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President Emeritus George C. Wright Speeches

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**Community Advisory Board- Center for Mexican American Studies**

George C. Wright

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## CMAS

Good Evening! It is a pleasure to be here to recognize the members of the Community Advisory Board and to see the new offices for CMAS.

### \*\*The Significance of CMAS and Mexican American Studies

As a scholar of race relations in the United States, I know the value of Ethnic Studies, of Women Studies, and of the study of minority groups. So often, the History or Culture--the "significance"--of minority people has been either excluded or distorted. No where have the victors been allowed to tell the story of the past in the way they deem most appropriate than in American History. In the writing of American History, rarely are minority people placed at center stage and shown as controlling their own destinies and making contributions. Instead, things "were done to them or for them." So often, they are depicted as merely reacting--most often in a negative manner--to what the majority group did. I am not exaggerating when stating this, and this is true regarding the general story of women, of Afro-Americans, and surely of Hispanic or Mexican-Americans.

In part, I became a History Professor because I wanted to challenge what people thought they knew about the black experience. In 1980, when I joined the faculty of UT Austin, another scholar had just been hired: Dr. Ricardo Romo, and he and I came to that institution with the same mission: to correct the historical account. I peppered him with a ton of questions, all seeking to know the ways in which race relations in Texas were similar to that found elsewhere or how race relations differed here--compared to the "traditional South--because of the presence of three groups. I specifically wanted to know about segregation laws and whether they were applied equally to Mexican-Americans and blacks; about the community life of Mexican-Americans, the dominate organizations in the Hispanic community, and whether the legal system historically had been the protector or the oppressor of Hispanics.

CMAS—the Center for Mexican-American Studies at UTA—was created to address these issues and many more as well. This Center is interested in political leaders; in cultural activities; and in education. And, as the Hispanic population has grown in numbers and significance, CMAS is



clearly positioned to assess demographic trends and what the changing (and ever increasing) Hispanic population has meant over the last 50 years and will mean over the next 50 years.

**\*\*CMAS and Community Activities**

Ethnic Study Centers, which can stake their existence on their scholarly research and teaching activities, were created to a large degree because community pressure was applied to white Universities. In making this assertion, I am not ignoring the hard work of minority scholars, who deserve to be at these institutions based on their scholarly credentials alone. But without community backing, it would have been far more difficult for the opportunities that we now enjoy and take for granted to have been extended to us.

### Conclusion

A month ago, President Witt and I gave a presentation to the members of the UT Board of Regents about his goals for this institution. In my comments, I focused at length about Outreach Activities and their

positive benefit to UTA. In the area of student recruitment, many of our Outreach Activities are focused on the Mexican-American population. We need to work with young people, as early as possible, in informing them about college and that attending this university will be a real viable option for them. In working with young Hispanic people, it is important that we communicate effectively with their parents, which means that our literature and presentations must often be in Spanish. As some of you may know, we have assigned Michele Bobadilla to Outreach Activities in Dallas, and this has already proven to be productive. CMAS in its past has been involved in Outreach Activities, and I am confident that under the leadership of Manuel Garcia y Griego, CMAS will play an even greater role in communities throughout Texas.

### Conclusion

Here at UTA, CMAS will prosper because of community people--like you—who are supportative. It will thrive because our students, Hispanic,



white, black, and International, realize that to be fully educated, they need to know more about the role of Hispanics in American and World Histories. Our faculty are committed: professors whose courses touch upon the Mexican-American experience, will contribute, and even more will be the work of faculty members who have joint appointments with CMAS. I want to acknowledge Professor Neal Foley for the role he played for two years, in keeping CMAS afloat, in working with many of you both on and off campus, in helping set a direction for the program, in chairing the search for a Director. I feel extremely positive about the Core faculty who will be assisting Dr. Garcia y Griego. I want all of you to know that President Witt, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, all other UTA Administrators, are committed. Speaking for myself, I know what the world will look like in the very near future, and I am personally committed to doing everything I can to increase the Hispanic presence on this campus.

The site of the new CMAS offices is perfect: here at the center of campus, in the Student Union. It is also focused on serving students and the community.