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Introduction: Unsettled Issues

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In virtually all fields of human endeavor, there is abounding evidence to support that women are consistently relegated to a status of inferiority and submission. This is true whether we examine the worlds of labor, law, health, education, the family, politics, mass media, or history. Hegemony based on gender remains deeply embedded in all societal spheres and requires the continued perseverance of women and men to reverse a system of domination that is detrimental to the liberation of all people.

In keeping with a long tradition of struggle by women to assert their dignity, we, as members of *Mujeres en Marcha* at the University of California, Berkeley, organized a panel discussion for the 1982 National Association for Chicano Studies conference in Tempe, Arizona. The purposes of the panel were 1) to generate discussion around significant issues of gender inequality that appeared to be unsettled, and 2) to generate suggestions of action to remedy the problems that women in NACS face in their attempts to be recognized as serious scholars.

Certainly, we were not exhaustive in the enumeration of issues, nor did we intend to be. Similarly, we were aware that the issues raised were particular to Chicana women in institutions of higher education, and that a vast number of pressing issues remain to be addressed adequately for women in the Chicano community at large. The panel addressed an academic audience. This report continues in the same vein.

Three issues of concern were identified as topics for presentation:

1. For a number of years, Chicanas have heard claims that a concern with issues specifically affecting Chicanas is merely a distraction/diversion from the liberation of Chicano people as a whole. What are the issues that arise when women are asked to separate their exploitation as women from the other forms of oppression that we experience?

2. Chicanas are confronted daily by the limitations of being a woman in this patriarchal society; the attempt to assert these issues around "sexism" are often met with resistance and scorn. What are some of the major difficulties in relations amongst ourselves? How are the relationships

between women and men affected? How are the relationships of women to women and men to men affected? How do we overcome the constraints of sexism?

3. It is not uncommon that our interests as feminists are challenged on the basis that we are simply falling prey to the interests of white middle-class women. We challenge the notion that there is no room for a Chicana movement within our own community. We, as women of color, have a unique set of concerns that are separate from white women and from men of color.

The issues raised in the panel evolved from a series of discussions that took place among members of *Mujeres en Marcha* during the 1981-82 academic year. The panel consisted of seven members from *Mujeres en Marcha*. As moderator, Teresa Córdova presented opening and closing remarks. The three sets of issues were introduced by Margarita Decierdo, Gloria Cuádriz, and Deena González, respectively. Other members of the panel included Sylvia Lizárraga, Linda Facio and Lita de la Torre. Other members of *Mujeres en Marcha* include Maurilia Flores, Guadalupe Fríaz, and Beatriz Pesquera. Each presentation of an issue was followed by a time allotted discussion period. The program ended with the presentation of a poem by Julia de Burgos, "Yo Misma Fui Mi Ruta," and a poem composed by Martha Lizárraga.

This paper is a recapitulation of some of the highlights of the panel. It is structured in the following way. The introductory remarks of the panel are presented first, interspersed with afterthoughts referred to as a commentary. Bear in mind that these opening remarks were designed for oral delivery, as were all other prepared remarks. After the introductory remarks you will read the preface for Topic I--the politics of race and gender. A synopsis of the discussion that was generated by Topic I follows. Again, afterthoughts are inserted. These afterthoughts are distinguished by a ruled border. Our hopes are that this commentary helps to capture the flavor of the discussion that occurred at the NACS conference. You will note that in the description of the discussion there simultaneously appears narrative, paraphrasing, and direct questions. You will also note that many of the ideas are undeveloped. Our intent at this time is not to develop these ideas but to present them as having arisen out of the group discussion. Separate

trains of thought are separated by a row of asterisks. There will not necessarily be direct connections when one crosses the asterisks; they may be entirely unrelated. We would also like to point out that because it was not possible to attribute all comments to the appropriate individual, the only distinctions made in the script are between panelists and audience members, or between women and men.

After the discussion in Topic I, we then move to the prefatory remarks to Topic II--the politics of change. The summarized discussion is structured in the same way as described above. Topic III is then introduced--the convergence of race and gender. We then move to the discussion engendered by this final topic. The closing remarks that follow are those that were made at the panel. The subsequent final commentary by the author is a reflection of the panel itself and the type of discussion it had created.

This description of the organization of this paper is made necessary by the complexities of reconstructing the panel itself in printed form. We hope that the reader, by bearing this in mind, will find the flow to be more easily decipherable. It must be added that the success of this panel was a consequence of the many who contributed their knowledge, enthusiasm and support.