

500 YEARS OF RESISTANCE

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When we are taught history in the United States we are taught of the discovery of America by a lost Italian, sailing under a Spanish flag, who did not know where he was going or where he landed; who was greeted on shore and nursed back to health, and who did not know where he had been when he returned.

Discovery of America? It makes nonsense. We are told that the Pilgrims came for religious freedom, yet Ann Branford, the first person banished from the original colony was sent away for attempting to teach the women to read... from the Bible; Cotton Mather decided she was obviously a witch and sent her into the forest to die. Religious freedom? These people, who the indigenous people called "Wasi Chu" (meaning "greedy ones") did not only come to live, they came to conquer — raping land and women, destroying all they encountered, enslaving and exploiting.

But, how do we teach our children these lessons? Why are we still teaching that the Constitution says, "All men are created equal," when — in the libraries of congress — we can read the correspondence of our so-called "Founding Fathers," who clearly state that only propertied "white males" were to be accorded the rights of citizens. They deliberately excluded women, "savages" (the indigenous people of America), the "tawneys" (Asians), "slaves" (Africans), and — yes — even non-propertied white males.

• We are never taught that the Mayan people had discovered the concept of zero 1,000 years before the Hebrews, and so could cal-

culate to infinity, and that this concept had a profound effect on their religious beliefs.

• Or that the 10 commandments from the bible are from the ancient teachings of the Africans and can be found in the *Ptah Hotep* in the 142 negative commandments of their religious teachings.

• Or that the Aztecs had operated on the human brain and had evolved a mathematical system which allowed them to chart the stars — and that it was an extremely sophisticated vesesimal system in base 20, rather than base 10?

• Were we ever taught that the Aztecs practiced a form of 'plastic' surgery and could replace body parts, including the noses of their warriors who were injured in battle? Or that they performed sophisticated brain surgery and stitched up the cuts with human hair to avoid rejection or infection?

• Or that most indigenous groups had profound knowledge of botany, zoology, astronomy, hieroglyphics, architecture, irrigation, mining and city planning? Or that the design of entire cities was an ancient art in the Americas when Madrid, London and Paris were suffocating in their own crowded stench and dying of the plague (interestingly, only Africa and America had the knowledge and ability to build pyramids)?

• Or that the U.S. Constitution and the Articles of Confederation were imitations of the Great Law of the Iroquis?

Part of the pain and melancholy of the indigenous people of America is that — to the invader — none of these accomplishments were important. Anyone not white was considered a patently sub-human

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500 YEARS OF GENOCIDE, SLAVERY, RAPE, PLUNDER AND RESISTANCE

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savage, and their languages, religions, customs and traditions were not respected. Imagine how horrifying and loathsome to have all that is important to you robbed from you, and then being forced to emulate the same people who robbed you.

**We seem to
have lost ground.
But have we?**

In 1776, the United States of America usurped the name of continental people for a basically white, English-speaking, middle class minority. It probably revealed the continental ambitions of that minority. An "American" was thereafter defined as a white citizen of the U.S. The numerous brown Spanish-speaking people from Aztlan to the south were given secondary status as Latin-Americans, Spanish-Americans, South-Americans, and Mexican-Americans. White colonialists even had the nerve to turn the Native Americans into a hyphenated American, or use the clear misnomer "Indian."

Only now are we beginning to understand that the "Banditos" of our history books were the peasant outlaws whom the state regarded as criminals — but who were, in reality, the champion avengers, fighters for justice, our leaders of liberation, our heroes.

Some of these heroes of protest and rebellion were:

- Tiburcio Vasquez, who led an uprising against "Yankee invaders of California;"

- Joaquin Murieta, who avenged the rape of his wife, the murder of his children and the burning of his home and lands, and who became the legendary, feared bandit they said could be a hundred

places at once;

- Elfege Baca, who defied the Anglo way of things and who was a source of pride and a symbol of resistance to the people of New Mexico;

- Juan M. Cortina, who gave up everything — social status, money, and property — to stand up for his countrymen resisting Anglo oppression, Texan style;

- Gregorio Cortez, who was hunted because of a tragic mistake and who only recently has been presented in a more historically accurate fashion, now that we have Latino scholars to correct the lies.

United States history shows the complete disregard of the humanity of the indigenous people of this continent, and of course, the evolving *mestisaje*. And from these courageous freedom fighters of our people stem the revolutionaries of the Chicano movement.

In the census figures of 1990 we find that the world population now consists of only 16 percent caucasians. In the United States between 1980 and 1990, the general population grew by 69 percent, with the Asian population growing by 127 percent, the African population growing by 14 percent, and the caucasian population growing by 13 percent.

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We read that by the year 2000, 92 percent of the population will live in cities. In the last 10 years, for example, the population of Los Angeles grew by 17 percent. But the Latino population within Los Angeles grew by 70 percent; the Asian population in Los Angeles grew by 65 percent; the African population in Los Angeles grew by 17 percent;

and the white population in Los Angeles has not grown at all. These percentages are similar to those of other cities across the nation.

As the second-largest "minority" in the United States, Latinos/Hispanos, Raza, (whatever term you are most comfortable with — many are also Chicanos) are those who, in the latter part of the '60s, began an era of protests to ensure that the human and civil rights of Latinos were guaranteed and protected. Historical landmarks in the United States which signaled the Chicano Moratorium include:

- The rally protesting the ouster of VISTA workers in Del Rio, March 1969;

- The student walkouts in East Los Angeles, March 1969;

- La Raza Unida Conference in EL Paso, October 1968;

- The courthouse raid by Alianza Federal de Pueblos Libres in Northern New Mexico, June 1967,

- The founding of the Crusade for justice, growing out of a protest against the tactics of the administration of the city of Denver, April 1966,

- The strike of grape pickers in Delano, California which began in September 1965.

There were many more local incidents across the country, because we had been given hope by the ongoing civil rights struggle in the South, and by the liberal Supreme Court, and by the New Society programs of the Kennedy era, and we had realized the measure of our oppression, discrimination and disregard. We were bonding with divergent groups of working class people, feminists, ethnic minorities, the disenfranchised — protesting the Vietnam War, integrating public places, creating programs for equal access to education, registering people to vote, establishing rehabilitation programs for our people in prisons, for our pre-schoolers, for the elderly.

We developed store-front literacy programs for the millions of illiterate people in our populations, we were struggling for the guarantee

of civil and human rights for everyone. We were in the throes of becoming something more than the "silent minorities." We had hope.

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Many outspoken leaders rose among us, voicing their dissent against the unjust rule of the hegemony: the Panthers Revolutionary movement, preaching and teaching autonomy and self pride; the American Indian Movement (AIM), continuing the battles now fought in the courts to attempt to stay the abuses of natural resources in land, euphemistically "given" to them; the Japanese Nisei stepping into courts in their fight for the reparation of property stolen from them during the incarceration of 110,000 Japanese during World War II — most of them American citizens — and against all evidence from CIA, FBI and military intelligence of any fifth column/espionage or treasonous activity; and the Chicanos, selecting a name for themselves from the lowliest of their people — the most discounted — and turning it into a word they would say with pride when identifying a political ideology: Chicanismo became more than slang, they became terms that stood for unity, pride, a unique identity and a belief in great possibilities.

Since then we seem to have lost ground. But have we? There are more Latinos in powerful political positions in the United States than ever before, more Latinos with a college education, and more entrepreneurs.

By the year 2000 we must be prepared to lead or be led.