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Preface

The first edition of Occupied America (1972) opened:

Mexicans—Chicanos—in the United States today are an oppressed people. They are citizens, but their citizenship is second-class at best. They are exploited and manipulated by those with more power. And, sadly, many believe that the only way to get along in Anglo-America is to become “Americanized” themselves. Awareness of their history—of their contributions and struggles, of the fact that they were not the “treacherous enemy” that Anglo-American histories have said they were—can restore pride and a sense of heritage to a people who have been oppressed for so long. In short, awareness can help them to liberate themselves.3

The book immediately got caught up in controversy from those who claimed that I had made a mistake and should have called it Occuped Mexico since the land once belonged to Mexico. I responded that I was referring to the invasion of the continents that are America. Next some Chicanos objected to the internal colonial model insisting that, according to the Marxist paradigm, Chicanos were not internally colonized. I was surprised to find Chicano graduate students at the forefront of the criticism. Many of these detractors were at the time enamored with the theories of Immanuel Wallerstein’s World Systems Analysis that emphasized globalization and colonialism.2 I realized that the misunderstanding was epistemological. Most were Americanist that is, they were sociologists and social scientists whose area of study was the United States. In Latin America, the internal colonial model had kicked around since the 1950s. Pablo Gonzalez Casanova and Andre Gunder Frank refer to Internal Colonialism as did other Third World intellectuals.3

It was not that I did not want engage in the debate, but anyone who knows me knows that teaching is my first love. I had been a public school teacher for seven years and a junior college teacher for three years. I had recently committed myself to starting the Chicano Studies Department at San Fernando Valley State and my teaching and activism prepared me to work on curriculum development. Realizing that the detractors were mostly Americanist, I chose to withdraw from the intellectual fray and concentrate on Chicana/o Studies that at the moment was more important and productive.4

With this edition I chose to return to the past and reintroduce the theme of colonialism from the vantage point of the colonized. In doing this I choose not to dwell on theory, rather to peel the onion a metaphor for the colonized person and his or her colonial mentality and search for the truth and unravel the myths, lies, and peel the onion that has formed us over 500 years of colonialism. This seems apropos with the demise of Europe’s system of direct colonialism and the surge of who I choose to call the colonized. In doing so I touch on systematic inequality of Mexican Americans/Latinos in the policies and practices of American institutions and the lies history tells, and deal with subordination, not least of which includes cultural production and finance.

In engaging this theme I must pay tribute Franz Fanon. Fanon was a West Indian who received his doctorate in psychiatry in Paris. He went to Algeria and found that he could not practice because he did not understand the Algerian culture, he had to learn about the different layers of the onion to become a psychiatrist and a revolutionary.

In this cognitive dissonance theory, Fanon stresses attitude change and behaviors. In his book Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon wrote:

Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn’t fit in with the core belief.5

Franz Fanon makes it clear that colonization is possible only with the complicity of members of the colonized. Fanon gives us a glimpse into the complexity of race.6

I return to the classroom and my life experiences for answers. My friend René Martínez, a former teacher in the Tucson Mexican American program, quotes an African proverb to his students: “Until the lions have their historians [storytellers], tales of the hunted will always glorify the hunter,” adding that in the Mexican American program, “We talk about how we come from the lion’s perspective, from the story that’s never told and which continues to be left out.” An example is the story of the First Peoples of the Americas and the history of people other than those of Western European heritage. Hopefully this book will question the hunter and form a counternarrative that is closer to the truth.

Occupied America is about the history of the Chicana/o or Mexican in the United States. Biases are difficult to root out—as in the case of propaganda films of World War II, the distortions are woven into the nation’s historical memory and are kept alive by schools and the media. For instance, Pulitzer Prize-winning presidential biographer Jon Meacham is often a guest contributor on MSNBC; his presidential biography of Andrew Jackson, American Lion, won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for biography or autobiography. From the Lion’s perspective, Meacham’s book celebrates Jackson and lacks a healthy skepticism that is essential in the search for the truth.8
Preface

Meacham, like most successful American historians, is popular; he smiles and adheres to the American paradigm and the canons of the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians.

In That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession, University of Chicago historian Peter Novick argues that “there is no such thing as ‘truth in history.’” Historical objectivity, according to Novick is “incoherent” and “dubious” and that “most historians generally write about their colleagues the way Arthur Schlesinger Jr., writes about the Kennedys.” According to Novick, historians ignore the flaws such as “racism and ultra-patriotism” of their protagonists. Novick continues that professional, psychological, and cultural pressures control historians. These pressures determine their epistemological interpretation and their philosophical and professional biases.

The official story became that Ice Age hunters from Siberia crossed into North America. “Armed with stone weapons, called Clovis points, these hunters spread rapidly across the continent and feasted on animals” unknown before to humans. The theory was almost immediately challenged; however, the Clovis hypothesis or myth persisted up until recently. Anyone challenging the model was professionally ostracized. The Clovis-first paradigm was the dominant hypothesis from the early twentieth century until recently, when other antiquities forced archeologists to take another look. The preponderance of evidence is that humans arrived thousands of years before the accepted arrival date from Asia. The new school holds that other sites predated Clovis and it cast doubt on the accepted paradigm.

For years archaeologists dismissed Native American social scientists accounts of the Indigenous Peoples. The great Native American historian Jack Forbes took a broadside at European perspective in his book titled The American Discovery of Europe.

Forbes wrote:

Most PEOPLE have probably never heard of the idea that ancient Americans might have traveled to other parts of the globe, so strong is the fixation with the “newness” of America. “Mainstream” archaeology in the twentieth century exhibited hostility toward any ideas that suggest a remote antiquity for humans in the Americas, or to the idea that Americans might have “spilled over” into Siberia and other parts of Eurasia.

Forbes did not raise the question to get tangled in controversy, but to show the probabilities of the footsteps pointing the other way and how the Eurocentric bias in history limits possibilities of 100 million people being discovered.

What Is New in This Edition?

The simple proposition of the book is that a lie is a lie. This is the ninth edition and most probably my last edition of Occupied America. At 86 I have a strong sense of my own mortality. So this book is about language, the truth, and an effort to be more precise than in previous editions. A lie is a lie. The urgency brought about by the election of Donald Trump to the presidency and his attack on the truth and the popularization of propaganda news “alternative facts” have made it more difficult to find the truth. As will be discussed, a distortion of history is more American than apple pie, although the distortion of the truth is common among nations. The change was obvious since the end of World War II when the United States became a global power and its imperial pretensions expanded. Notions of grandeur and a distortion of the truth propped up claims of moral authority. The Eisenhower Doctrine (1950s) accelerated interventions throughout the globe and put the Monroe Doctrine on steroids.

These events and those that followed put us on the road to the election of Trump and the world of doublespeak. Gore v. Bush (2000) accelerated the decline of democracy and brought on Middle Eastern Wars and the great recession in 2008. They heightened the irrational and unrelenting racist nativism and came after 40 years of the decline of the American Empire. Many Americans did not understand or resented this loss in moral authority as well as were incapable of dealing with an of control inferiority complex.

By the twenty-first century many Americans came to realize that the United States got whipped by the tiny nation of Vietnam as it had by North Korea. The wars bankrupted America and the nation’s infrastructure was sadly neglected. Public sector jobs declined, real wages fell and no longer could fathers sustain the family as women were forced to work to survive. Economist and Secretary of Labor under Bill Clinton (1993 to 1997) Robert Reich singled out for women working outside the home it was not a matter of choice, it covered up the wage gap. Finally, by the twenty-first century, it was no longer possible for lower-middle-class Americans to afford to buy a home. The educational crisis of the early 1990s shut out higher education as the stairway to the middle class—it cost too much. On a positive note, the decade produced the Dream Act movement that was built on the pro–foreign-born of the Chicana/o generation. By their fathers’ standards Americans were losers; this realization hit white males particularly hard. The natural outcome was scapegoating non-whites.

In the 1980s I met a young lady who had just gotten out of a mental sanatorium. A racist but loving white family had adopted her. When she grew up, they told her that she was adopted and was Mexican. She said she could cope with being Mexican, but could not cope with not being white. Today empires throughout the world are coping with the reality of not being great, not being benevolent and indeed,
being exploiters. My generation of Americans grew up with the illusion that everyone loved Americans. It was a lie.

The first of the Trump Years drove home the importance of being blunt and not hiding behind language. Distorted news and national biases must be challenged. A lie is a lie. Although I am no longer religious I acknowledge the importance of my early education. I recognize the importance of epistemology (the theory of knowledge) that places an emphasis on methods, validity, and scope of the question and investigates what distinguishes belief from opinion. The study of Latin and the figuring out syllogisms taught me the art of negation.

A note of caution: The book will abstain from using the term Indian or Indio unless quoting a source or within the context of an event. In the United States and Mexico, the word Indio/Indian has been used pejoratively. It is a product of Spanish conquest and colonialism and was constructed as a lie. Indio/Indian often means that the person is dumb or slow. In the United States, it accompanies names such as “Indian giver” or “Redskin.” The First People and their descendants will be referred to as Indigenous Peoples, which is what they are.

In discussing identity, it must be remembered that America is not the name of a single nation. But for better or for worse, it is the name of two continents. More than a 100,000 people lived here and they had no say in what it was called. It was named after Amerigo Vespucci—an Italian Florentine explorer, financier, navigator, and cartographer who in 1502 drew a map of Brazil and the West Indies that showed that the colonizers were not in Asia. Columbus mistakenly called the people Indians because he thought he had reached India, so it was with the reasoning that Vespucci “discovered America.” (In honor of Amerigo the name of two continents became America.)

I use various terms to refer to Mexican Americans. I continue to use the term Chicana/o because that is what I call myself, but I try to limit it to a particular generation and time in history. The U.S. Census uses the terms Latinas/os or Hispanics as do most studies. As a historian I am of the opinion that this leads to a fake identity. It includes everyone from Latin America, Spain, Italy, and France. Occupied America chooses to spell Mexican American without a hyphen. If written with a hyphen, the word Mexican becomes an adjective. The experiences of Mexican Americans within the United States make the word Mexican American a noun. A hyphen should not qualify their identity. The nationality of Mexican Americans hangs around their necks and should remind them that they are a colonized people. Mexico is part of their American national identity. Mexico is not an insignificant part of our future. As we keep repeating, it is the 10th largest nation in the world. In the United States, the Mexican American population larger than Canada and most American states. Mexico is among the top 10 global leaders in engineering and computer science graduates.

The failure to communicate has produced what Stuart Chase called “The Tyranny of Words.” Mexican Americans and other Latinos use the tag Hispanic. However, this term is in error. It refers to people from Spain, of a Spanish nationality. They were the people who invaded Mexico and began imposing what Stuart Chase calls a caste system The Tyranny of Words. The truth is that people from Spain are Hispanics, and people from Mexico are Mexicans.

The term Latino refers to anyone whose language derives from Latin—it includes Spaniards, Portuguese, French, Latin Americans, Romanians, and Italians. The name dates to the 1860s when Napoleon III of France coined the term “Latin America.” Napoleon wanted to make his puppet Maximilian Emperor of Mexico. Napoleon pushed the notion of a cultural affinity between France and Latin America. In using the ethnic identification of Hispanic and Latino they may have good intentions, but they weaken the individual national identity of each Spanish-speaking group. A people without an identity are a people without a history. Mexicans, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and others have histories. Latinos/os are of different nationalities like Asian Americans. They are not one nationality and the lack of specificity leads to a distortion of history. For example, Argentinians were not at the Alamo but some people would substitute Hispanics for Mexicans rewriting history. The word Latino comes from “Latin America.” It referred to a cultural kinship with France. Supporters of the term Latino argue that times have changed and national identities as we once knew them are outdated and that the term Latino is more inclusive. Others prefer Hispanic that has similar etymological problems. Hispanic refers to Spanish people. It refers to their language and culture. Hispanic is popular among professional and national organizations. In my day, to say you were Spanish was like denying that you were Mexican. It has gotten to the point that I have heard some people say that they were eating Hispanic Food. My reaction is what is wrong with the “M-word”? This challenge is getting more involved as Mexican American youth refuse to be European and are searching for an Indigenous identity.

There are 33 different nationalities in Latin America where the Spanish, Italians, and Portuguese do not use Latino—it would offend the social order. They differentiate Spaniards from Mexicans. However, in the United States we lump everyone together as if we all belonged to a single nationality. This makes it difficult to ferret out Mexican data from the Census and other reports. I try to adjust and use the terms Mexican American, Mexican/Latino, and U.S. Mexican. I feel it is important to know and respect the identity of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Puerto Ricans, and others. It helps unravel the lie. Making them generic Latinos/Hispanics will hurt them. A lie is a lie.
Acknowledgments

I dedicate this book to my wife Guadalupe Compeán. It is because of her that I have lived this long, not only physically but intellectually. I have always had a tendency to escape into a shell; Lupe forces me to engage. I owe her an intellectual debt. Also to my daughter Angela who is always correcting my 1950s language expressions, my sons Walter and Frank, and my grandsons and granddaughters. Thanks to my family, colleagues, students, community, and those who struggle for justice and care. As you get older you think a lot about the past. I remember my father and his stories. He was a reserved man, but one story stands out. When he first came to the United States in the early 1920s he did not know a word of English and for six months the only thing he ate was ham and eggs. My father was a tailor and I remember him telling me that it was easier to make a suit from scratch than make alterations. I remembered my father’s advice working through the nine editions.

Lastly, to my mother who went blind at the age of five. She never went to school and taught herself to read using a gigantic magnifying glass. When I was child, boys never did the dishes or housework. However, because of my mother’s health, I washed dishes and scrubbed floors. It was an important lesson in life. My parents were immigrants who added layers to my onion and while many of the layers were positive, many of the layers had to be peeled away.

It would be remiss if I did not thank Sergio Hernández for his beautiful rendition of the Saguaro Cactus found in the Arizona and Sonoran Deserts. The giant saguaro is the symbol of resistance to Spanish and American Colonialism. Some stand 40-60 ft high. For thousands of years, people have the saguaro lived in harmony with the First People such as the Hohokam resisted Spanish and American Occupations; i.e., conquistadores, homesteaders and ranchers. Thank you Sergio.

Notes

1 Rodolfo F. Acuña, Occupied America: The Chicano’s Struggle Toward Liberation (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972).
8 Jon Meacham, American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House (New York: Random House, 2009).
14 Forbes, Ibid., p. 80.
16 Traveling through Europe in the post–World War II era, many Americans were shocked to know that Europeans did not love them. After all they had liberated them, they thought, from the Germans. Instead of trying to find the truth as to why, they would say that it was because Europeans were jealous.