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Opening Plenary Welcome

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NACCS@40: Plenary Introduction

Susan Marie Green, Chair Elect

California State University, Chico

Good morning and welcome to Chicago! My name is Susan Green and I am Chair Elect of NACCS, working with Julia, Kathy, and the Board to put together a milestone conference we know you will enjoy. Even in these economic hard times, we have over 400 people here this weekend, and a tremendous number of submissions. There are people from Connecticut, Kentucky, Ohio, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Kansas, just to name a few.

I am currently Associate Professor of Chicana/o Studies and History at California State University, Chico. I am also a statewide officer for the California Faculty Association, the largest public employee union in the nation for faculty in higher education.

My first NACCS conference was here in Chicago in 1994. After doing two sessions of NACCS for beginners yesterday, I know this is the first NACCS national conference for many of you. If this is your first conference, please stand so everyone can see how exciting the future of NACCS is (applause). So in 1994 I went to my first NACCS as a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, home of the oldest Chicana/o Studies Department in the Midwest. (For those who do not know Louis Mendoza, chair of Chicana/o Studies at the University of Minnesota, he will be hosting the Open Mic session after tomorrow night's Save Ethnic Studies Fundraiser and Noche de Cultura).

And, 1994 is the answer to the question I received from many members: "How could it have been the 38th conference in Pasadena last year, and this year we are celebrating NACCS 40th Anniversary?" The reason being, in 1994, NACCS boycotted the state of Colorado due to an anti-gay amendment to the state constitution. It was a controversial decision, and one we still struggle with, such as in the contemporary boycott of Arizona surrounding SB 1070 and other anti-immigrant/anti-Chicana/o legislation and policies in the state. (Aside: Devon Pena, Past Chair, authored an Amicus Brief on this case with the NACCS board and there will be a press conference on NACCS support for Arizona education in addition to the Save Ethnic Studies Fundraiser).

So, NACCS@ 40... some of us in this room thought perhaps we would not get here. There have been a lot of challenges to Chicana/o Studies on our campuses, among "colleagues," among politicians, and hate organizations (increasingly indistinguishable these days!) But, our commitment to this unique interdisciplinary field, firmly rooted in the community and issues of the day, has been strong. The contemporary move to "service learning," and "best teaching practices," throughout academe, looks a lot like the blueprint in the Plan de Santa Barbara to me! We have been practicing these things for decades.

In California, where over 50% of students in K-12 are Chicana/o/Latina/o, we have decided we can no longer “afford” quality public education and dropped to 49th in school funding rankings. Hundreds of thousands of young people have been turned away from public higher education; another casualty in an increasingly normalized crisis in education funding. Chicana/o Studies programs and classes are being whittled away and EOP programs slashed to the bone while institutions increase their rhetoric about “diversity” or recruitment and retention rates. The rhetoric may not be as harsh and overt as 40 years ago, but the outcomes have been the same.

Our colleagues in Arizona are facing the most extreme and overt attacks, but many of us have felt the assault on our work and our students in regional variations on a theme. And yet, as my Northern California FOCO colleague Martha Acevedo remarked ayer in NACCS for Beginners: “The Movement never died. Look around this room.” So while things look as bleak perhaps as we have ever seen them, this is not 1965. We *have* had a *serious* educational revolution of our own making and we remain as committed to Chicana/o Studies today, maybe even more so, than 40 years ago, having added thousands of Chicana/o Studies students and colleagues to our ranks. This includes our books, articles, libraries, research, and policy briefings.

In the spirit we have asked three Chicana/o Studies scholars to address us on the field of Chicana/o Studies and their work, in this 40th Anniversary of NACCS Plenary Session. Two have worked in Midwest FOCO. We will begin with Eden Torres. Eden is an Associate Professor in the Departments of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies and Chicano Studies at the University of Minnesota. She received her B.A. in Chicano Studies and Women’s Studies and her Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Minnesota and has been teaching there since 1990. Her work focuses on the intersecting and overlapping nature of socially-constructed categories like race, class, and gender. She is author of a collection of essays entitled *Chicana without Apology/Chicana Sin Verguena: The New Chicana Cultural Studies*, Routledge 2003. I asked Eden to begin as a contemporary of mine, a Chicana/o Studies scholar who is heir to some of the foundational work scholars like Reynaldo Macias did in the early 1970s, and a trailblazer for later scholars like Felix Medina, about to receive his Ph.D. in Chicana/o Studies at Michigan State University. This was something Eden and I could see on the horizon in undergraduate and graduate school, but weren’t developed in time for us.

Second, we have Felix Medina Jr. Felix is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Chicana/o/Latina/o Studies at Michigan State University. He received his B.A. and M.A. in English from California State University Chico, writing critical work on Jose Antonio Villarreal’s novel *Pocho*. His current dissertation work has taken him back to his home in the Salinas Valley in California. His adviser, NACCS Scholar Dionicio Nodin Valdes, called me after Felix’s defense of his preliminary examination, excited about Felix’s thoughts on the field of Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies. I asked him to share some of his thoughts as part of the bright future of Chicana/o Studies and NACCS.

And finally, last but certainly not least, Reynaldo Macias. Reynaldo is Professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies, Education and Applied Linguistics in the Cesar E. Chavez Department for Chicana and Chicano Studies at UCLA. He received his bachelor’s degree in

Sociology and a Master of Arts in Education from UCLA. There *weren't* any B.A.s or Ph.D.s in Chicana/o Studies in the early years until scholars and activists like Reynaldo, around the country, began fighting for that which we all continue to struggle. Reynaldo has published in the *NABE Journal* and the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, among many. He was a co-founder of *Aztlan: International Journal of Chicano Studies Research*. Reynaldo was a co-founder and member of the National Association of Chicano Social Science from 1973-1976, which was the first name for NACCS, and rejoined from 1999 to the present. He served as National Coordinator from 1975-1976, served on the National Coordinating Committee from 1974-1976, and edited the first volume of conference proceedings published in 1977. He returned as the national Chair of NACCS from 2004-2006, helping make important changes to the organization after being committed to the field and the organization for over three decades. I think he is one of many veteranas and veteranos in the room (like Rusty Barcelo or Devon Pena) that would say NACCS has been a work in progress; like us, it has not been perfect, but it has been a space we all value enough to continually return, to engage with our colleagues, even though it has not always been glamorous or fun. But it is for the young people who just stood up, attending their very first NACCS national conference, that we have returned and improved NACCS for the past 40 years.