

Interviewer:

What are the main lessons you are able to draw from your 25 years experience of community organizing?

Wilma:

I think that I am now more than ever convinced that unless people themselves, the people that are affected by whatever the problem is -- unless these people are working on the problem how to resolve it, it's not going to work. I think every major failure that I have had was something that *I* had wanted to do. And I talked with people about it and they agreed to do it and we did it together — but it was really my idea. The things that have worked well have been where I have done the hard work and taken the time to move people along in their thinking so that *they* really were able to clearly articulate their own vision of the future and what they wanted to happen. They then actively could commit to working it through, in the long-term and short-term, which is hard.

One of the big evils in our society right now is complacency — people feeling so powerless that they are essentially paralyzed. So you have to get people to understand that they can change things. And it's much easier to just blame others around you and go on, than it is to change your life and commit to giving time and effort and a part of your life to the community.

And so I guess I've learned that even the best of facilitators and organizers are sometimes manipulative, and sometimes have their own agenda; though they have a good heart and are well-meaning, but they have their own views of how things should be rather than working with the community and teasing that out from the community, and having the community state what the needs are. The other thing that I think is important for minority people, especially Native people, is before starting to take charge, I think they have to be liberated from what they have always been taught about themselves and the situation they find themselves in. Right now we are living in a real ugly time where there are no