelists Kimberle Crenshaw, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Bonnie Thornton Dill emphasized the importance of including race-gender-class analysis for transforming society. “When we don’t have intersectional analysis, we pit movements in opposition. Race is now encoded in a colorblind language which allows people not to see it,” said Kimberle Crenshaw.

Linda Basch, President of the Council, concluded the conference by stating that the organization is committed to building a more inclusive and multicultural network while fostering research that is crucial for transforming the lives of women and girls.

“Research not only reveals the real challenges faced by women but paves the way for developing effective policies and strategies to address those challenges and ignite transformative change,” Basch said.

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