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Women of color

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oppressions that women of color face, is organized by the ASUO Women's Center Diversity Coordinator. This year's coordinator, Celine Jo, said she was happy with the way the conference turned out. Jo, a senior history major, wanted the keynote to be entertaining and uplifting to conclude the event.

All day, the EMU housed nine panel discussions and workshops about problems and issues particular to women of color. The workshops addressed many different topics, such as affirmative action, healing white racism, celebrating diversity and surviving sexual assault.

At 6 p.m., about 100 people gathered for a buffet dinner and performance called "Womyn with wings"

The main theme of the three-person play was how women can still "fly" even if someone, or something, is trying to hold them back.

James Chapmyn, who choreographed the play, was the voice of all men and stood far to the right, almost out of sight.

The performance touched on domestic abuse, genital mutilation, abortion, eating disorders and other issues that face mainly women. "Some people were crying, they were so moved by the play," Jo said.

As the caterers cleared the tables and organizers popped balloons, the remaining people inside the ballroom mixed with the actors and expressed gratitude for their inspiring performance.

D'Ebrar Chapman, one of two actresses in the play, said she enjoys the message the performance gives. Chapman has been with the Chapmyn Spoken Word performing arts company for four years. The play shows that "no matter what you've been through, you have power," she said.

Chapman stood or sat center-stage and often added clothes, changed her headdress or put on glasses to signify a change in character. At the beginning of the play, she boldly declared that she was every woman. "I am European women, I am Native women, I am Aboriginal women," she said.

Meanwhile, Amy Varshock portrayed a woman who had been violated by a man she formerly trusted. Varshock has been acting for only a year.

"I feel I am learning more than I teach," Varshock said. "Helping people along the way is an added bonus."

Chapmyn took on the voice of society in a section on eating disorders. He boomed demands from men over Chapman and Varshock as they tried to explain what women with eating disorders go through.

"When we accept ourselves, we find the beauty we all possess," Chapman and Varshock said in unison.

Varshock, who had stood stage left the entire play, finally took center stage near the end of the show. She portrayed a woman who had been raped, stabbed and beaten and left to die. She stood in front of Chapman and displayed her strength as she declared she did not have to go it alone to be strong. She vowed she would fight to bring the perpetrator to justice and show that he could never destroy her.

Darlene Dadras, a theater arts and romance languages major, said she thought the play was wonderful. "It had a lot of powerful messages."

Dadras, who also attended some of the workshops, said she learned a lot at the conference.

"I'm glad they decided to have a performance instead of a speaker."

In future years, Jo said she would like to see more collaboration in planning the event and is working on ways to facilitate this for next year's coordinator.

Francis Piven

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vate funding made possible an expansion of the associated programs including the creation of four classes dedicated to the issues Piven will address.

For three decades, Piven, 67, has stridently worked toward understanding public welfare policies and how they impact or prohibit democratic citizen participation. Her most famous work, the 1971 book "Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public

Welfare," examines the connection between systemic welfare policies and the widespread social change they incite.

Currently distinguished professor of political science and sociology at the City University of New York, Piven's extensive writing and personal activism make her an ideal occupant of the chair, according to Morse committee member and director of the Labor Education and Research Cener Margaret Hallock.

"We invited her because we believe economic inequality and the growing disparity between professional and wage workers is of paramount concern," Hallock said. "And we are at risk if we allow this gap to develop and grow leading to alienation and a lack of participation."

Speaking to participatory politics, Piven will use the recent WTO protests in Seattle as a stepping-off point for much of her presentation topics schedule. In her view, such groundswells of activism are signs of hope against the behind-the-scenes government policy making she evaluates.

In a statement regarding her trip to Eugene, Piven said, "The overall theme of the visit is economic inequality, which is taking a heavy toll on American life, and not only on the poor who are its first victims. When money talks as loudly as it does today, the voices of ordinary people cannot be heard, and democracy atrophies."

But Hallock acknowledged the author's positive outlook for the future when large-scale protests like Seattle bring these issues to the forefront of American consciousness. Changes in policy, Piven believes, often come from the bottom up, not from the top down.

"She is simultaneously a critic of the systems in place but also very insightful and optimistic about opportunities for mobilizing people and including them in the political process," Hallock said. "Having a voice, that's what it's all about."

Giving voice to the issues close to home, Piven's participation in the community forum will give local residents a chance to discuss the labor and justice issues that affect Lane County.

With a total population of 313,000, according to 1998 Oregon Employment Department data, the average annual wage in Lane County is \$26,137. The area's unemployment rate, however, is slightly higher than the national average. This is partly because of the decline of lumber and wood products jobs over the last decade, which provided the largest component of manufacturing employment for the region.

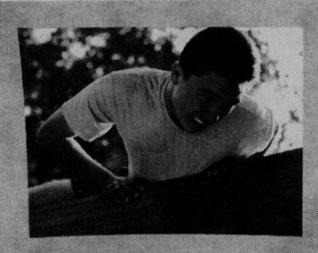
Eugene and Springfield have seen an increase, though, in service sector and high-technology jobs over this same period. Yet as Piven argues in her writing, unskilled workers get squeezed out when their jobs are either mechanized, outsourced or require additional training.

As regional economist for Lane County, Brian Rooney studies these trends and agrees that they help to create the "disappearing middle" Piven discusses.

"There is more of an income disparity here because lumber production jobs have been replaced by high-tech ones like Sony Disc Manufacturing that don't pay as well," he said. In the past, we were dependent on those jobs, and we felt the pain when they left.

Still, Rooney is encouraged by the influx of companies that have moved to the area recently, including Levi-Strauss and a number of call centers which provide new jobs to both skilled and unskilled laborers.

"The economy looks good here in Lane County," he said. "Expanding manufacturing, finance and software design is helping us to diversify and that's good for our future."



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