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Table of Contents and Preface

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**Chicana Voices:
Intersections of Class,
Race, and Gender**

Chicana Voices:

INTERSECTIONS OF CLASS, RACE, AND GENDER

National Association for Chicano Studies

Editorial Committee

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**This volume is dedicated to
the many Chicanas
who made it possible.**

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Preface

The 1984 conference of the National Association for Chicano Studies (NACS), held at the University of Texas at Austin, was truly ground-breaking. For the first time in the Association's twelve-year history, its annual meeting focused on women. The theme of the conference, *Voces de la Mujer*, generated an unprecedented number of panels and papers that addressed the question of gender in the Mexican community.

The conference witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of women participants. Chicanas chaired panels, presented papers, and attended conference activities as never before. Most importantly, a growing feminist consciousness marked the increased involvement.

Based on outstanding papers from the 1984 conference, this book is also an historic first. It is the first NACS publication devoted totally to scholarship on *la mujer chicana/mexicana*. Further, it is the first time women scholars and their work predominate in the proceedings of the Association. This volume stands as the culmination of years of effort to place Chicana involvement at the center of our scholarly endeavors.

In the past, when Chicanas, individually or collectively, raised their voices to be heard—as women—in Chicano studies circles, floodgates of reaction broke open. Chicana challenges to their underrepresentation and misrepresentation in NACS, Chicano studies programs, and other arenas drew a variety of responses. In some cases, serious attempts were made to address these issues. But much more likely were the all-too-familiar responses of resistance to change.

Token efforts, if they were made, to invite (not recruit) Chicanas to serve on panels, in faculty and administrative positions, and so forth, constituted a common “defense” for sins of omission. Other responses involved countercharges that Chicanas were distractive, divisive, or duped: distractive because Chicana demands took time and energy away from the more important issues at hand; divisive

because such demands disrupted efforts at unity and appealed only to "special interests"; and duped because Chicanas were essentially being used to promote the interests of white women.

Still other responses entailed appeals to "reason" (yes, there are problems, but change can come only incrementally); cries of confusion ("what is it you want?"); or requests for prescription ("tell us what to do").

At the same time, Chicanas themselves were struggling to define their own positions, increase their numbers in academia, and devise strategies for articulating their interests as women of color. Conflict and change marked these efforts as well.

If we as Chicana/o scholars sought to address issues that affected Chicano people as a whole, then addressing the issues of half of our population could not be considered irrelevant or distracting. We also began to recognize that the so-called disruption of unity and harmony meant the disruption of systems of domination that were harmonious as long as they were not challenged. Further, Chicanas indeed were voicing issues and concerns that were distinct from those of middle-class white women.

The increasing Chicana presence in NACS coincides with the development of the Association. In fact, women's participation has furthered the development of the organization. A vital, albeit small, Chicana presence was part of NACS during its formative years. As Chicanas mobilized, Chicana participation in NACS conferences and in leadership positions within the Association strengthened accordingly. Certainly, numerous individuals and particular events could be singled out for clearing the pathways to women's involvement in NACS. Here, two key events are noted.

Mujeres en Marcha from the University of California, Berkeley, presented a panel at the Tenth Annual Conference (1982, Tempe) entitled "Unsettled Issues: Chicanas in the 80's." This session raised the topic of sexism for discussion among women and men and, in doing so, promoted a collective consciousness of *mujeres* in the Association. The following year a group of women met informally at the NACS annual meeting in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and formed resolutions that would be submitted to the site committee. The most notable of these requests was that the upcoming conference to be held in Austin, Texas, have as its theme *Voces de la Mujer*. The proposal was accepted, and thus the twelfth annual conference of the

National Association for Chicano Studies was dedicated to the world as seen and articulated by Chicanas.

Sixty-one panels were held at the conference, twenty-five of which were related to gender. Topics addressed included labor, politics, research, language, literature, theater, art, and the family. The most notable panel was a plenary session on higher education and the problems of gender inequality. "An Open Discussion on Sexism: Constructing a Chicana Feminism" had as its purpose to bring women together to see where we stood in our movement to create a feminism that is uniquely our own, as women of color. "Chicana Political Activity: The Role of Women in La Raza Unida Party and Politics" was a session highlighted by the participation of Chicanas who had been active in La Raza Unida party in Texas. On a more intimate and emotional level, the daughters of Sra. Aurora E. Orozco paid a loving tribute to their mother.

Special events were numerous, among them poetry readings, art displays, and discussions of art programs. On the first evening of the conference, the Association honored Sras. Manuela Solis Sager and Emma Tenayuca for their commitment and dedication to labor organizing. Approximately one hundred Chicanas met to form the Chicana caucus. Caucus concerns served as the basis for action taken during the business meeting of the Association, where the most controversial issue was the composition of the editorial committee. The victory of increased Chicana participation on the editorial committee enhances Chicana representation and the diversity of perspectives.

The events of the conference signify a new era for the National Association for Chicano Studies in which we can expect increased Chicana presence and participation. That participation will be accompanied by the development of Chicana feminism that is the outcome of struggle for our rights. As we continue to struggle, so will our feminism continue to develop. The issues of class, race, and gender are combined in our experience; thus, the challenge that we pose is the challenge to domination itself. In opposing power based on domination, the efforts of Chicanas within NACS will improve the very nature of the Association itself.

It is, thus, with great pride and excitement that we present these proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Conference of the National Association for Chicano Studies.

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