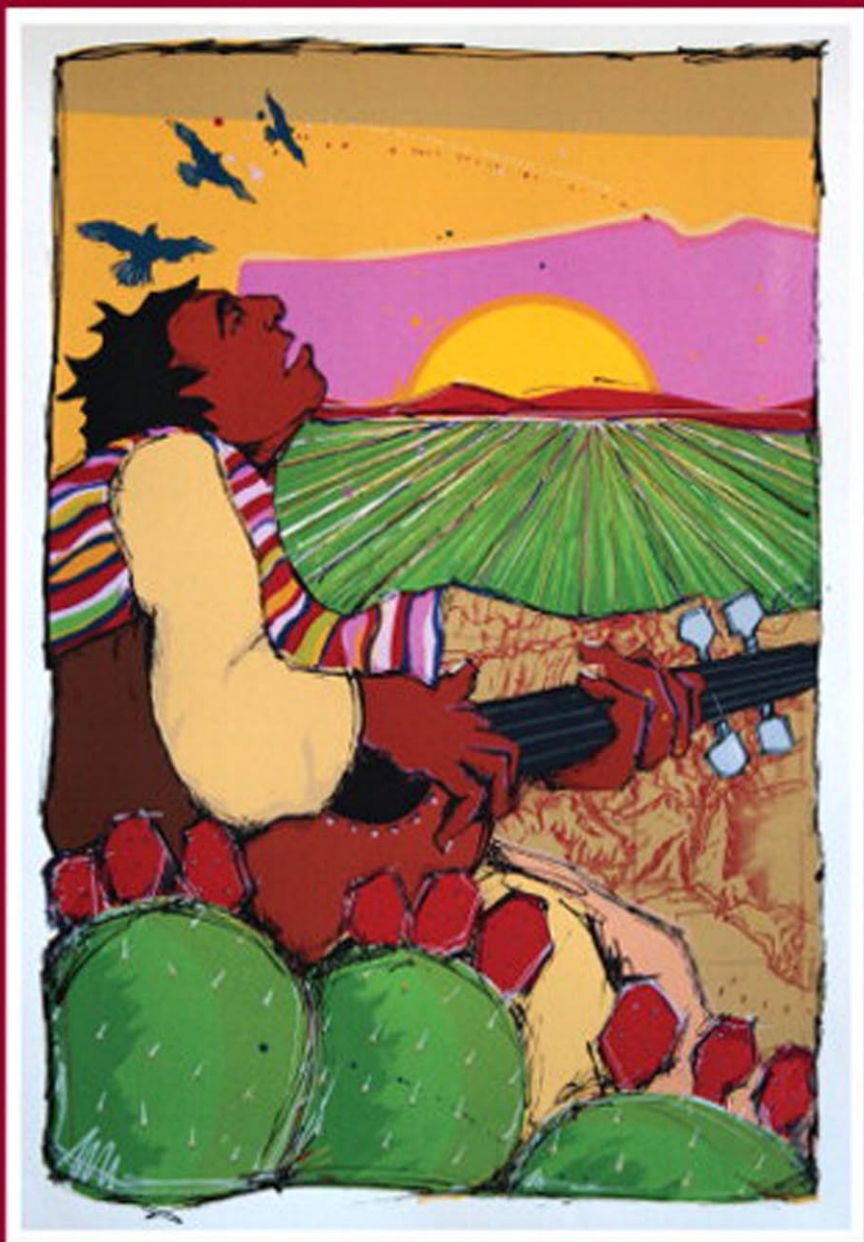


Occupied America

A History of Chicanos

Eighth Edition



Rodolfo F. Acuña

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Occupied America

A History of Chicanos

Rodolfo F. Acuña

Emeritus California State University at Northridge

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PREFACE

History can either oppress or liberate a people. Generalizations and stereotypes about the Mexican have been circulated in the United States for over 124 years. . . . Incomplete or biased analyses by historians have perpetuated factual errors and created myths. The Anglo-American public has believed and encouraged the historian's and social commentator's portrayal of Mexicans as "the enemy." The tragedy is that the myths have degraded the Mexican people—not only in the eyes of those who feel superior, but also in their own eyes.

—Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972), p. 1.

The first edition of *Occupied America* was published in 1972. I intended it to be a monograph that explained historical events leading up to the 1970 Chicano Moratorium and the murder of Rubén Salazar, a former *Los Angeles Times* reporter and news director for the Spanish language television station KMEX in Los Angeles. My intention was to publish one edition, and then move on to my area of specialization—the history of northern Mexico. I had a contract to publish my dissertation on nineteenth-century Sonora, Mexico, and a verbal commitment to publish another book on “Los Hombres del Norte,” the Sonoran leaders of the Mexican Revolution—Álvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elías Calles, and Adolfo de la Huerta.

That was my intention. However, as Albert Einstein once said, “Information is not knowledge. The only source of knowledge is experience.” My experiences at San Fernando Valley State College, now known as California State University Northridge, and the growth of Chicana/o Studies changed my trajectory and my life. The experiences were unique, and teaching at a teacher's college shaped my priorities, which were in teaching, not research.

I came out of a public school teaching background. I was influenced by theorists such as John Dewey who cautioned that education was about teaching the child and not the subject. The question was therefore how to improve the teaching of Chicano history. For many teachers a textbook is a partner with whom they often do not agree but which they use as a tool to fill in the spaces and cover the basics of the course. The truth be told, new fields of study are products of scholarly articles, monographs, and teaching. The textbook summarizes them. So in my case the glove fit, and the evolution of *Occupied America* was a natural next step.

I had taught hybrid survey courses on the Chicano as early as 1966. Consequent to publishing *Occupied America* I published three K–12 books:¹ *The Story of the Mexican Americans* and *Cultures in Conflict* for elementary grades; *The Mexican American Chronicle* was a textbook for high school and community college students. In the introduction to the first edition of *Occupied America* (1972) I laid out the thesis of the internal colony. To my surprise it was successful—to the point that many people believe that I should have left it at that, and I probably would have if it were not for my teaching. The truth be told, to this day I have remained a frustrated eighth grade teacher and I take the questions raised by students seriously.

After a decade of teaching from the first edition of *Occupied America*, I decided to change it to a textbook. By this time the book had acquired a cachet so it seemed

dumb to change horses in midstream and begin from scratch. Besides, the title “Occupied America” said it all; I liked it. Students have to understand the subject in order to be able to identify patterns and make comparisons. So the main objective of the second edition of *Occupied America* was to systematize the learning of the essentials of Chicano history. This was no small task. One of the difficulties is that when a scholar writes Chicano history, she or he must constantly correct the errors of Euro-American historians, and at the same time form the field’s identity.

The textbook helps the student organize and analyze. The objective is to understand the historical processes. It keeps them on track, constantly asking, What is behind the story? Historical vignettes are offered to encourage the readers to question what happened. Deduction is a very important part of historical analysis; it should encourage inductive thinking, which is where the instructor comes in.²

Over the past 40 years, I have repeatedly corrected the previous editions. Each subsequent edition raised new questions and added new sources. My tenure at a teaching institution, however, had its drawbacks: Aside from growing the Chicano Studies Department, I taught 12 units a semester, was active in community and labor struggles, wrote columns for major newspapers, did research and published other books and revised the various editions of *Occupied America*. This all had to fit into my available time. I am not complaining because this pried me out of the library.

This edition of *Occupied America* takes into account new trends in education. In California education is undergoing a crisis. Tuition has mushroomed to the point that many students cannot afford it. The community colleges are jammed, and it is projected that at least one-third of their offerings will be online in the near future. Corporate America has refused to pay the social cost of production, shifting the entire burden to the middle class and the poor. In January 2012, “Gov. Jerry Brown . . . announced his plan last week to pressure state colleges and universities to expand their online offerings and reduce costs.”³ Online classes save the cost of classroom construction and maintenance.

This brings me to the question that many of you will ask and certainly one that I have asked. Why another edition? I wanted the opportunity to develop the student/teacher manual, which I believe is necessary.

Another reason is that since the last edition, a lot has happened. The immigration question came to a head in 2006 and 2010, and so did the reaction from racist forces who threw reason to the wind. Incredibly, they want to control the border by deporting 12 million undocumented workers and their families, an act that if taken to its logical conclusion would bankrupt the country. They don’t consider the economic and human costs of rounding up 12 million people. They don’t ask who would replace them in lower-paying jobs. How many teachers and merchants would be displaced if we lost 12 million people? It is the same sort of idiocy that got us to invade Afghanistan and Iraq while lowering taxes on the rich, running the country on a credit card and plunging the country into a depression.

The reelection of President Barack Obama in 2012 was a milestone for Latinos. Without over 70 percent of Latinos voting for Obama, it is doubtful that he would have been reelected. Consequent to the election, more attention is being paid to Latinos and immigration than ever before. Many wonder in contrast to Arizona punished the Republican Party. Since California voters in 1994 passed the Republican-sponsored draconian Proposition 187, Republicans have not been able to elect a statewide candidate. The Latino electorate there is a firewall that checks the manufactured crisis.

This is the eighth edition of *Occupied America*; throughout its history, I have attempted to make each edition less imperfect than the last. As mentioned, this edition was in part prompted by Arizona, but it was also a result of the entire decade: Gore v. Bush (2000), the Middle Eastern Wars, the great recession beginning in 2008, the irrational and unrelenting racist nativism beginning in the early 1990s, the crisis in education, and the shutdown of higher education as a stairway to the middle-class heaven. On a positive note the decade produced the Dream Act movement that built on the work of the Chicana/o generation in support of the foreign born.

This edition is more Internet course friendly. There are links to maps, and a skills section. The book has numerous hyperlinks to sources on the Internet. Every link was tested, but as we know, links often become obsolete. We encourage the readers to use their browsers and check for new web addresses in the event that any we give are not functional. The Internet is not static, and many sites are renamed or dropped frequently.

New to This Edition

- The text covers history from pre-Columbian civilization to the 2012 presidential election.
- New historical material, texts, and scholarship have been taken into account.
- Individual women have been given a bigger share of the narrative alongside organizational development.
- The Preface and the Epilogue have been completely revised.
- Chapters 15 and 16 have been rewritten and revised and emphasis is placed on the role of population growth in forming priorities.
- Special note is made of the heavy immigration of groups other than those of Mexican origin, beginning in the 1980s.
- The Student/Teacher Manual—or, as I call it, the “Mini-book”—is over 100 pages and is designed to accompany *Occupied America*. It is in chapter format with an introduction, hyperlinks, and discussion questions. The manual makes *Occupied America* more online friendly for teachers and students. It is available free of charge at <http://forchicanachicanostudies.wikispaces.com/>—click on the link “Occupied America Manual” and on the link for Center for the Study of the Peoples of the Americas <http://www.csun.edu/cespa/Acuna%20Manual%20Binder.pdf> Chapter summaries and overviews have been expanded or added where space allowed.

This text is available in a variety of formats—digital and print. To learn more about pricing options, and customization, visit www.pearsonhighered.com.

Acknowledgments

I thank Chicana/o Studies at California State University, Northridge. It has allowed me to teach part time into my eightieth birthday, giving me contact with 130 students per semester, which has extended my life. It gives me a sense of community and a feeling for what is continuously changing. Aside from the students in my classes I am always thankful to the Movimiento Estudiantil de Aztlán (MEChA) that has kept the flame of activism and caring

alive. Because of my students, teaching is not just a vocation; it is a way of life. I would like to thank the teachers, students, and supporters of the Tucson Unified School District for showing us that history is important and worth fighting for. Los Angeles is my hometown: I was born here, and I only left it for the 19 months of my tour in the army. I love LA, smog and all.

Thanks to the founding students of Chicana/o Studies, they founded CHS; it was not the faculty nor I and certainly not the CSUN administration. My good friend José Luis Vargas, director of the Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP), reminds me, EOP was there first and students created and sustained EOP and Chicana/o studies. Thanks are due to Mary Pardo, Jorge García, Gabriel Gutiérrez, and David Rodríguez, who find time to discuss history. I'd like to thank Benjamin Torres; he has been a good friend and supporter throughout the years. I am grateful to the members of the For Chicana/Chicano Studies Foundation and for their support of undocumented students. To the Dreamers who demand their rights as human beings: hopefully their appreciation of history will expand. I would like to thank the Pearson editor, Ashley Dodge. I also appreciate the contribution of the reviewers: James Barrera, South Texas College; Maria Eva Flores, Our Lady of the Lake University; Laura Larque, Santa Rosa Junior College; Manuel F. Medrano, University of Texas at Brownsville; and Mary Ashley Riley Sousa, West Valley College.

Not least, thanks to my sons, Frank and Walter, and my granddaughters and grandsons. My daughter Angela Acuña who I hope never loses her love of animals and maintains her principles; I admire her greatly and love her more. My life would not be the same without her. I just underwent the first of two eye operations and say that my wife, Lupita Compeán, literally es mis ojos. I could not have accomplished a tenth of what I have without her. My writing in newspapers, four of my books, six editions of *Occupied America*, and my suit against the University of California have all occurred on her watch. In addition, we co-edited a three-volume anthology with some 425 documents, and have accomplished much more. I owe her an intellectual and moral debt. I always feel safe because I know she has my back.

*Rodolfo F. Acuña, Professor Emeritus of Chicana/o Studies
California State University at Northridge*

Notes

1. *The Story of the Mexican Americans: The Men and the Land* (New York: American Book Company, 1969). *Cultures in Conflict: Problems of the Mexican Americans* (New York: Charter School Books, 1970). *A Mexican American Chronicle* (New York: American Book Company, 1971).
2. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1970). Edwin Fenton, *Teaching the New Social Studies in Secondary Schools: An Inductive Approach* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).
3. David Siders, "Jerry Brown Carries the Day on Online Classes at UC, CSU," *Sacramento Bee* (Jan. 17, 2013).

CHAPTER 1

Not Just Pyramids, Explorers, and Heroes

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Interpret the evolution of Mesoamerican civilizations via a timeline through their Preclassical and Postclassical periods.
- Show the movement of the different Indian societies/civilizations in the context of the spread of corn.
- Explain the evolution of agricultural innovations, urban centers, architecture, calendars, and mathematical and literary achievements.
- Trace the changes in the development of classes and gender differences as the populations grew from villages to chiefdoms, to urban centers, and trace the evolving modes of production.
- Analyze and contextualize the world system, placing the disparate Mesoamerican civilizations within this model.

The primary culture of Mexico and the Americas is Indian. Because this fact challenges the legitimacy of the conquest, many Western scholars minimize this truism and they disrespect or slight the histories of the Indians. Mesoamerican and Andean civilizations did not need the Europeans to give them civilization; they are two of the world's cradles of civilization rivaling other great civilizations in China, the Indus Valley, the Middle East, and Africa. The Mesoamerican and Andean civilizations shared with them similar features. All of the cradles of civilization had a stable food source—this provided the people with an adequate supply of food to fuel a population explosion. In the Eastern Hemisphere, the *basic grains* were wheat, rice, rye, oats, millet, and barley. In North America, corn was developed at least 9,000 years ago in what is today central Mexico, spreading to what is now North America and the Andean region of South America. Corn was essential to the evolution of indigenous cultures, so much so that indigenous peoples worshipped maize. Corn made possible the changes in modes of production and helped mobilize labor to meet the challenges of population growth and cope with environmental change. Corn, like the pyramids, was a product of human labor and ingenuity.

40,000 BC

8000 BC

2000 BC

AD 200

AD 900

AD 1519

Stages of Development		
40,000 BC–8000 BC	<i>Paleoindian</i>	<i>Hunting and Gathering.</i> Characterized by bands of hunters and by seed and fruit gatherers.
8000 BC–2000 BC	<i>Archaic</i>	Incipient agriculture. Domestication of maize and other plants. Earliest corn grown in Tehuacán circa 5000 BC.
2000 BC–AD 200	<i>Formative Preclassic</i>	Intensification of farming and growth of villages. Olmeca chiefdom stands out. Reliance on maize and the spread of a religious tradition that focuses on the earth and fertility. Organizational evolution, 1200–400 BC: numerous chiefdoms evolve through Mesoamerica. The Maya appear during this period. Monte Albán is established circa 400 BC–AD 200. Rapid population growth, a market system, and agricultural intensification occur. Development of the solar calendar. Villages grow into centers.
AD 200–900	<i>Classic</i>	<i>The Golden Age of Mesoamerica.</i> The evolution of state-level societies. The emergence of kings. Priests become more important. Complex irrigation, population growth, and highly stratified society. Excellent ceramics, sculpture, and murals. Building of huge pyramids. Teotihuacán had more than 150,000 people, the largest city outside China.
AD 900–1519	<i>Postclassic</i>	<i>Growth of City-States and Empires.</i> Civil, market, and commercial elements become more important. The Azteca and Tarascan empires emerge as dominant powers. Cyclical conquests. Use of metals, increased trade, and warfare.

Sources: Robert M. Carmack, Janine Gasco, and Gary H. Gossen, *The Legacy of Mesoamerica: History and Culture of a Native American Civilization* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 48–49; also see Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.

The Cradles of Civilizations

Worldwide people began settling in sedentary societies around 8000 BC as agriculture became more common. Populaces formed laws based on mores and folkways. Slowly six cradles of civilization formed: China, the Indus Valley, Mesopotamia, the Nile, the Andean region of South America, and Mesoamerica.¹ Food surpluses made possible “specialization of labor” and the development of complex social institutions such as organized religion and education. Trade and a writing system facilitated the cross-fertilization of cultures. The interactive map and timeline at the following website shows the formation of such civilizations.

Time is very important in understanding history. It determines the questions we ask. Time represents the knowledge a people have accumulated. To gain more understanding of the science of time, go to the end of the book and read “Creating a Timeline.” Correlate this discussion with the online maps (cited in the text and in The Map Room at the end of the book) and with the timeline above, which shows the stages of cultural evolution in Mesoamerica.

The Corn People: An Overview

When the first modern humans migrated to what are called the Americas is not known precisely but is estimated to be about 20,000–30,000 years ago. Their migration into Western Europe began about 30,000 years ago. By some accounts, the New World was inhabited by about 15,000 BC. However, these are theories

and some linguists have raised the notion that language spread from south to north instead of from north to south.² There is the probability that some of these early people may well have migrated back to Asia from the Americas, with the last migrations ceasing when the Bering Strait's ice bridge melted around 9000 BC.

The earliest known villages in the Americas appeared along the coasts as early as 12,500 years ago.³ But it was not until around 7000 BC, when the hunters and fruit gatherers began to farm, that they began to alter or control their environment. In the Valley of Mexico, the climate changed, and water sources, game, and flora became scarce. As the population grew, the people were forced to turn to agriculture or perish. The evolution of this civilization was made possible by the cultivation of maize (corn). The origin appears to be the central valley of Mexico as early as 9,000 years ago. Corn became the primary dietary staple throughout Mesoamerica and then spread northward and southward.⁴ Native Americans commonly planted maize, beans, and squash, which formed the basis of their diet.

Maize unified Native American cultures. Recent studies show that people traveled with the seed to various places in the Americas. Archaeologists discovered the remains of the largest human settlement in the American Southwest dating from 760 BC to 200 BC, which included evidence of maize farming. The completeness of the maize culture supports the theory that Mesoamerican farmers brought corn into the Southwest.⁵ Corn spread a culture that extended along what today is U.S. Interstate Highway 10 into the eastern half of the United States, eventually becoming a staple throughout much of North America.⁶ The symbolic significance of maize and its role can be found in ceremony and ritual throughout Mesoamerica and the Southwest. The presence of maize was also found in modern-day Peru as early as AD 450.⁷

The European invasion put the corn cultures in danger of extinction. This threat continues today in places like the remote mountains of Oaxaca, Mexico, where traces of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are invading the native corn. Mexico, which banned the commercial planting of transgenic corn in 1998, imports about 6.2 million tons of corn a year, mostly from the United States. About a quarter of the U.S. commercial corn crop contains GMOs, and after harvest it is mixed with conventional corn. As a result, much of the Mexican corn is now considered to contain low levels of “background” GMOs. This concerns Mexicans since GMO foods and seed are an environmental threat to wild plants and species such as the monarch butterfly.⁸

The Olmeca 1500 BC–500 BC

Around 3000 BC, a qualitative change took place in the life of the corn people. The agriculture surpluses and concentration of population encouraged specialization of labor. Shamans became more important in society. Tools became more sophisticated and pottery more crafted. History shows the development of civilization occurring at about the same time as in North Africa and Asia, where the “cradle of civilization” is traditionally believed to have been located. Mesoamerican identity had already begun to form, marked by a dependence on maize agriculture and a growing population.⁹

Because the Olmeca civilization was so advanced, some people speculate that the Olmeca suddenly arrived from Africa—or even from outer space! Most scholars, however, agree that Olmeca, known as the mother culture of Mexico, was the product of the cross-fertilization of indigenous cultures that included other Mesoamerican civilizations.¹⁰ The Olmeca “built the first kingdoms and established a template of world view and political symbolism the Maya would inherit.”¹¹

One of a few known primary civilizations in the world—that is, state-like organizations that evolved without ideas taken from other systems—the Olmeca culture is one of the world's first tropical lowland civilizations, an antecedent to later Mayan “Classic” culture. The Olmeca settled villages and cities in the Gulf Coast lowlands, mostly in present-day southeastern Veracruz and Tabasco, and in northern Central America.

Around 2000 BC, the production of maize and other domesticated crops became sufficient to support whole villages. A second breakthrough occurred with the introduction of pottery throughout the region. The earliest pottery came from the Oco, who populated the Pacific coast of Chiapas and Guatemala. Although not much is known about the Oco, their pottery is found from Veracruz to El Salvador and Honduras. The development of pottery allowed the storage of food surpluses, encouraging the Olmeca and other Mesoamerican people to form small villages. Little evidence of social ranking and craft specialization has been found in the early villages, which evolved from an egalitarian community into a hierarchical agrarian

society of toolmakers, potters, and sculptors. As they evolved, the Olmeca became more patriarchal, and they probably excluded women from production outside the home.

The Olmeca began to build villages on the Gulf Coast as early as 1500 BC. By 1150 BC the Olmeca civilization formed settlements of thousands of people; constructed large formal temples built on earthen mounds; and carved colossal nine-foot-high stone heads. San Lorenzo was one such settlement, an urban center with public buildings, a drainage system, and a ball court.

La Venta (population 18,000), a major ceremonial site in Tabasco, eclipsed San Lorenzo (2,500) as the center of the Olmeca civilization in about 900 BC.¹² Tres Zapotes (3,000) would eventually overtake La Venta. By the Middle Formative period, other chiefdoms emerged throughout Mesoamerica. Trade networks linked the Olmeca with contemporaries in Oaxaca and Central Mexico. In the Valley of Oaxaca, San José Mogote functioned as a primary center, as did Chalcatzingo in the present-day state of Morelos. Priestly elite dominated the primary Olmeca settlements. As time marched on, the shaman class played an ever-increasing role in the lives of the people. From these centers, they ruled dispersed populations of farmers, who periodically assembled at the ceremonial and trade sites to meet labor obligations, attend ceremonies, and use the marketplace. The elite had greater access to valuable trade goods and occupied larger homes than the common people. The elite were even buried in larger tombs.

The Olmeca left behind archaeological evidence of their hieroglyphic script and the foundations for the complex Mayan and Zapotecan calendars. The Olmeca developed three calendars: a ritual calendar with a 260-day cycle that was used for religious purposes; a solar calendar with 18 months of 20 days, plus 5 days tacked on (corresponding to our 365-day calendar); and a combination of the two calendars in which religious days determined tasks such as the naming of a newborn infant. In any case, the Olmeca used a more accurate calendar before the time of Christ than the West uses today.¹³

The development of the calendar required a sophisticated knowledge of mathematics. There is considerable difference of opinion about whether the Olmeca or the Maya discovered the concept of the number *zero* circa 200 BC.¹⁴ (The Hindus discovered the zero in the fifth century AD, and not until AD 1202 did Arab mathematicians export the concept to Europe.) Pre-Columbian astronomy, too, was far ahead of Europe's. The writing system of the Olmeca is still being deciphered. These hieroglyphic texts represent more than a history; they also constitute literature.¹⁵ Other Olmeca legacies are the ball game and the feathered-serpent cult of Quetzalcoatl that they shared with most Mesoamerican cultures.

The growth of agricultural surpluses increased trade, which gave the Olmeca the luxury of developing advanced art forms. Although they are best known for the massive carved full-rounded heads, they also crafted smaller figurines of polished jade. Religion and the natural world inspired the subject matter for Olmeca art.

The Olmeca culture passed its organizational forms, religion, and art to the Maya, Teotihuacán, and later Azteca societies. About 300 BC, Olmeca civilization supposedly mysteriously vanished. In truth, it continued to exist from 150 BC to AD 450, in what some scholars call the Epi-Olmec period.¹⁶

The Maya

Mayan agricultural villages appeared about 1800 BC. The Maya formed a trade network that interacted with other chiefdoms in the Gulf Coast, Oaxaca, and Central Mexico. Merchants from Teotihuacán lived in Maya centers such as Tikal from at least the first century AD.¹⁷ The Maya experimented with advanced forms of agriculture, dug irrigation canals, and reclaimed wetlands by constructing raised fields. As their population increased, they built larger ceremonial centers. At this point, as in the case of other Mesoamerican societies, rulers took control of religious rituals and the belief system.

From AD 250 to 900, the Maya lived in an area roughly half the size of Texas (today the Mexican states of Yucatán, Campeche, Quintana Roo, part of Chiapas, Tabasco, as well as Guatemala, Belize, western Honduras, and El Salvador). The divine *ahauob*, the “divine lord,” ruled millions of farmers, craftsmen, merchants, warriors, and nobles and presided over capitals studded with pyramids, temples, palaces, and vast open plazas serviced by urban populations numbering in the tens of thousands.¹⁸ Agriculture and trade produced prosperity and gave the Maya the ability to build temple-pyramids, monuments, and palaces of

limestone masonry in dozens of states. They also used their astronomy skills to link earthly events to those of the heavens. Their calendars were a product of time science.¹⁹

In the ninth century AD, the Maya Classic culture began to decline, probably because of revolts, warfare, disease, and/or crop failure. Overpopulation explains the internal strife and dissatisfaction with their leadership and is a possible explanation for their decline. But the Maya left many examples of their accomplishments. In a limestone cavern in northern Guatemala, through narrow tunnels frequented 12 centuries ago, there are black carbon images of a sacred ball game, musicians, dwarfs contemplating shells, homosexual lovers locked in embrace, and columns of intricately entwined hieroglyphs.

The decipherment of the glyphs raises many questions. For example, little doubt exists about the presence of homosexuality; the question is how society formed attitudes toward homosexuality.²⁰ Research in this area is just beginning and, like past literature on the subject, it comes from highly biased sources. One of the most interesting accounts is by Richard Trexler, who argues that Spaniards would often feminize their enemies in warfare, calling them sodomites and pederasts. Trexler says that European notions form much of what we know about homosexuality. In the case of the invasion and subjugation of the Mesoamericans, the Spaniards' homophobia suggested to them their own moral supremacy. Sodomy "was seen as either a sign of insufficient civilization or a sign of moral decay."²¹

Maya Hieroglyphic Writing

The decipherment of hieroglyphic writing is leading to a greater understanding of the Maya culture, including the identification of dynasties of rulers and an understanding of how the various people interacted.²² Direct evidence from bones of the ancient Maya suggests that the common people seldom lived beyond the age of 40—many died in infancy and early childhood. Men and women in the ruling class were physically larger than others—as much as four inches taller. Furthermore, evidence from bones and inscriptions shows that the ruling class sometimes lived remarkably long lives. One of the greatest rulers of the ancient city of Yaxchilán, Shield Jaguar, lived almost 100 years.

Maya glyphs suggest that a ball game, played throughout Mesoamerica, served as a means to communicate with the gods. It also enhanced social and economic organization and was a substitute for war.²³ Revered by both the Maya and the Aztecs, the game possessed deep religious significance. The object of the game, which was played by small groups in an outdoor stone court, was to pass a large rubber ball through a stone ring at opposite ends of the court.²⁴

The Maya based their numerical system on counting on the fingers and toes; for example, in Quiché, a branch of Maya culture, the word for the number 20 symbolized "a whole person." This method of counting is also reflected in the decimal divisions. The Maya used a system based on the number 20, with only three symbols: a bar for *five*, a dot for *one*, and a stylized shell for *zero*. As we have discussed above, the Maya, if not the Olmeca, were probably the first people to develop the mathematical concept for zero.²⁵

Their knowledge of mathematics allowed the Maya to develop an advanced calendar. The astronomy of the Maya was not limited to observation of the stars and approximate predictions of the movements of the heavenly bodies. Using sophisticated numerical systems and various tabular calculations in conjunction with the hieroglyphic script, Maya astronomers calculated figures running into the millions.²⁶

At the time of the Spanish conquest, the Maya still wrote glyphs—not only on stone slate but in hand-made books. In 1566 in the Yucatán, Friar Diego de Landa read a great number of Maya books. According to him, because the books were about the indigenous antiquities and sciences, which he believed were based on nothing but superstitions and falsehoods of the devil, he burned them. However, not all of the Maya books were burned; some were sent to Europe as part of the booty seized by Cortés from the Native Americans. The Spaniards could not decipher them, and over the years, most crumbled into dust or were thrown out as trash.

Maya Society

Like other Mesoamerican societies, the Maya lived within the matrix of the community. They organized themselves into extended families in which there was a patrilineal descent. Multiple generations of a clan

that had a common ancestor resided in one household compound. The inheritor of supreme authority was established through primogeniture, which resulted in the rule of clan elders. Kings also based their legitimacy on their membership in a clan. The kings erected monuments to commemorate their victories and to record their lineage.²⁷

During the Late Classic period, Tikal, a kingdom of around 500,000 people, was the largest known Maya center. It covered about 14 square miles and included more than 3,000 structures. It made alliances with other city-states but also often used force to expand its territory.²⁸

The glyphs on a prominent Tikal building reveal the names of notable women such as Bird Claw, Jaguar Seat, Twelve Macaw, and the Woman of Tikal.²⁹ These women, although buried in honored places, were present only through a relationship with an important male. The differences between males and females changed with time. Scholars suggest that there was more equality before AD 25 than after. As in most advanced civilizations, class differences existed and over time, one's position in society became hereditary. Therefore, a distinct divide between high-ranking members of Tikal society and the poor existed, and this widened over time.

The glyphs reveal few actual women rulers among the Maya. In Palenque during the sixth and seventh centuries, there were only two women rulers, Lady Kanal-Ikal and Lady Zac-Kuk. Both were the descendants of kings and thus legitimate rulers. They inherited the throne and passed it on to their children. Lady Zac-Kuk was the granddaughter of Lady Kanal-Ikal and was the mother of the Great Pacal, who built grand buildings as testimony to her greatness. Indeed, Pacal got his legitimacy through his mother's line of ancestry. She enjoyed great prestige because she lived for 25 years into his rule. Pacal died in his nineties.³⁰

The Decline of Mayan Civilization

After AD 909 the Maya built few new temples, and even fewer cities, except in the northern Yucatán at sites such as Chichén Itzá and Tulum. Chichén Itzá was first founded about AD 400 and was governed by priests. The architecture reflects this religious dominance and there are many representations of the god Chaac, the Maya rain god, on the buildings. With the arrival of the Itzá from Central Mexico about AD 850, the city was rebuilt and images of the god Kukulcán, the plumed serpent, became numerous. The Itzá were politically and commercially aggressive rulers.³¹ Chichén Itzá, the dominant Maya center in the Yucatán Peninsula during the early Postclassic period, was closely linked to the Tula people in the north, and was greatly influenced by that culture. The importance of the center declined after the late twelfth century, when a rival Maya group sacked it. Tulum and other coastal cities were important centers for sea-based commerce.³²

Glyphs may someday answer many questions about the Maya, who built their civilization in a hostile and fragile rain forest. How did 6 million Maya coexist in this difficult environment? For a time, these civilizations met the challenge, and they developed a sophisticated knowledge of astronomy and mathematics that allowed them to increase production of food and other necessities. They constructed a mosaic of sunken gardens, fruit trees, and terraces—a system that used the rainfall, fertile soil, and shade of the jungle to their advantage without permanently harming it. Maya farmers dug canals and built raised fields in the swamps for intensive agriculture.³³ Until recently, archaeologists assumed the Maya used a slash-and-burn method in which farmers cut and burned the jungle-planted crops for a few years and then moved on when nutrients were depleted.³⁴ A true slash-and-burn method would have supported only about 65 people per square mile. However, the Maya population density had already reached about 125 people per square mile by AD 600.

We can speculate that engineering projects like canals, reservoirs, and the terraced fields came about at the cost of human labor. After hundreds of years of relative prosperity and power, the urban infrastructure of many Maya cities broke down. The drop in the food supply increased between the lower and the elite classes and between city-states. Today, Mesoamerican scholars generally agree that no single factor caused this fall. But, by the Late Classic period, populations suffered from malnutrition and other chronic diseases. The environment simply could not support the large population indefinitely.³⁵

Surely, class oppression and war played a role in the decline. The common person labored in the fields, maintaining a complex agricultural network, while priests resided in empty ceremonial centers. The nobles plainly oppressed the commoner—the warrior, temple builder, and farmer. The Maya organized construction crews of *corvée*, or unpaid labor, and the growth of this system magnified class hostilities over

time. In addition, evidence shows a sharp decrease in rainfall between the years AD 800 and 1000—one of the most severe climate changes in 10,000 years—at roughly the time of the Maya decline in the ninth century. The drought caused tensions: the result was that cities, villages, and fields were burned and wars increased.³⁶

Although the cities of the Maya lowlands shared a common culture, they were not politically unified. Each region had a capital city and numerous smaller subject cities, towns, and villages. Furthermore, increased trade and competition led to warfare. The Maya civilization, however, endured for more than 1,000 years during what is known as the “golden age of Mesoamerica.” In the Postclassical period, the Maya experienced a gradual breakdown of their social structures, marked by a decline of the priest class and the growing political and cultural influences of a rising merchant class.³⁷

Until recently, scholars described the Maya society as peaceful. Decoded glyphs, however, suggest another view of the Maya, revealing the practice of human sacrifice and bloodletting.³⁸ The Maya believed that the gods controlled the natural elements, and that the gods demanded bloodletting. Human sacrifice was mostly limited to prisoners, slaves, and orphaned or illegitimate children purchased for the occasion. Generally, it was more common to sacrifice animals. This bloodletting and human sacrifice placated the gods and assured the Maya that their crops would grow and their children would be born healthy. As drought and the resulting drop in the food supply took its toll, there was a corresponding increase in both human sacrifice to appease the gods and warfare. (An analogy can be made between human sacrifice and war.)

Teotihuacán

Teotihuacán, the “city of the gods,” located in the Valley of Teotihuacán in a pocket-like extension of the Valley of Mexico, became the primary center of Mesoamerican civilization around 200 BC. Like the other city-states, by the end of the Formative Preclassic period, it concentrated sufficient authority and technology to make a quantitative and qualitative leap from a loose collection of settlements to a unified empire.³⁹ The civic–religious complex laid the foundation for this development. At its height, at the end of the sixth century AD, Teotihuacán covered about eight square miles. It may have housed more than 150,000 inhabitants, making it the largest city in the world outside China.⁴⁰

In the Early Classic period, the people of Teotihuacán lived in apartment compounds, with some larger than others. There were more than 2,000 separate residential structures within the city. Built by the rural peasants, the outlying villages were linked to the core city by commerce. As with peasants of other societies, these workers contributed labor, food, and other products for urban elites and state institutions. A strong central government gave administrators control over peasants in the city and countryside; they often treated the peasants like subjects. The ruling elite forcibly moved the rural peasants into the city during the Early Classic period, leaving some scattered villages. Teotihuacanos, aided by a highly centralized state, conquered an empire that covered most of the central Mexican highlands.

Urbanism and Trade

Teotihuacán was a major manufacturing center in the Early Classic period. The products of its craft workers spread over much of Mesoamerica, as far south as Honduras. The pottery, especially, represents Teotihuacán’s highest achievement as a city and empire. Its hallmark feature is the cylindrical vessel with three slab legs and a cover. Vessels shaped like modern flower vases and cream pitchers graced the city. Artifacts from other civilizations were also present, adding to the city’s splendor. So fabled was Teotihuacán that Azteca royalty annually made pilgrimages to the city.⁴¹

Teotihuacán civilization was contemporary with the Maya Classic period and acted as the hub of trade networks from Central America to today’s southwestern United States. Without trade, the Maya culture would have remained at the chiefdom stage instead of evolving into a sophisticated world system that stressed material production and common ideas. It grew to a population of 100,000–200,000.

Teotihuacán suffered from internal civil strife in the seventh century, and again at the beginning of the tenth century. In about AD 600–650, unknown invaders burned the civic ceremonial center of the city, marking

a turning point in its history. From Teotihuacán emanated a network of societies such as in the city of Xochicalco, later associated with the Tolteca people. It also remained a center of long-distance trade, continuing its history of robust mercantile contact with other regions.⁴² Even after its decline, Teotihuacán continued to be a great city of 30,000 inhabitants until about AD 950. However, without its authority, Mesoamerican societies were less centralized, breaking up into dozens of city-states, which competed for trade and influence.

The Tolteca

The Postclassic period is characterized by a secularization of Mesoamerica. Although religion remained important to the Mesoamerican peoples, the civil and commercial sectors of society became more important, and their rise led to the expansion of market systems and long-distance exchange. The Tolteca emerged in what is today central Mexico in about the tenth century AD.

The Tolteca were a dominant force during this period (from about AD 900 to 1150). A subgroup of the Chichimeca, a Nahuatl-speaking people from the northern desert, the Tolteca controlled the Valley of Mexico.⁴³ Their capital was Tula (Tollan), about 40 miles north of present-day Mexico City. Founded in the ninth century, Tula incorporated part of the heritage of Teotihuacán, although it is generally associated with Tolteca culture. After Teotihuacán's fall in AD 700, Tolteca refugees migrated there from northern Teotihuacán and adopted many of its cultural features. Topiltzin Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl (Our Prince One-Reed Feathered Serpent) ruled Tula from AD 923 to 947. Ce Acatl is often confused with the Azteca deity Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent who for 1,000 years was part of Mesoamerican mythology.

The Tolteca developed a system of cosmology, practiced religious rites, including human sacrifice, and built grand temples to their gods. In the courtyards of Tula, supporting the roof of the great Temple of Quetzalcoatl, stood 15-foot columns in the form of stylized human figures, specifically, enormous statues of warriors standing stiffly under the weight of their weapons and wearing rigid crowns of eagle feathers. Processions or military marches, and eagles and jaguars devouring human hearts are portrayed. The Plumed Serpent, formerly interpreted in Teotihuacán as the benevolent divinity of agricultural plenty, in Tula became a god of the Morning Star, the archer-god with fearsome arrows.

Little evidence exists that the Tolteca built an empire. Tula, for instance, was not at the crossroads of the international trade networks of the time. In the mid-1100s, the Tolteca collapsed, perhaps under attack by nomadic tribes, and Tula was abandoned. By that time the Tolteca had extended their sphere of influence into what is now Central America. This culture was transposed to Yucatán, where it was superimposed on Maya tradition, evolving and becoming more flexible and elegant. A hybrid art form of dazzling brilliance developed and lasted for two centuries. The Tolteca influence can be seen in a cross-cultural fusion of deities depicted in Mayan glyphs, frescos, and designs.

Tula was the axis of the Tolteca civilization. It controlled most of central Mexico, the Yucatán Peninsula, and the Gulf Coast, and it is speculated that its interests extended to Chiapas and the Pacific coast. The Tolteca also expanded trade with people as far away as Zacatecas, Veracruz, and Puebla; New Mexico and Arizona; and Costa Rica and Guatemala. They assimilated with many of the peoples that they cultivated ties with. An example is the important Mayan ceremonial center of Chichén-Itzá. By the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century, the Mayan culture was in decline. The Itzá stepped into the void and began to substitute their gods and architectural styles. The Toltecas added the Observatory, Kukulcán's Pyramid, the Temple of the Warriors, the Ball Court, and the Group of the Thousand Columns. Judging by the architecture and artifacts, there was considerable cross-fertilization between the two cultural areas.⁴⁴

Other Corn Civilizations

The Zapoteca were the original occupants of the Valley of Oaxaca. About 4,000 years ago, Oaxaca's people settled in agricultural villages. Interaction with common ancestors played an important role in integrating autonomous villages. Between 500 BC and 100 BC, a highly centralized, urbanized state emerged with Monte Albán as its principal center.⁴⁵ Great plazas, pyramids, a ball court, and underground passageways graced

the city. Some evidence exists that the Zapoteca and the Olmeca engaged in long-distance trading that dates to the time of San Lorenzo, and that the Zapoteca later enjoyed good relations with the city of Teotihuacán.

As with the Maya, Zapoteca society was religious; it held that a supreme being created everything, although not by himself, and there was no beginning and no end of the universe. Like other Mesoamerican societies, the Zapoteca wrote in hieroglyphics and were obsessed with astronomical observation. Their 365- and 260-day calendars set a rhythm for their lives, with the latter serving as a religious guide and marking the birthdays of its adherents.

After AD 650, Monte Albán began to decline as other strong city-states emerged in the valley. Mitla, in the eastern part of the Oaxacan valley, took on greater importance.⁴⁶ Mitla is the best-known Postclassic site, continuously occupied since the Early Formative period, and is thought to have been a Zapoteca religious center. Despite the growth of other societies, the Zapoteca remained a major player in the region.

Meanwhile, in the highlands, the Mixteca increased their influence, and by the eleventh century they interacted with the Zapoteca-speaking people of the valley. There was a high degree of assimilation and intermarriage between the Mixteca and the Zapoteca nobility. The Mixteca, like the Azteca, are known to have engaged in a highly ritualized form of warfare and they were known for military prowess. Despite their influence, the Mixteca, like the Zapoteca before them, were not a dominant imperial power. They established the kingdom of Tututepec on the coast, which was important enough to garner tribute from other kingdoms. The Mixteca expanded their power by establishing strong bonds with other city-states through extensive intermarriage and war.⁴⁷

The Mixteca developed their own art style, influenced by the Zapoteca, and the two cultures created a synthesis. The creations of their goldsmiths and their manuscript illuminations are exceptional. Mixteca manuscripts or codices constitute an illustrated encyclopedia, reflecting religious beliefs and rites and the history of the aboriginal dynasties and national heroes. The style and color range of the illustrations, as well as the symbols linked to the ritual calendar, are also found in their murals.⁴⁸ The history depicted in the codices is a holy history, showing an abundance of deities and rituals. The Mixteca also excelled in ceramics, which became the most highly prized ware in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Mexico.

The Tarasco

By the twelfth century, the Tarasco people, also known as the Purépecha, ruled a vast territory in west Mexico, centered in present-day Michoacán. Their exact origin is unknown. Most probably, they were part of the Chichimeca migration. The Chichimeca were supposedly uncivilized natives from the north that the Tolteca were once part of. Nomadic groups along the northern frontier of civilization migrated to what is today central Mexico. The Azteca were part of the later wave of Chichimeca. They, along with the Tarascans, formed the Nahuas. The Tarascan civilization was originally formed through political unification of some eight city-states located within the Pázcuaro basin. The Tarasco occupied the region for more than 1,600 years (150 BC–AD 1530). Their development resembled that of other Mesoamerican cultures. Ceramic artifacts link the Tarasco to the old traditions of Chupicuaro (present-day Guanajuato). Their pottery and metalwork styles are unique, although they borrowed heavily from surrounding societies. This borrowing was common. For example, ceramics found in the present-day northern Mexican states of Zacatecas and Durango bear resemblance to the Hohokam ceramic found in what is today Arizona.

The capital city of the Tarasco was Tzintzuntán, built on the shores of Lake Pátzcuaro and dominated by a huge platform that supported five round temples. The Tarasco raised a well-trained army and from Tzintzuntán forged an empire. However, Tarasco military prowess did not tell the whole story. Their language and culture almost totally dominated the region, with many of the surrounding villages assimilating into it. They were excellent craftspeople, and they invaded other peoples for honey, cotton, feathers, copal, and deposits of salt, gold, and copper. Tarasco lords were placed in conquered lands and collected tributes in goods.

Unlike other Mesoamericans, the Tarasco were not well-known traders. Nevertheless, it is speculated that they did engage in some long-distance trading, even by sea, reaching South America. Tarasco society was socially stratified, with nobility, commoners, and slaves. The capital city dominated the area, although most people lived in rural settlements.