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Welcome Letter, NACCS Chair-Elect

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Welcome Letter

NACCS Chair-Elect, Roberto D. Hernández

Estimad@s Colegas,

As the 2019-2020 NACCS Chair-Elect, I was initially slated to be the 2020 Program Chair and then came el Corona virus (in Spanish accent). As such, my task would have originally been to welcome you to the 47th Annual National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) conference in Seattle, Washington. Instead, here we are introducing to you the first ever iteration of a virtual NACCS Conference coming to your exhausting Zoom screen wherever it is that you have found refuge during this unprecedented pandemic.

Given the changing circumstances and the uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19, it goes without saying that our world has been turned on its head. However, this idea of a world turned upside down bears some reflection, for arguably the modern/colonial world has been existing as a world on its head for the last five centuries. In fact, the Mamos, Indigenous spiritual guides from the mountains of Colombia and Mayan medicine people alike, spoke of the coronavirus as a living entity, a living force or spirit that is at once also a messenger that arrived to warn us of the destructive direction in which “modern” society was steering our planet and hence the need to shift course. The first few months of worldwide shutdown indeed proved to be a regenerative moment, albeit brief, for our Madrecita Tierra, and perhaps the closest we have come to the complete decimation of an exploitative and extractive capitalist world economy that thrives on human misery and the destruction of life in all its forms. From this perspective, the messenger came to restore equilibrium, though that too with costly consequences for many in our own communities who bear the brunt of exacerbated inequalities.

In a somewhat related note, the theme of what would have been the Seattle conference asked us to draw attention to not just the various 50th anniversaries of diverse Chicano movement happenings that were taking place, but to shift our own cartographies and calendars to consider the occasion of a 52nd turn around the Sun often marked by numerous Indigenous nations of Turtle Island as the time for New Fire Ceremonies.

The New Fire Ceremony is not just about reflecting and marking the passing of another Gregorian calendar year. It is about the complementary destructive and creative forces that bring new worlds into being, new forms of social relations, new modes of sentir, pensar and hacer; a renewal and rebirth that comes with a collective reassessment of where we have been and where we are headed as a diverse yet cohesive assemblage of overlapping communities. The task is not easy or without conflict and heartbreak. On the contrary, it is both momentous and necessary.

This time of pandemic has interestingly seen both devastation to our people who are often on the “frontlines” as “essential” qua expendable workers, but it has also seen some growth in terms of the expansion of Chicana and Chicano Studies and Ethnic Studies as required courses in different high school and university curriculums across various states. Of course, this has also meant new challenges in terms of battles over control of resources and the very definition of what is and is not Ethnic Studies, Chicana and Chicano Studies, etc. Ultimately, what is at stake is what is deemed appropriate and even utterable content and discourse, or the boundaries of acceptable terms of debate, in our attempts to bring to life the stories, experiences, knowledges and conocimientos of our communities. Self-determination, the ability to determine our own collective futures, once seen as the cornerstone of Chicana/o movement efforts, is once again – or perhaps simply continues to be – under attack. But as the movimiento, the picket lines, the takeovers, sit-ins, walkouts, have shown us, when under attack we rise up and fight back.

As such, while we were not able to gather in Seattle, we nevertheless decided that this first ever virtual NACCS conference was not a task for one Program Chair to take on, but rather a moment for us to redouble our efforts and our collective spirit that lit that first fire in the 1968 walkouts and at the first gathering of the National Caucus of Chicano Social Scientists (NCCSS) in Las Vegas, New Mexico in 1973. For this reason, the 2020 Conference Theme, Love in the Time of La Corona, was the result of collective conversations about a return to the most essential: how do we carry on.... how do we live, love, write, create community in the absence or minimal presence of embodied connection? In the face of continued stolen lives at the hands of police violence. In the reality of continued murdered and missing Indigenous women, of family separation and caged children at the border, the real and artificial Black and Brown divides that result in misplaced ‘what about us’ missives, and rampant homophobia and transphobia in our own families and communities. The Trumpism that preceded Trump, now run wild.

While La Corona is still with us, let us come together virtually in hopes that

the lessons learned over this past year of turning inward towards our own respective home fires not be lessons that pass us in vain. I thus thank you and look forward to the collective reflections that our program aims to bring together in these most trying times.

En acompañamiento,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roberto H. Hernández", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Roberto D. Hernández