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Lucha Cornerstones of Chicana & Chicano Studies

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Opening Plenary Introduction, April 16, 2015

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2015 National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies

Opening Plenary Introduction, April 16, 2015

Dr. Nelia Olivencia

Welcome compañeras/os to San Francisco, California to the 2015 conference of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS):

This is a wonderful opportunity for you to gather in a city which has a rich Mexican, Chicano and Latino culture and history. One of my most meaningful memories was living in the San Francisco Bay Area where I taught at San José College and experienced great alliances with people who fought for access to higher education, EOP, and the development of Chicana/o Studies. Those were important days that forged my commitment for equity, inclusion, and a quest for social justice which I carry on today.

My observations today extend to the state of justice both at a local and global level. I am concerned about the state of world affairs and understand that it affects all of us in distinct ways. Living in Wisconsin where struggles are happening on a day-to-day basis and where we can take nothing for granted, I continue to think about the lessons learned long ago as I became a seasoned advocate for people of color and for justice at the ground level. NACCS has been a central space of sustenance and renewal for me over the many years of my involvement. Please take a moment to ponder my prepared comments which address salient points to bear in mind during your presentations at NACCS.

Presently, we are at a “breaking point in protests and revolutions in the 21st century.” We are experiencing a global clash of cultures, religions, and economic and political systems which are spiraling out of control. A new social political language has emerged to obfuscate the true meaning of words, to appeal to our fears and emotions, and to pander to extremism in the social, political, and religious landscapes. In many ways, we have reached a far more dangerous polarization at a local and global level than that of the last century. Since 9/11, this country’s sense of security and normalcy has been shattered. Emotions and fear rule over reason. Through the explosive transformation of social media in the last few decades, moreover, individuals’ skills have been diminished in their ability to deal with one another in face-to-face human contact. It has been

replaced by the anonymity of new technological forms of communication which have become somewhat unmanageable and ever-changing.

It is clear that our polarized world is a reflection of the paranoia, conflict and controversy in which everything is perceived. Truth and distortion are intermingled in a way that we have no sense of what is based on logic and objectivity or on fiction and fancy. The best examples of this phenomenon are political advertisements which are simplistic, untrue and/or distorted and which change their message according to opinion polls, etc.; they borrow and twist the same words used by opponents to take on an opposite or different meaning. Scott Walker, Governor of Wisconsin, is a master in using this tactic. For example, the first time he ran for governor in 2010, he never stated his views on collective bargaining but yet right after his election enacted Act 10 which eliminated collective rights for most public sector employees and which resulted in mass demonstrations and a recall election. More recently, the Right to Work Act – a play with words – was passed in which “mandatory union membership and dues are banned at privately owned businesses.” These actions garnered him national recognition. Scott has gutted the state of Wisconsin in other areas as well which are too numerous to go into in this introduction but with which you should become familiar since he is a Republican U.S. presidential contender. Altogether, he has run for office 34 times, more than any other U.S. politician. He has learned at least one thing out of being in these many campaigns, that is, the power of “double speak” far beyond other political predecessors.

Social media as a result of a technological revolution has created an information loaded world in which data is perceived as knowledge in and of itself without any critical analysis or thinking. By itself, information is meaningless; only in a systemized format which spells out a position or an argument in a coherent, analytical context does it acquire meaning. And once something is in social media many do not question its veracity and whether it is true or false.

Social media also overcomes time, space, and distance. We can connect almost everywhere with one another instantaneously. Yet there is one major drawback to the dramatic changes in communication and social media and that is that overall it omits the study of space or geography. “As the economic and cultural forces and impact of global environmental change is felt by everybody everywhere, the case for geography seems both obvious and inescapable.” Yet,

we are woefully uninformed about this discipline. I will leave this topic up to others to develop and discuss with regard to its impact on globalization.

In summary, the inability to know the true meaning of words and how to use critical thinking skills to make rational objective conclusions in addition to a growing incapacity to communicate personally with one another in a non-conflicting, non-controversial way, has made true debate and dialogue almost impossible. In addition, our personal and public communication skills have become invaded by jargon that makes no sense (or makes sense within a narrow esoteric academic discipline). Finally, social media has contributed immeasurability to the ability to relay information and connect with one another instantaneously. It, however, ignores the physical world of space (or geography).

Today, before I introduce to you the plenary speakers I would like to again welcome all of you to the city of San Francisco, and to the 2015 NACCS conference!

I am also delighted to present to you an outstanding panel of speakers who offer thoughtful perspectives on the 2015 NACCS conference theme.

Robert Hernandez who teaches at SDSU in his presentation entitled ***The World Turned on its Head: Coloniality, Civility and the Decolonial Imperative*** juxtaposes coloniality and civility and proposes to do a re-reading of the concepts of civility and incivility to explore whether “another” civility is possible.

Aureliano DeSoto who teaches at Metropolitan State University’s theme is ***Inside the Dream Factory of Chicana/o Studies*** and his presentation will focus on the internal dynamics within Chicana/o Studies, and especially between and among Chicana/o Studies professors and students. Professor Desoto realizes that the changes “in Mexican America will have an effect on the relevance of Chicano Studies, including its relation to the relevance of Chicana/o Studies; professionalism, hierarchy, and rankism in Chicana/o Studies.”

Cherrie Moraga teaches at Stanford University and will speak on: ***Teaching as a Xicana with an X***. In her presentation she proposes “mediation on the following question: *What do Chican@s have to offer one another and the world to counter the rising militarized globalism and earth-quaking environmental disaster sitting expectant and gluttonous on the horizon?*” She will recommend “a “de-colonial

turn” in our teaching, looking other than westward (and "west words"), with all its endemic patriarchies to shape our teaching form and content.” She will also speak to her “belief in the bounty and politically curative promise in indigenous knowings as a road map to an equitable world and rescued planet.”

The panelists will speak in the order in which they were presented. Again, a warm welcome to them.