

A POET SPEAKS ABOUT...

The use and abuse of language by a Chicano from Aztlán (both words unknown)

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When the rich steal from the poor it is called business,
when the poor protest it is called violence.
When the natives follow their millennial migrations across America,
they are called undocumented illegal aliens.
When the Europeans, invade, commit genocide and steal America,
they call themselves immigrants and pilgrims.
The united Nations and the Red Cross are concerned
and sometimes respond to atrocities throughout the world,
never to atrocities in the United States of America
and its borderland wall of death more than 1000 miles long,
so long the boundaries can be seen from outer space!

Language is the most important tool of humankind, and by the act of genesis, of all life. After all, before we became human there was language, as it continues to be present in creation itself. We hear that dogs communicate or emit what could be language: “au au” in Brazil, “ham ham” in Albania, “wang wang” in China, “guau guau” in Mexico, and “bow wow” in the United States. A variant of their language is “Grrr...”

Metaphorically we say there is the language of music, poetry, art, science, mathematics, and that there is a family of languages. Academically this most complex human system of communication is broken down into philology, etymology, grammar, phonetics, diction, verbs, nouns, gerunds, adjectives, possessives, past, and present tenses. To delve into language minutiae gets extremely mind boggling, mysterious, and either headachy or rapturous depending on your love or hate for insights on language.

Leaving the origins, extensions, variants, dialects, specific language branches, and evolution of nationally collective forms of expression to scientists, poets and dreamers, I shall focus here on a very specific use and abuse of language: how language has

identified, trapped, occupied and liberated a specific people in the world: the Chicano people of the nation of Aztlán.

The mere declaration of such a purpose and the use of the words “Chicano” and “Aztlán” is already a statement of mystery, ambiguity, an ipso facto truth of the unknown, of the destruction of knowledge, of an occupation, unknown elements (Chicanos, Aztlán) to be deleted. I refer to language here as a tool of occupation or liberation, of validation or elimination.

When I say that I am Chicano to people in China, they say, Chicago? I tell them that I am a person, not a town. And the question follows – what is Chicano? The irony is that the same question is echoed in the land of my own origins. Chicanos in my homeland do not know they are Chicanos. Those that do know find themselves in the minority. Aztlán? It is a millennial nation-land that still does not exist! Even fewer natives of Aztlán have even heard of an Aztlán ! By contrast and contradiction, both Chicanos and Aztlán bear an influence way out of proportion to their self-awareness and acknowledged numbers. Chicanos of Aztlán shake the roots of the most powerful nation in the world, the United States of America.

On the immediate surface one might think; this is politics, not language. Just as *thought* is action, all life interaction is transmitted and sieved through and with language. We are the collective result of what language permits us or binds us to be, in freedom, or bondage; autonomy, misery or joy.

Chicanos are Native Americans often referred to as Latinos, Hispanics, Mexican Americans, and a host of other internal denominations such as Mestizos, Cholos, and Raza. Chicanos are the descendants of the people that lived and continue to live in their homeland, Aztlán. Many of their ancestors left the place to migrate into and settle in the central valley of Mexico destined to become the Aztec Capital Tenochtitlan, today’s Mexico City. Chicanos are the people left in limbo while European nations warred with each other for control of the land, totally ignoring when they could, destroying when they met, the native people of the Americas. Chicanos are the original Mexica tribes that would give the name to Mexico – MeXicanos, while they themselves remained Xicanos written more popularly today as Chicanos. The native language of Chicanos is neither English nor Spanish, but was and is – Azteca Náhuatl. Today’s Chicanos speak all three

languages, with their native language so suppressed that they often are unaware they speak it.

The fact that we as Chicanos semi-exist is a direct result of the use and abuse of language. As extraordinary as it may seem, we are in the throes of surviving the last hurrahs of the days of an outdated but real Empire colonization. Through a series of well established government plans, the United States of America has pursued a policy of genocide, the total extermination of natives, especially those advocating for the de-occupation of their homelands, or at least, for the present, a negotiated co-existence planning for mutual autonomy. The most concentrated and focused use of language was placed in motion – a language that would justify, validate and install the ultimate masquerade to morality, democracy, fairness, freedom and justice. Among other examples of this, is the pivotal one called The Constitution of the United States, the bible of democracy, and freedom in America. It holds the most preposterous, outlandish and irreverent hyperboles, such as “We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal”. It then declared that black people were 3/5 human and natives were savages, the ownership of their land preempted and “extinguished” – actual language to rephrase “invasion” and “highway robbery”. The language that replaced “colonization” was “democracy”.

The greatest malefactor of the Great American theft is the bugled hero Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall (1801-1835) who declared that America had inherited ownership of the Americas from Great Britain. He also wrote of the rights of preemption (replace the word here with “theft”) by virtue of the rights of discovery and conquest. This was to be the base of the masqueraded “rule of law” still flaunted to this day. To the Euro-illegals, to accidentally run into a populated civilized continent is “discovery”. They immediately struck with the sword, the cross and the power of language by labeling the populations , “unchristian, heathen and savage”. These were our ancestors, many with magnificent temple cities, paved walkways, balustrades, intrically carved statues and earthly placed buildings to reflect the heavens and the moving stars. John Marshall’s use of language to declare legal what was totally on prima facie evidence, illegal, became the basis for “American Constitutional Law”, and made the supreme court a co-equal branch of government; that is, the government could not stand without its word-master thief to rubber stamp its government thefts.

Historical facts abound that this was and has always been our Homeland. Mayan ruins, from our other large half of our brethren have been discovered in Florida, while very recently, in the last few months of this year 2012, more Mayan pyramid ruins have been found in the state of Georgia, traditional base, like the state of Alabama, of racism of the deep south of the United States.

The abuse of language was instituted when the Mexican people (so confused and mixed, Natives with European Spanish) were seen as a blurred race to be despised and condemned, destroyed if possible. Referred to as greasers, wets, and dirty Messcans, they were shot on the range, haunted in their homes and hung on the nearest tree, as black slaves who stood up for their freedom, or who dared to look at a white woman. Such brutality would give rise to many a local hero such as Jacino Treviño, from south Texas, who became a legend in his own time, by defying all white attempts to kill him and foiled many a posse attempt to capture him including his running circles around the infamous Texas Rangers. He shot a local sheriff who murdered his brother over language confusion regarding a horse. The question was – do u have a horse ? A caballo repeated the sheriff. The true answer was no. Jacintos´ s brother had a “llegua”, (a mare). The sheriff called him a liar and shot him. Jacinto shot the sheriff. From then on Jacinto Treviño shot many a sheriff and many a Texas Ranger who came to hunt him down. There are songs and corridos about his “asañas” (exploits). Américo Paredes immortalized him in his book titled, *With a Pistol in his Hand*.

During the later part of the depression era 1929-1944, the government began massive deportations of Mexican people, estimated to be about 2 million; they were accused of taking American jobs. It is estimated that some 400,000 of them were U.S. citizens and/or legal residents. A recent article in the Los Angeles times, February 21, 2012, states that “families were forced to abandon their homes, or were defrauded of personal and real property, often sold by local authorities as ‘payment’ for the transportation expenses incurred in their removal”. In February of the year 2012, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, born in Austria, signed a law to apologize for the inhumane deportation of such masses. A memorial has been placed in La Plaza on Main Street in the city of Los Angeles, California.

So real and so extreme is this established policy of extermination that a 50 page manual exists today issued by the Department of the Interior officially titled “Endgame” (remember the use and abuse of language?). The direct perversity of intent, said in a mocking terminology cannot be missed. Endgame. This manual details ways and means to find, arrest, and deport 10 million people of our kind, to be removed out of the United States of America, that is, from the heart of Aztlán, our ancient and native homeland. The genocide and removal of the native people, the destruction of their infrastructure and means of survival have been a Game from Hell to the invading Euro-American Illegals. In this very day, the daily Television news can break your heart to see the tears and anguish of families broken apart, children left alone to criminals who sometimes rape them, parents removed unable to defend them.

As if to drive the unwelcome fact home, the linguistic nails hammered on the cross of our Chicano Golgotha are various. The extreme xenophobia about our presence, and the memory of our belonging home, has driven the foreign Euro-Americans to dehumanize us in order to treat us as “others”. The government has labeled many of us, that migrate back and forth in our homeland, as *illegals*, *undocumented*, and *aliens*. These 3 words are the language of the day, -- officially instituted in order to stop, abuse, harass, arrest, imprison, and deport many of our kind. It does not matter that families are broken up, that children are left without parents, wives without husbands and vice versa. It does not matter that this community is not breaking any laws but quite the contrary doing its best to uphold morality, humanity and the economy by being consumers and doing the most dangerous and difficult jobs. As if they were criminal offenders my community is arrested while doing its job. The prisons where they are incarcerated are called “Detention Centers”.

In America, language is used to cloak, to deceive, to distract and to euphemize what has been a constant realpolitik of destruction meant to annihilate my people, community and ancestral memory. This has been going on for centuries where our communities are shuffled back and forth worse than cattle. Cattle are fed and taken care of – even if slaughtered. We are only slaughtered. In addition to the fact that our color and physical native appearance is enough reason to be suspect and detained for deportation, the worst damage is done to our minds – as with the death of our minds, so goes the extermination of our identity and presence as Native Americans. In the case of language, when a

language is erased, so are the tools of expression and maintenance of autonomous memory, and ancestral ways.

In Tucson, Arizona, as of this writing in the middle of the month of January in the year of our Lord, 2012, when, according to Maya prophecy, an era is to come to an end and a new more enlightened one begin, an auto da fé, has just been executed; the public burning of knowledge of our history by the U.S. government. An inquisition was instituted by a State of the Union. All that was needed was for the torch to be set to the burning of the books. Some fifty books were banned and physically confiscated from the successful program of Mexican American Studies (MAS). Not only was the program declared “unconstitutional”, but the books that served that program were banned and physically removed, this action in front of the students who used them.

Some of the books banned and confiscated in this 21st Century inquisition are:

Critical Race Theory, by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic

500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures, edited by Elizabeth Martinez

Message to Aztlán, by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales

Chicano! The History of the Mexican Civil Rights Movement, by F. Arturo Rosales

Occupied America: A History of Chicanos, by Rodolfo Acuña

Pedagogy of the Oppressed, by Paulo Freire

Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years, by Bill Bigelow

Cantos al Sexto Sol, an Anthology of Aztlanahuac Writing, edited by Cecilio García-Camarillo, Roberto Rodriguez, and Patrisia Gonzales

This last book banned and prohibited, *Cantos al Sexto Sol* (Songs to the Sixth Sun), is an *Anthology of Aztlanahuac Writings*, reflecting a great number of Chicano activists from the heyday of the 70’s and 80’s. The poetry and words of my fellow Chicano authors are there, including some of my own.

As if to underline the perversity of control over our hearts and minds some of our own native people were instruments of this public *auto da fe*.

The Words of San Antonio, Texas, 1950’s organizer, Emma Tenayuca, ring true, “A people cannot be oppressed without the help of some of the oppressed”. When students from Cholla High School walked out and marched a distance of 5 miles to Tucson

Unified School District, they were met by “burrocrats” including administrator Lupita García. She told the students that racism had nothing to do with the action and that Mexico should be taught in Mexico not in America.

An earlier bill passed in the state upon which she based her words was HB (House Bill) 2281 that suspended Mexican American Studies not Mexican Studies. When asked why European studies had not been banned, no one, including Lupita García, had a response. Those students that protested were directed to perform janitorial duties on the weekend without any kind of hearing regarding their actions.

This is all too reminiscent of the fact that “ethnic studies” did not exist until the Europeans came to invade and occupy our homelands. The apartheid fact also exists in that in Tucson more than half of the students are of native origin. It is a minority of white immigrant invaders that establish the rules of conduct and what will be taught and reflected in the colonial schools. The irony and abuse of language lies in the fact that “Ethnic Studies” bases itself on the “racialization” in the Americas. Its mission statement (of Ethnic Studies) is to focus on the histories, literatures and politics of minorities and how such impact upon the social, political, and cultural factors that shape these minorities. As long as this interdisciplinary verbiage does not declare openly that we are an occupied people, but rather fulfills the job of telling minorities how they should interact with their occupiers, ethnic studies is grudgingly accepted in some schools. Accept the fact and study how messed up we are. All this can go on in an academic classroom while the streets are haunted by bodies armed with the latest high tech equipment to terminate us.

All this is executed and put into effect by language. This is the tricky abuse and cunning of a perverse mentality to enforce an advantage of power, this through politics and warfare. Some intent to portray the politics as benign is so absurd that there is a billboard that runs across the internet. “ICE establishes toll-free hotline for detainees claiming U.S. Citizenship (855) 448-6903”. Rather than absolve the armed force of wrong doing, it fully establishes that this wrong doing is so prevalent that those that claim allegiance to white pure blue blood but do not look so are picked up for deportation and imprisonment daily. It also establishes that any hope of being freed is directly bound to a proclaimed allegiance and fealty to being occupied and invaded –

claim U.S. Citizenship. What is this ICE I have mentioned? It is the arm that triggers the guillotine: Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Immigration is the act of foreigners passing or coming into a country for the purpose of permanent residence. Customs is usage, frequency of same acts, habitual. We all know what enforcement is. What is ICE enforcing? The contradiction is real easy to see. The real immigrants are the white people that came from the old world of Europe.

ICE is either enforcing that the customs of the new European immigrants be the law of the land – or that the customs of the natives be extinguished, especially their insistence that they are AmerIndian natives. To deport native peoples from their homeland is more than ethnic cleansing, it is a war of termination. Only time and history can record the outcome and clash between natives and colonization. Language continues to be central to the on-going battle for control of how anyone will be classified as a member of the world community.

The fact that ICE exists is an Orwellian concept plucked from the pages of Huxley's Brave New World. It is a Vini Vidi Wiki, (I came I saw I conquered) Aryan supremacy mentality that still polices the world in a Tweedlee and Tweedledom society. The people that once came uninvited to trespass and steal America from the natives now refer to themselves as "Nativists". What are we to think of a people that impose a nation with the words, "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal", while invading and occupying people's homelands, and dragging their slaves in chains? In present times the inhumanity of this is reflected in the young men and women sacrificed to be warriors; minorities to the war front in droves! Many who survive remain in shock forever as they learn that humanity is not meant to create carnage one upon the other.

Chicanos exist by the power of ancestral legacy. The denomination itself, the name, has floated in the misty past of myth and legend. The appellation itself, "Chicanos" has had its own uphill struggle to become itself, that is, to be established as an accepted denomination for a people. The Mexicans from Mexico said it sounded nasty, like chiquero (a pigsty), until they were reminded that part of their (our) tribes were called "Chichimecas". The Euro-illegal Americans said it was dirty and sounded like "chicanery" (deception, trickery, artifice). The native community was so confused that

in the beginning the word “Chicano” was used in hushed whispers and mostly in the backstreets and narrow alleys where Chicanos were surviving. The community itself was leery of those that used the word and community members were defensive about being called Chicanos themselves. In the beginning there was almost universal rejection of the use of the word Chicano.

In the early mist of time Chicanos and the Mexica tribes they come from, had their homeland named Aztlán. It was their ancestors, the Mexica tribe that gave them their name: Mexicanos to the south (Mexico) and Chicanos to the north (USA). Their world of language allowed them group communication, group survival, and with a certain surplus of confidence in sheltered safety, the time and space to transcend language applications. It was through language that Chicanos discovered a reflection of their identity, doubted it, questioned it, and sealed it in their customs, traditions and ways. Then came the inequity of invasion and colonial occupation that persists to this day just as the Moors remained holding Spain hostage for 800 years. Giuseppe Mazzini states: “Without a country you have neither name, token, voice, no right, no admission as brothers into the fellowship of the peoples”.

Chicanos have no language of their own, no homeland of their own, no flag, no written statement of their identity or rights as a people, or as a nation. There is no one to advocate for, protect or guarantee the human rights of Chicanos as a people, as a nation or even as a conglomeration of tribes. Nonetheless, Chicanos have emerged in the 20th / 21st Centuries as living fossils that carry their own rebirths. There exists no weapon, nation, force, government or flag that can defeat or destroy such persistence of presence which translates into an indomitable sense of greatness.

In spite of all that Chicanos do not have, they have the most important element in their DNA, in their ancestral roots and in their memory of themselves; they have myth, they have legend and the knowledge that they descend from a people of awesome and mythic proportions.

That is why the United States government has burned its wits to withhold, contain and extinguish the flame of freedom and liberty that beats a great rhythm in every barrio across the length and width of America. Aztlán has grown and continues to grow day by day. It has neither diminished nor lessened. The land of the dead, Mictlán, has a greater

voice than the thunder of American weapons and arms. In the year 2012 the prophecy comes to pass. Aztlán is reborn with the splendor, wisdom and strength of all our generations past. The language and voice of Aztlán is reborn to liberate our colonized home. All the king's horses and men can never pretend to be legal resident citizens of someone else's stolen land – ever again.

Those Euro-illegals that have, in spite of their own government, acquired a sense of humanity are now occupying Wall Street, a movement that has spread throughout the world. Language is once more being applied toward the liberation of a humanity held hostage through the use and abuse of language.

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