

*The National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NAACS) held its XXIII Convention March 20-23.*

# News From Aztlan

...Juan will be eating the fruits of his labor when the *migra* deport him out of the state that tilts the ocean.

CARLOS CUMPIÁN, Chicano poet.  
From his poem *We don't wanna peso much*

The NAACS meeting was held in Chicago, which boasts one of the U.S.'s largest Mexican American communities.

The convention was both festive and marked by concern. The academic phalanx of the Chicano movement had a lot to celebrate: one of its most prominent members, Rodolfo Acuña, had just won his anti-discrimination case against the University of Texas.

There was also an air of indignation and alarm because of the escalation of racist activities and statements targeting members of *la comunidad*. In fact, this has become so important that the central topic of this convention was "Mapping Strategies: NAACS and the Challenge of Racist Policies."

Among the keynote speakers were Adaljiza Sosa-Ridell, a well-known civil rights activist, who centered her presentation on the double discrimination—both racist and sexist—confronting Chicana women because of their ethnic background and gender. Other speakers included René Nuñez, one of the main organizers and co-editor of the *Santa Barbara Plan*, a guiding document of the Chicana and Chicano studies movement; Ana Castillo, well-known poet, novelist, essayist and editor, whose work has appeared in many anthologies in the United States and is considered one of the most representative literary voices of the Chicana experience; and Rudy Acuña himself, the author of one of the most influential books on the history of the Chicano movement, *Occupied America*, who won the two-year suit that he brought when denied a post supposedly for reasons of age.

The Acuña case put the continuing racism in some parts of the U.S. higher education system under public scrutiny. It also turned into a battle to consolidate the epistemological and administrative independence of Chicana and Chicano Studies programs, of which Acuña is one of the founders.

The majority of the working groups, and particularly the plenary sessions, concentrated on racism,



basically from three different viewpoints: changes in migratory laws and policy, which in the era of neoliberalism have increasingly limited the rights and possibilities of immigrants; the struggle for human and civil rights, more and more frequently violated as evidenced by the aggression perpetrated against Mexicans trying to cross the border, aggression which has even resulted in fatalities; and the discussion about the concept of “equal opportunities,” which implies thinking about affirmative action (for example, setting up admittance quotas to educational institutions on the basis of race or national origin) and discrimination on the basis of race, language, sex, age, health (illness and physical challenges) and sexual preference.

Racism as a global phenomenon, and anti-Latino xenophobia in particular, defined to a great extent the NAACS’s conference resolutions. Other topics, like the association’s ideological orientation and political strategies and a declaration entitled “Democracy Movement in Mexico,” supporting the Zapatista National Liberation Army and the Mexico City *Ruta 100* Bus Drivers Union, were also dealt with.

Among the convention’s most important resolutions are the “NAACS Declaration of Equality,” committing the association on all levels (regional and state levels, as well as individually), to a national campaign in the media and of letter-writing to government offices against discrimination, demanding an end to institutional physical and mental abuse based on race; opposing all forms of political, economic and social injustice affecting the “Chicano family;” and to fight for education as a basic human right, a collective bargaining agreement to establish and raise the minimum wage, basic medical care for all and policies that would tend to decriminalize immigration, etc.

The convention was also the venue for the world premier of a 30-minute segment of the television program *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, financed by the Public Broadcasting System and the Ford Foundation. Also shown were the videos *Viva la Causa! Some Years of Chicano History in Pictures*, by activist Betita Martínez and *Pochonovela*, by the courageous director, Coco Fusco.

There were also art, painting and sculpture exhibits and several sessions of poetry and prose reading. The Aztlán Prize for Literature 1995 was awarded to Norma Elia Cantú for her book *Cántica: Snapshots of a Girlhood in La Frontera*.

It is also important to mention the unanimous decision to hold NAACS’s XXV Conference in Mexico City in June 1998 with the support of prestigious academic and government institutions like the National University of Mexico, the Autonomous Metropolitan University, the National Institute of Anthropology and History, the Autonomous University of Sinaloa, the University of Guadalajara and the National Fine Arts Institute.

For four days, Chicago was renamed Chicano, Illinois, allowing an important part of *la Raza*, its intellectuals, to meet, and —inspired by their heroes Cesar Chavez and Reies Tijerina— to discuss and express their concerns and strategies for forging a better future for *la comunidad*. ❧

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