

Jan 1st, 6:00 AM - 7:00 AM

## Closing Remarks

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Cordova, Teresa, "Closing Remarks" (1982). *NACCS Annual Conference Proceedings*. 7.  
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## CLOSING REMARKS

Speaker: Teresa Córdova

We have only begun--all of us--to deal with the systematic hegemony--the systematic dominance of men over women. This dominance appears in many forms, at many levels, throughout all realms of our lives. It is not an easy task, there are many issues, many complications, many misunderstandings.

There is first the question of whether there is room for a feminist movement within the Chicano community. Such a question is based, first of all, on the assumption that liberation is a zero-sum commodity; that there is only enough room for some of us to be liberated. It is based on the assumption that hegemony based on race is not related to hegemony based on sex. It is also based on the assumption that we can separate ourselves as Chicano women. It is further based on the assumption that the liberation of women precludes the liberation of our people. It is based on the assumption that women's active participation cannot contribute to the struggle. These assumptions, however, are not based on our reality.

The struggle of our people is better enhanced if we bring ourselves up *together*. The struggle is better enhanced if we struggle *together*. United we stand. Divided we fall.

What is this thing we call sexism? It is like racism in many ways. It is both blatant and subtle. It is both psychological and institutionalized. There is "a systematic body of knowledge that oppresses" Chicanas. We need to identify both a Chiconology and a Chicanalogy\*--whether we call it that or not. We have here today begun to enumerate together *the assumptions, the actions, and the consequences* of dominance by men over women.

As we continue to do this, the process unfolds. It is important to emphasize that it is a process. Like any other process, there are dynamics--the most striking to us is what happens when we raise these

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\*This is a reference to the work presented at the conference by Francisco Vasquez from Loyola Marymount.

issues to our men. Most typically we are reacted to as though we are trying to cut off something. We are not. We are not castrating. We are not bitches. We are not insignificant and we are not stupid. We are working together towards the liberation of all of us. What is in it for the women, is in it for the men--cooperation, humanization, friendship, and liberation.

It is crucial, we agree, that situationally confronting the issues is ideal. When "sexism" occurs, we need to deal with it. That is, the time to assert a right is when that right is denied. To do this is something both men and women seem to agree is important. This is the ideal, an ideal that we collectively have yet to achieve. Remember what happens when women do raise these issues. The men become defensive and the women are defined as uppity or insolent. What is really being said is that women have overstepped their boundaries. The point is, achieving this ideal is a process--a process that collectively we can effectively develop.

There is also the question of whether we are a co-opted product of the white feminist movement. There are charges that we are being used. Neither of these points have been proven. What has been proven is that we, as Chicanas, experience oppression as women and as Chicanas. We cannot separate the two. There are, therefore, significant divergences between us and white women--differences of race and of class. Similarly, to us and Chicano men, the issue of gender is significant.

There is a further issue that we have emphasized to many of you and wish to emphasize here again--the issues of intentionality. It is not necessary that one intends to act in a way that has hegemonic consequences. More often than not, the intention is not there. However, intention or not, the consequences remain. The point is, the pernicious assumptions and stereotypical understandings about Chicana women are deeply rooted. These assumptions and understandings have been perpetuated and sustained through history--La Malinche is a case in point. It is easy to operate on these assumptions and act accordingly. It is these assumptions, however, which comprise the systematic body of knowledge that serves to oppress us--men and women.

People act on the assumptions under which they were socialized. The point that we are making is that many of these underlying assumptions have served as the basis for a hierarchical structure that places

men on top, women on the bottom. We challenge this on the basis that it is hierarchical and therefore requires that someone be on the bottom.

We know this is difficult for the men--it is even more difficult for us.

*Concluding Commentary:* If the success of this panel can be judged in terms of its goals, then we can say that it was indeed a success for all those involved. First we wished to "generate discussion around significant issues of gender inequality that appeared unsettled." Not only did people respond during the panel to issues raised, but the discussion is continuing throughout the remainder of the conference and beyond. The resulting excitement of both men and women was an assurance that there are many who are committed to continuing the struggle to break down the systematic relegation of women to inferior status and submission. Secondly, we wish to "generate suggestions of action to remedy the problems that women in NACS face in their attempts to be recognized as serious scholars." There were numerous points throughout the panel when concrete suggestions were offered for action. For example, it was suggested that the question of sexism in NACS be raised in the plenary session. It was also suggested that we must actively promote the involvement of women in administrative posts within the organization. Additionally, a group of men decided to formally continue the discussion at the next NACS 1983 conference in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

The upward struggle for our rights as women of color continue. Our voices are becoming stronger and cannot be silenced. There are many men who are joining the struggle. Together we shall work for the eradication of a dehumanizing system of dominance.