

Aracely Contreras

Facing Race Essay

Racial Justice Now...Racial Justice Forever! This years Facing Race Conference was held in the Cobo Center in Detroit. Michigan. I learned new things, networked with others, and had an overall great experience. I enjoyed the snow and new scenery but missed the warm California weather. Throughout the conference I learned about struggles, battles and victories in the fight for racial justice. I discovered new campaigns/fights happening throughout the country for racial justice, for example I learned about the "Police Free Schools" campaign in Chicago. I also learned about how vital it is to be a Women of Color entrepreneur and the benefits of owning your own business. I also learned more about Tarana Burke and the Me-Too Movement.

In the breakout session called: Policing Race-the intersection of policing, immigration, and school criminalization, I learned that in Chicago the Black Youth Project is working on a Police Free Schools campaign. Criminalization affects us all and the black youth project started to organize in the space where they spend most of their time; their school. Schools are supposed to be a space where students are nurtured. By placing police at schools, it takes away the nurturing characteristics of schools. Police placement at schools is intentional. Schools in the low-income, marginalized communities of color get the police, whereas the schools on the "other" side of town get the counselors. Policing schools is part of the school to prison pipeline. Police need to be kept off campuses. Schools need more teachers, nurses, counselors and people who are not part of the law enforcement system. In this workshop we discussed

campaigns and how to effectively run and win them. I learned about the 6 D strategy used by many campaigns. The six Ds stand for; Divest/invest, Deprioritize, Demilitarize, Delegitimize, Decriminalize, Dismantle. The Police Free Schools campaign has all these in place. I was fortunate to receive an action Tool Kit that has many useful tips and tools on creating campaigns and changing the narrative. This workshop was very informative, and I gained a better perspective on what is being done around the country to change the way policing is done from the police free schools, to the campaign in Chicago that is trying to dismantle the police gang data base as well as the We came to Learn campaign. It is very inspiring to meet so many people working together to make a change.

Another breakout session I attended and really enjoyed was the Step UP, Lift Up: Women of Color closing the Pay and Wealth Gap through Entrepreneurship. In this session we spent some time learning some current statistics. For example, currently Women of Color are the fastest growing business owners in the US. The facilitators in this session were two WOC business owners. They were both also involved in social justice movements. I learned about the organization called Standing in Our Power. This is a business/entrepreneur mentorship program. Throughout the session we were able to analyze our thoughts and ideas about our own visions. We had the opportunity to think deeply about our passion and link it to social movements. I learned that healing and transformation is a long journey and entrepreneurship is a way to start the process. I was also informed that diversity funding and impact is growing for women like us. This workshop was very interactive and inspiring. The women hosting it were motivational and empowering. We learned the importance of being Fearless, Audacious and Bold.

The Facing Race conference gave us the opportunity to listen and learn from Tarana Burke. As one of the events keynote speakers she enlightened me on the Me-Too movement. I was unfamiliar with the movement. All I knew was what I saw on social media. Tarana Burke is the founder of the Me-too movement which started in 2006. It began to address the sexual abuse women of color have endured. They are at the intersection race, gender and sexuality. This part of the conference was the most eye opening. I learned about all the statistics about women who have experienced sexual abuse. 86% of women in jail, 60% of black girls by the age of 18....and the horrific stats kept going. Sexual abuse is happening all over, in all areas, in all movements. It is the least spoken of in communities. Tarana Burke expressed her thoughts about how to fight against sexual abuse. This part of the conference was one of the most revealing. The fight against sexual abuse has been going on for a long time and there is still so much work to be done. "Most of the abuse black girls endure is in the hands of black men. We need to acknowledge this and take action" (Tarana Burke). She made us understand of how difficult the fight to end sexual abuse is. It must be addressed and at the forefront of all work in all areas of social justice movements. As I listened to her, I understood the struggles she has gone through and the importance to address the issue. She said we are the gap fillers. We are the ones keeping the possibility alive. I am now aware of how the fight to end sexual abuse has to be approached at all aspects in all work of social movements.

Overall my experience at the Facing Race Conference was a positive one. I was able to learn, grow and network. I am now more aware of how all social movements intersect at some point. I have gained knowledge of what work is being done and everything that still needs work. Racial justice is needed now and forever!