

Diversity On the Black Panther's 50th

By **Simma Lieberman**, *The Inclusionist*



I recently attended the 50th anniversary conference of the Black Panther Party at the Oakland Museum. I didn't expect to be impacted so deeply. Three of the programs I attended had very deep, personal meaning to me.

One was on the original Rainbow Coalition of White, Black and Brown people working together to feed hungry kids, promote consciousness and action of race and economic disparities and improve quality of life for everyone. As a White teenager I joined the Rainbow Coalition and learned how to bring people from different backgrounds together to dialogue, share their experiences and find commonality.

I watched a beautiful film showing how Panthers in Chicago approached White people to work together, and how they came to know and trust each other after. The conference itself was a diverse rainbow of race, ethnicity, and age. I saw people I had not seen in over 30 years but it felt like just yesterday.

The work of the original Rainbow Coalition, plus the work of the people before- The Freedom riders. March on Washington, voting rights, etc. laid the groundwork for diversity and inclusion work today in corporations, government, and education. The civil rights era was the impetus for LGBT rights, gender equality and the movement for diversity and more inclusive workplace cultures.

In some ways I'm not the person that I was more than 30 years ago. I'm a lot less dogmatic, more flexible, don't have to be right and don't always think I am right I look for the good in people, and assume positive intent unless I'm shown otherwise. I've learned to see many different perspectives and understand where people are coming from when we don't agree. I'm willing to change my position on issues when I have additional information.

I'm much more conservative in some ways and liberal in others. But I still believe in working to create a better world, a better country and bring more humanity to our communities and workplaces. I still believe in the importance of people hearing each other and bringing people together from different backgrounds to learn, collaborate and become bigger. I believe everyone has the right to an opportunity to be successful and prosper.

I thought that since I've become "mainstream" and part of "corporate life," that my role in the original Rainbow Coalition was another part of me, but I've come to realize that the values of equality, and the ability to bring people together across race, ethnicity, age,

etc. are rooted in my past. I think that is what enables me to sit down with senior execs and employees and help them find commonality, collaborate and innovate.

We all have past experiences. The key to using those experiences to be our most productive and creative in the present and in the future, is in how we synthesize, analyze and learn from our lives. We have choices. Let's keep moving forward as diversity champions to build inclusion and create the workplaces, communities and world in which we want to live together.

Simma Lieberman works with organizations and individuals who want to dramatically increase their profit and productivity by creating more inclusive cultures. She is an internationally known consultant, coach, speaker and author. You can reach her at simma@simmalieberman.com