

MY PERSONAL HISTORY OF THE  
BLACK WOMEN'S CAUCUS OF  
WASHINGTON STATE

The Black Women's Caucus of Washington State is now in its 6th year as an organization dedicated to increasing the participation of Black people across the State in the issues affecting their communities. The Caucus was organized in July 1977 during the State Women's Conference which was held in conjunction with the International Women's Year. Its purpose is to define the barriers preventing Black Women from fully participating in the mainstream of American Society, and to set forth a course of action directing their efforts, resources, and talents toward the removal of those barriers.

The fate of Black Americans as a racial minority group, and the development of Black women in the United States are intricately bound together. We have a long history of concern for civil liberties, and each generation of women has contributed to the long struggle for the rights of women. The social, political, and cultural background of Black American women differs from that of other women and as a consequence, we view the world differently and have different priorities and needs. *(i.e. - single parenthood affects all of us -*

My first experience with the Black Women's Caucus was to attend an organizing meeting in Spokane on October 15, 1977. ~~There had been at least one other meeting that was convened here in Tacoma. Sally Lewis was the first President of this Tacoma group.~~ During the meeting in Spokane, many hours were spent hammering out the documents that would govern our organization. It was an exciting time for me because I had never been involved in an organization of this type before. I had to re-learn Robert's Rules of Order (I'm still learning them) and become familiar with the way meetings were carried out.

After that meeting in which we rode together in a van with other members during the night, met during the day, and returned the evening of the 15th. This planning was done in order to keep the expenses as low as possible. Hotel rooms are expensive!



Upon our return to Tacoma, the whole state was involved in planning for election of State Officers. Our state had been divided into quadrants that included the entire state. Each area was to nominate officers and we were to elect them at the next annual meeting which was held in Seattle, January 7, 1978. Thelma Jackson of Olympia was elected our first State President and presided for two years.

In October 1978, the Black Women's Caucus sponsored the First Annual Black Summit Conference in Yakima. I had the opportunity to work some on the steering committee with various members from Seattle, Tacoma and Olympia. This Conference brought together Black people from all over the State and from many areas of life. A Second Summit Conference was held in October 1979 in Seattle. Both of these conferences provided much information and participation from members of the community.

While planning for Summit conferences were on-going, so too was planning for our annual meetings. We tried to hold them in each area of the state so that each group would serve as the host chapter. I have traveled throughout the State in this fashion. I've visited Richland, Yakima, and Spokane as well as Olympia and Seattle which I feel have been interesting and educational.

In addition to the State-wide activities, our local chapter has been busy too.

For instance, we have been responsible for bringing a display of Black Women: Achievement Against the Odds, a traveling exhibit produced by the / along with the Tacoma Public Library to Tacoma from the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D. C. We have hosted a ~~Black~~ Survival workshop at the People's Center here as well as participated in almost every activity of a positive nature that affects Black life in this area. The activities of the Caucus have centered around issues identified by Black women. We adopt a plan of work and each year up-date and evaluate progress on the plan. Our members are from all walks of life and play a vital part of the communities of which they reside.

I'd like to issue an invitation to you here today to join us - make a commitment to the community and help us break down these barriers that we face. Today, more than ever, we are faced with odds that seem insurmountable when looking at them alone.