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## COMMENTARY

# Columbus, Indians, and the Black Legend Hocus Pocus<sup>1</sup>

WILBUR R. JACOBS

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One of the joys of my life in teaching and writing about American Indian history has been the friendships I have had with Indian men and women. Linda Murray (Pima), a student, has taught me a lot about how much a circle of Indian friends and students can mean. Kenneth Eaglespeaker, a young Blackfoot Indian and one of the best dancers among any of the students I have had, once told me, after I had spoken about "contributions" Indians had made, "We Indians were just doing our thing and did not plan to make special contributions to any white society." How right he was! Johnny Flynn (Potowattomi) showed me how student activists could take on two formidable foes: the University of California, Santa Barbara Archeology Department, which was destroying age-old Indian middens (village refuse deposits) on Santa Cruz Island; and the mighty Chevron Oil Company, which was destroying Indian burial sites along the northern Santa Barbara coastline. And then there was Grandfather, Chumash Indian medicine man and spiritual leader of Redwind, an Indian commune north of San Luis Obispo. Grandfather taught me a lot about Indian humor and good luck charms that really worked. I am

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indebted also to Archie Fire, a Sioux medicine man (who put me in a sweat that was heated only for children because I was merely a "professor,"), as well as to Indian leaders such as Dennis Banks and Oren Lyons, who have provided an education about the burden of dealing with authoritative agencies in the United States government.

At the Wounded Knee trials I learned how government officials and police lie. The Minneapolis head of the FBI was such a charlatan that he had to be warned several times by a presiding judge after making statements that were unquestionably false. Agent after agent rehashed imaginary happenings. After a day full of this claptrap but also full of Vine Deloria's roguish joking, the defense witnesses and some of the defendants were assigned to trial rooms in another Minneapolis court building. Joe, my companion, a tough Indian warrior who was charged with attempted murder, assaulting an officer, and a dozen other fuzzy allegations, suddenly stopped. "What's up, Joe?" I said. He took my arm and wildly waved his soiled and feathered cowboy hat. "I'm waving to the FBI cameras in that high building," he said. "I want to be sure we get a good picture." I am not sure I share his joy in being in an FBI picture, but, still, I feel good about it. We were both battling for recognition of Sioux land rights according to the great treaty of 1868; although we lost that skirmish, the war is not over.

Let me move on to my main theme tonight: Let us join the battle and enjoy the fight. Since the Columbian invasion, Indian people have had to fight off an ongoing assault. At my elbow, as I prepared notes for tonight, I found an invitation of 28 February 1992 from the Berkeley, California mayor, Loni Hancock, to participate in the 10 October celebration of 1992 as "The Year of Indigenous People." This, Mayor Hancock writes, is to commemorate "500 years of resistance."

For me, there are three parts of the ongoing war: I begin with an account of my own brawls, mostly with other historians, about resurrecting truthful Indian history. Second, I turn to an identification of modern enemies and semi-enemies, the modern history "borderlanders," successors to Herbert Bolton in promulgating a no-sin Spanish history. They are, I discovered, often joined to the influential press of the Franciscan order and other church-oriented publications. For example, well-meaning but fiercely loyal Franciscans such as the late Maynard Geiger and his successor, Francis Guest, have spent their lives eulogizing the missionary past of their order. Modern scholars such as Robert Heizer,

Woodrow Borah, Edward Castillo, Ramon Gutiérrez, and the late Sherburne F. Cook have demonstrated that there is another story. Indeed, the Franciscan historians and their lay allies have, as Rupert and Jeanette Costo complained, created a buffer to obfuscate the record and draw a rosy, mellow picture of mission history. Some of these writers are what we call scholars of the old Spanish borderlands, such as my old friend and colleague, Philip Wayne Powell. Some have not gone as far as Powell in painting pious, righteous Spaniards victimized in the barbaric woodcuts accompanying Dutch and English reprints of Bartolomé de Las Casas's *Tears of the Indians*.<sup>2</sup> But, generally, they have tried mightily "to set the record straight" by erasing the stories of what have become known as the cruel, gold-seeking, Christian exploiters from Spain, the Black-Legend Spaniards. Of course, they have not told the courageous stories of Native American resistance. In their retellings, the Spaniards who died in the resistance are cast as martyrs, and the Indian caciques, chiefs, and warriors are degraded as "conspirators" or treacherous outlaws.

For the origin of all this controversy, I turn to the famous "Diario" of old Christopher himself, abstracted by Bartolomé de Las Casas. I examine the naked record left by the admiral and let him speak for himself. The third and last part of my talk deals with something that has often been shrouded in mystery—the quiet counterconquest of the New World by Native American people.

### BATTLEFIELDS IN WRITING INDIAN HISTORY

Let me turn to the first part of the argument—how I, an unsuspecting, ignorant young UCLA undergraduate of Irish, German, and Catholic, Jewish, and Unitarian background, got tangled in the thickets of Indian history. My adviser, Louis Knott Koontz, an early ethnohistorian, led me to a strange series of documents in early American archives: long lists of "gifts" to the Indians, found in English and French records of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Almost overwhelmed, I staggered through a bewildering mass of documents to complete a doctoral dissertation on Indian giving and Indian treatymaking during the heyday of the French and Indian War. Indian diplomacy, I found, involved a protocol of wampum deliberations, speeches, and converse speeches, each documented by specific proposals. Additionally, there was an exchange of very practical items such as furs, skins,

guns, gunpowder strouds (a type of colored blanket made by London merchants from discarded woolens), hatchets, knives, needles, scissors, and a hundred other items. I discovered that, instead of being passive recipients of gifts, Indians—sachems and chiefs, along with their women and warriors—had specific agendas. They negotiated to augment a program of foreign relations (with French and English agents), to follow a policy of neutrality and keep the land-hungry English and the furtrading French at arms' length.

The Iroquois, for example, were actually great peacemakers as well as warriors. By shrewd negotiations, they held off the two great imperial antagonists and created a balance of power between France and England that lasted from the early 1600s to 1750. The Seneca and some of the other Iroquois tribes later joined Pontiac in a courageous international battle for self-determination in the early 1760s. The woodland Indians (as well as the western Plains Indians), I discovered, had tremendous clout. They fought in a long and bitter struggle to defend their homelands against an uncompromising and overwhelming use of force by the growing United States. Their old enemies, the British, counseled the emerging Canadian nation, where the ongoing fight was derailed in a series of compromises beginning with the allocation of a huge Iroquois reserve in what is now Brantford, Ontario.

Despite my research, I found leading historians such as the late Ray Allen Billington, who, in his best-selling 1949 textbook on the westward expansion of the American people, depicted Plains and woodland Indians as barbaric savages. I argued with Billington for ten years, and he finally asked me to make repairs to the fourth edition of his book to take out those offending, treacherous Indians. I did my best, but it was hard to eradicate the Billington bias, nurtured by Frederick Jackson Turner, who wrote as if the Indians had no real significance in American history aside from creating a buffer zone.

As I got more into the tangled shubbery of Indian studies, I encountered genuine falsification of history. There was mistaken interpretation and misrepresentation at best; at worst, there were compilations of deliberate mendacity. Leading authorities on the early frontier, including Frederick Jackson Turner and Francis Parkman, shaded their accounts with inaccuracies as well as racist innuendos. I remember that, as a fledgling historian at Stanford, I was greatly honored to be invited to write articles for the *Encyclo-*

*pedia Britannica* and was innocent enough to tell the truth about the Indians' opposition to Andrew Jackson's horrific policies on Indian removal. To my astonishment, the encyclopedia's editors erased my censures, "corrected" my article, and assigned it to an in-house writer, who removed my initials as author. I was told that my work did not correspond with an essay on Andrew Jackson in the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

Aroused by the fantastic erosion of Indian history by consensus historians as well as encyclopedias, I began in earnest to write books and articles about Indians and started what turned out to be the first American Indian history course ever taught in the University of California. Unexpectedly, I became involved in a big fight with a guard of young Anglo turks in my department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. They vehemently contended that there really was no Indian history because it was part of general United States history. In the midst of the turmoil, I found two supporters, Professors Alexander Deconde and Warren Hollister, who helped me nourish my project. My main Indian history class came to be called 179Q (Q because it was seen as a kind of nonhistory offering). But it, along with others, survived. I taught 179Q (sometimes twice a year) for some twenty-five years, until my retirement. A number of young Ph. D.s specializing in Indian history came out of that course, and, as some of you know, two of them, Calvin Martin and Al Hurtado, won national prizes for their dissertations. Another, Yasu Kawashima, wrote a brilliant book, *Puritan Justice and the American Indians*, that was a runner-up prize winner.

Despite the popularity of the program with both Indian and non-Indian students, I became aware that my own department at UCSB gave little tangible support to Indian history. Not unexpectedly, after I retired in 1988 and was no longer there to lead a protest, hostile members seized control and blackballed Indian history. Thus no Indian history is taught today at UCSB. You can follow Fred Hoxie of the Newberry Library and write chairman Sears McGee, Department of History, UCSB, Santa Barbara, California 93106, and scold him for anti-Indian policies. He is personally an agreeable man and probably would encourage Indian history if enough pressure were put on his department. You may be interested to know that the new substitute for Indian history is "history of the biological sciences."

## THE "BORDERLANDERS" AND COLUMBUS

I wanted to tell you about my career as an Anglo writing Indian history to illustrate the ongoing battle we have in getting our story into the mainstream of American history. According to several of the best modern textbooks, exemplified by Harper-Collins's 1989 *America and Its People* by James Kirby Martin and associates, we students of Indian history are getting a better press on Columbus and his impact. This text talks about the invasion of the Americas and the eager search for riches by Columbus and his followers. But we still have to cope with publications like *American History Illustrated* which, in its October 1992 edition (p. 29ff), presents a long article depicting a romantic, heroic discovery story devoid of any recent scholarship. The work of Al Crosby, Francis Jennings, Henry Dobyns, D'Arcy McNickle, and other scholars, who have helped to bring about the more balanced view of the age of discovery that has crept into our best textbooks, is still muffled in popular publications and in the long parade of books that glorify evangelization of the New World peoples.

There is an old cartoon showing three Indians viewing the *Pinta*, the *Niña*, and the *Santa Maria* as the ships near the shore of a palm-studded beach. "There goes the neighborhood," one of the Indians wisely observes. There is a yarn (sometimes told by my friend Martin Ridge, without the Spanish words), illustrating the arrogance of these first Spaniards, who met an Indian chief, or cacique, on San Salvador. When told that the Spaniards had discovered their island, the cacique replied, "The island was not discovered; we have always known where it was." Then, drawing a small circle in the sand with his sword, the Spaniard replied, "Aqui, en esta circulo (in this circle, this is all the Indian knows)." He then cut a larger circle and declared, "This is what the Spaniard, the español, knows." The chief, after looking up and down the vast beach engulfing the two circles, which now seemed small indeed, replied, "There is much that neither the Indian nor the Spaniard knows."

There can be no question about the enormous impression the New World and its green forests and colorful plants and birds had on Columbus. As for Indians, the admiral reported frequently on their hospitality, their kindness, and the fact that they could easily be subdued for slave labor. Such behavior has been called "instrumentalism," that is, using and abusing others. In his reflective moments, Columbus came up with no end of elaborate, pious self-

justifications for his views and actions. He observed, for example, that Indians "would be good servants," that they "would obey without opposition," that "they bear no arms," that "they repeat very quickly what was said to them." To test their capacity as servants, the admiral, seemingly without a second thought, kidnapped, or, as he said, decided to "carry off six of them . . . that they may learn to speak." As the eminent English historian of Spain, J. H. Elliot, has noted, Columbus "sent home shiploads of Indians to be sold as slaves . . ." On the other hand, one of Columbus's admirers told me, "Remember, he was only a sailor . . . a man of his time." True, but we must still try to tell things as they happened. In a sense, the behavior of the admiral was representative of Christian Europe at the time, especially of Latin nations in relations with Muslims and Africans.

For the most part, Spaniards, as well as the rest of the exploring Europeans, were ignorant of their own ignorance during their encounters with native peoples. But there was one Spaniard, Bartolomé de Las Casas, who, along with his thoughtful intellectual successors José de Acosta and French Jesuit Joseph François Lafitau, challenged the "crude image of the American Indian as an unreasoning creature of passion, a non-cultural 'natural man.'" There is, as Anthony Pagden of Cambridge University has pointed out, a lack of appreciation of Las Casas's contribution to understanding the beginnings of historical relativism and the early beginnings of comparative ethnology. As Las Casas argued, Indians were men and deserved to be treated as such. They were like anybody else and should not be mistreated under the umbrella of waging a "just war" to convert them.

The Spaniards, led by the gold-seeking sailor Christopher Columbus, who later turned to Indian slave-trading, brought about the transformation of more than the neighborhood. Certainly in the realm of technology—especially weaponry—and in their right arm of conquest, lethal microbes, the Spaniards cut a large circle, even a hole in the sand. The "New World" would never be the same. The history of the bloody conquest, with the continuation of the occupation and the further expansion from 1492 to 1800, has long been recognized as a grisly story of the exploitation of native people.

Although Native Americans fought back with horses and guns, there was a part of this invasion, the Old World microbes, against which they had almost no defense. It is called, as many of you recall, the greatest demographic disaster in world history. Hordes



of sword-swinging Spanish soldiers and a phalanx of zealous priests were among the first to bring the deadly microbes, along with rats, horses, pigs, and dandelions. As the Spaniards worked to seize gold and silver, they choked off the culture of the Native Americans. To exploit the mines and the new plantations, they turned first to Indians, who could be purchased, converted, and collared as a labor force. Then they turned to importing Blacks by the hundreds of thousands. All of these invaders brought pestilence, deadly viruses, bacteria that wiped out whole societies of Native Americans who had little or no resistance to the pathogens from European and African disease pools. After seeing thousands of Indians reel with feverish sickness, one German priest remembered that the very smell of a Spaniard would make an Indian sick. Here we have the Black Legend in miniature. The Spaniards seemingly were the worst of the lot, exceeding the records of brutalization of those oftentimes ferocious Protestant rivals, the English, the French, and the Dutch. As Ramon A. Gutiérrez has noted in a brilliant book on the early Spanish missions among the Pueblo Indians, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away* (Stanford University Press, 1990), Spain left behind a severely tarnished record.

Much can be said to defend the Spaniards, and certainly a defense is attempted by the modern Franciscans who converted the historian Herbert E. Bolton to their point of view. We cannot dispute the fact that the Spaniards brought with them a reverence for God, glory, and gold, besides olives and goats and horses. Such gifts were part of a divine mission, the Franciscans tell us, and even historians such as Doyce Nunis state, with all sincerity (how can they keep a straight face?), that Indians were naked people, shivering in the cold, starving for Spanish food and completely without morality.<sup>3</sup> Even worse, Father Serra, bless his soul, understood these facts and deserved to be canonized for all that he did for the unfortunate gentiles, as they were called by Spanish churchmen. Father Guest, living Franciscan historian, tells us that Serra was right on target, flogging himself in front of anyone who would see him in action as a prototype of what a good priest should be. Flog yourself to prove that flogging captured Indians is just the thing to do.

I have the distinction of being a questioner of such nonsense and therefore am now recognized as one who observes certain truths of the Black Legend, especially those facts that were first recorded by the great Spanish friar, Bartolomé de Las Casas. As an eyewitness, he told us of staggering murders, the careers of Cortez and

Montezuma, the eager baptisms by brown-robed priests, the decrying of Indian sacrifices and idolatry, the punishments with whips and faggots, and the avarice for Aztec gold. When an innocent historian writing about such events was attacked by James Axtell in the *American Historical Review*, I foolishly came to the rescue, stating that there was indeed some truth in the Black Legend. And now those borderland historians, the still-living disciples of Herbert Bolton, that pious old fraud (in writing about missions), have made me a marked man. I have been designated as a kind of enemy of the people by David Weber, dean of those borderlanders.

I tell you, my friends, beware of the borderlanders. Some of them will, I am convinced, rustle up the record so that Indians are never recognized for who they are. There are borderlanders who are anointed with the holy oil of the Franciscans such as Father Guest at Mission Santa Barbara, who writes tirelessly on the virtues of his Franciscan forbears and their heroic virtues in flogging Indians captured by Spanish soldiers after they had fled from the intolerable conditions at the missions. Fortunately, the borderlanders now are being undermined by a new breed of scholars digging in a Chicano past. Here is help for the realignment of Southwestern Indian history. Douglas Monroy, for example, in his superb book *Thrown among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California*, published by the University of California Press in 1990, devotes a series of chapters to the story of the Indios of California and how they responded to what he calls "Iberian imperialism." The padres were sometimes horrified by the outrages committed by the soldados (many of them former convicts), but, as "sagacious merchants" the fathers were more interested in promoting cash flow in mission sales of grain and cattle to the presidios and pueblos. Nevertheless, the padres, using their soldados, practiced a grim form of forced conversion, rounding up Indians, sometimes women alone, in punitive expeditions. And Monroy tells us how a joyful group of Indians, in a revolt against repeated beatings with an iron strap, captured a priest, crushed his testicle, and smothered him in retaliation for crimes he had committed against them. In *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*, Ramon Gutiérrez gives more examples of borderland revisionism, documenting the cultural imperialism of the Catholic Church's attacks on Indian beliefs.

The significant thing about this upside-down history is that Indians fought back every inch of the way. The pueblos exploded

in a great revolt in 1680, and there was a series of fights, counterbattles, and persistent blows of resistance that are often untold in the history of the missions.

### WHAT WE OWE THE INDIAN PEOPLE OF THE NEW WORLD

We need more connective scholarship on Indian religions such as that of Anthony Wallace, who shows in his books that when we help to preserve and understand major Native American cultures, we become beneficiaries of great riches.

When I completed my book *Dispossessing the American Indians* some years ago, I was pleased that Scribner's would allow me to include a chapter on what we owe the woodland Indians. More and more, that kind of appreciative interpretation is finding its way into a larger context, especially in a new paperback volume by Jack Weatherford called *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World* (Houghton Mifflin, 1992). The author has traveled widely in Central and South America and brings together facts to support his argument that Indians brought on a world food revolution as well as contributing silver money, which helped fuel early capitalism. Indians also gave the world advances in agriculture, technology, and architecture, and medicine for healing our bodies. A major portion of the world today eats corn and potatoes, only two of the long list of foods that Indian people domesticated.

I would add that we can learn much from the Indians' worldview of peacemaking and their concern for the welfare of future generations, as well from their ability to live together in harmony, so easily exemplified by tribal lifestyles. Vice President Al Gore, in his epoch-making book, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*, writes appreciatively of Native American religions, which offer "a rich tapestry of ideas about our relationship to the earth" and quotes speeches by western and eastern Indian leaders.

Perhaps the greatest debt America owes to Native American people is for our magnificent traditions of freedom and democracy. I scarcely need mention the volume *Exemplar of Liberty: Native America and the Evolution of Democracy* by Donald A. Grinde and Bruce E. Johansen, which for the first time gives us widespread documentation of this indebtedness. Equally significant is the fact

that the book is an exemplar of the fighting spirit in the front lines of knowledge, counteracting the cadre of well-meaning but misled scholars who call themselves "Iroquoianists," although the Iroquois themselves often decline to be identified with them. Against this formidable phalanx of academic shock troops, Grinde and Johansen skillfully penetrated firing lines of generalities with barrages of understory factual research that toppled the opposition. Grinde and Johansen proved that the Indian people of North America left a legacy of freedom and democracy that is worldwide in its influence. In modern Indian constitutional history, Duane Champagne gives us another fascinating account. His book *Social Order and Political Change: Constitutional Government among the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek* (Stanford University Press, 1992) explains how the Southeastern tribes have coped with evolving social and political issues.

Any statement about our enormous indebtedness to Native American people should pinpoint the legacy of great forests, pure air, clean water, ecological balance, and reverence for mother earth. Let me be very specific. Indians are often discussed in one of the most important publications in the English-speaking world, *The Ecologist*, published in Cambridge, Massachusetts, edited in England, and distributed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press. The November/December 1992 issue of this magazine contains a penetrating, well-documented article on the massive clearcutting of forests in British Columbia, which has been opposed by tribal peoples and environmentalists, including the Sierra Club of Canada. Geographer Aubrey Dieum, professor of environmental studies at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, demonstrates how this massive destruction of old growth forests destroys the ecosystem, how this desolation is bad forest husbandry, and how the giant timber firm of MacMillan Bloedel has misled the public with statements lauding the supposed benefits of clearcutting (strongly contested by Kluskus Indians). Professor Dieum sums up the Indian role in forest conservation with this eloquent assessment:

It is to the credit of these Indian communities [tribes of the Northwest Pacific Coast] that about 25 species of the world's largest and longest-lived trees—including many specimens 500 or even 1,000 years old—have survived fires, insects, climatic changes and human activity. In a matter of decades, this priceless heritage is being systematically annihilated by an unscrupulous and short-sighted logging industry.

This, then, is only one aspect of the heritage passed on to all of us by what ethnohistorian, anthropologist, and archaeologist Robert Heizer called the Indian of America, "the ecological man."

Early parts of this story are retold, as we know, in the heroic sagas of Indian leaders found in the writings of William Brandon, Frederick W. Hodge, William Christy McCleod, Alvin Josephy, Christopher Miller, and others. Indian patriots of a high order gave their lives and wisdom for the ideals of freedom and liberty: Sassacus, Miantonomo, Opechananeau, King Hagler, Carlos (cacique of the Florida Indians), Red Shoes, Canassatego, Half King of the Senecas, Pope, Pontiac, Little Carpenter, Tecumseh, Black Hawk, Keokuk, Cochise, Sitting Bull, Sequoyah, Black Kettle, Crazy Horse, Chief Joseph, Wovoka, and a host of others. The lives of many of these leaders, as skillfully chronicled by William C. Macleod in his classic *The American Indian Frontier*, show that there are other kinds of Indian history than grand conquest narratives or "just" wars in the name of God. The argument can also be made that it is inaccurate to stress "victimization themes" without demonstrating that Indians fought back and resisted.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

On the preceding pages, I have discussed a number of the books that have influenced my thinking. Additional commentary on these writings is in the notes and text of Antonia I Castañeda's superb essay "Women of Color and the Rewriting of Western History: The Discourse, Politics, and Decolonization of History," in the *Pacific Historical Review*, volume 61, number 4 (November 1992), pp. 501–33. Further discussion of significant works in American Indian and ethnohistory is in Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Dispossessing the American Indian* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1985, second edition), Note on Sources, 221–35. The Smithsonian Institution's *Handbook of the American Indians*, under the general editorship of William Sturtevant, includes extensive bibliographical notes accompanying each volume. The volumes that I have found most useful are those edited by Robert Heizer on *California* (volume 8, 1978) and by Wilcomb Washburn on *History of Indian-White Relations* (volume 4, 1988). There are twenty projected volumes, including a general index. Although these hefty tomes spurt out massive lists of bibliographical data and excellent articles,

they nevertheless do not supplant the older two-volume *Handbook of the American Indians North of Mexico*, edited by Frederick W. Hodge (reprinted by Roman and Littlefield, Inc., 1965). The bibliographical notes accompanying each article are of lasting value. See, for example, the piece on Hiawatha, volume 1, discussing Henry Schoolcraft's confusion of Manabozho, a Chippewa deity, with Hiawatha.

The Smithsonian Institution has also published a series of three volumes by ethnohistorians and anthropologists on the *Columbian Consequences*. Although they all have valuable bibliographical materials, I have found volume 1, *Columbian Consequences, Archeological and Historical Perspectives on the Spanish Borderlands West*, edited by David Hurst Thomas (1989), the most provocative and challenging.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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#### NOTES

1. An early version of this essay was presented on 9 October 1992 at the banquet address at the Native Voices Conference, University of California, Los Angeles.

2. See *Tears of the Indians: Being an Historical and True Account of the Cruel Massacres and Slaughter of Above Twenty Millions of Innocent People Committed by the Spaniards* (London, 1656), pp. 1-3, 20, 44-45, 109.

3. Rupert Costo and Jeanette Costo, eds., *The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide* (San Francisco, CA: Indian Historian Press, 1987). Nunis is quoted at length in an appendix document stating that California Indians had "no spirit of loyalty . . . no idea of the social compact . . . no sense of morality. They participated in free love" (see pp. 221-22).