

## THE AMERICAN REDOUBT AND THE COYOLXAUQUI IMPERATIVE

### Dismembering America through Whiteness, Remembering America with Gloria Anzaldúa

**Keywords:** Whiteness, white supremacy, Racism, Redoubt, Anzaldúa, *mestiza*, *conocimiento*

These are sad and concerning times: we live with increasing fears of ecological devastation, the dissolution of civil society, and even nuclear war. Many people in the United States—particularly those who are white and Christian—respond to these fears by fleeing our crumbling cities for the isolation and perceived safety of rural environments. This is particularly noticeable in the movement known as the American Redoubt. The American Redoubt is a complex movement driven by political conservatives and Evangelical Christians who hope to extricate themselves from the complexities of U.S. society and the problems of a chaotic world by segregating themselves in rural enclaves in the U.S. Northwest. Their motivations include a desire to prepare for civilization's impending collapse, a yearning to be free of what they consider excessive state control over individual liberties as well as the aspiration to establish a devout Judeo-Christian theocracy.<sup>1</sup> Abraham Lincoln argued that sometimes a political dismemberment is the only way to save the body politic, writing “often a limb must be amputated to save a life.”<sup>2</sup> Lincoln was likely thinking of the Nazarene's edict in Matthew 5:30: “And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.” As extreme as this response might be, those who seek refuge and rebirth in the American Redoubt hope for an even more extreme political dismemberment. They believe that the American *body politic* is so contaminated that the best

they can hope for is an inverse amputation: saving the healthy limb by amputating it from the diseased body.

The American Redoubt is also a practice of embodied whiteness wherein adherents who share a common notion of purity enact their physical and economic privilege by self-segregating from people they deem polluted and morally inferior. This essay argues that the Redoubt is not just an unethical response to political problems and an impractical survival strategy. It is a symptom of our nation's long festering chronic spiritual illness: habitual white racism that threatens to destroy any hope of community among the peoples of the Americas. It also signifies that the Americas are in a Janus moment: we can delve deeper into the terrible violence born of separation and ignorance or embrace the hope that we might finally know and love our many selves and create a greater union.

This essay argues that our best guide away from the false promise of life through unnatural purity and isolation is the radical and loving wisdom of the cultural theorist and spiritual activist Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004), who urged the people of the Americas to develop a new *mes-tiza* consciousness. In her uncompromising and category-defying work, Anzaldúa encourages us to see that attempts to ignore, run from, or kill our fears will prove fruitless since white Americans cannot disown the shadows of our actions. Further, there is no pristine Eden towards which we might return and shelter from the whirlwind we've caused. More than any other philosopher or visionary, Anzaldúa prophesied this moment and the need for the people of the Americas to seek healing and redemption through a form of understanding and spiritual activism she called the *Coyolxauqui Imperative*. Engaging with Anzaldúa's work will enable white Americans to see that fences and AR-15s won't protect us from the shadows of our actions and that we must instead be brave enough to face and amend for our sins against other people and the life of the world.<sup>3</sup>

### **AN AMALGAMATION OF LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE**

Demographers have predicted for many years that by 2040, white people will be a racial minority in the United States.<sup>4</sup> A cursory glance across the U.S. political scene shows that a lot of white folks are really freaked out about this fact. Quite a few of us are adapting to this reality through a response open to anyone who happens to have enough money to buy many acres of land, a sweet photo-voltaic rig, a geothermal heating

system, a fence, a guard tower, forklift batteries, years of shelf-stable food, and—of course—lots of guns and ammo. They are choosing to bid farewell to what they see as the squalor and moral decline of American cities, as well as oppressive state and federal governments, in order to establish an American Redoubt in the remote wilderness of the Pacific Northwest.

The American Redoubt is a tricky phenomenon to define. The phrase “American Redoubt” was coined in 2011 when survivalist James Wesley, Rawles,<sup>5</sup> a novelist and retired U.S. Army Intelligence officer, posted an essay titled “The American Redoubt—Move to the Mountain States” on his influential blog SurvivalBlog.com.<sup>6</sup> Wesley, Rawles says as much, announcing in an introductory note later added to the post, “This essay launched The American Redoubt movement.”<sup>7</sup> The essay, which has been praised with religious fervor by devotees of the Redoubt movement, urges select folks to “Get Out of Dodge” (his emphasis) and to prepare for TEOTWAWKI.<sup>8</sup> He calls for “freedom-loving Christians” to escape the deprivations of godless totalitarianism by joining a self-segregated amalgamation of like-minded people in rural areas of Idaho, Montana, Eastern Oregon, and Eastern Washington. His essay includes clear instructions for the would-be redoubter regarding what to bring (guns, a pickup, sensible clothes, and a strengthened Christian faith), what to leave behind (the TV, big city expectations, jewelry, and the Xbox), and what to expect (a lot of driving, homeschooling, farm work, prayer, volunteering, church work, and community engagement).

Anyone familiar with either the histories of American Puritanism or the Inland Northwest will already have a good idea of who is—and is not—welcome to join the community of the Redoubt. When asked who is a part of their movement, Redoubters use the phrase “like-minded people” and bristle at the implication of racism, sometimes without even being asked about it.<sup>9</sup> Some Redoubters single out “lefties” and liberals as examples of people who are not wanted.<sup>10</sup> Wesley, Rawles, for his part, is more careful—though no less defensive—about whom he thinks belongs in the Redoubt. In a section of his blog post titled, “To Clarify: Religious, Not Racial Lines,” he proudly admits “I *am* a separatist, but on religious lines, not racial ones.”<sup>11</sup> He explains further:

I have made it abundantly clear throughout the course of my writings that I am an **anti-racist**. Christians of *all races* are welcome to be my neighbors. I also welcome Orthodox Jews and Messianic Jews, because

we share the same moral framework. In calamitous times, with a few exceptions, it will only be the God fearing that will continue to be law abiding . . . I have more in common with Orthodox Jews and Messianic Jews than I do with *atheist* Libertarians. I'm a white guy. But I have much more in common with black Baptists or Chinese Lutherans than I do with white Buddhists or white New Age crystal channelers.<sup>12</sup>

To be charitable, I take him at his word when he says his intentions are antiracist as well as antitotalitarian, and there is at least one prominent African-American member of the movement: Alex Barron, the Secretary of the Kootenai County GOP Central Committee and the self-styled Bard of the American Redoubt.<sup>13</sup> That exception noted, it is also the case that avowing antiracism and practicing it are two different things.<sup>14</sup> Racism is not just a matter of expressly stated beliefs but a network of deep habits, logics, and institutional practices that can persist in the behaviors of someone who sincerely rejects racist ideas.

With this in mind, it is noteworthy that Wesley, Rawles is defensive only on the issue of racism. Why is it that a discussion of race is the only time he feels the need to explain himself in the entire essay, which is otherwise written in a tone that is confident, encouraging and inviting (as long as you are not an atheist or a crystal channeler)? One reason is that Wesley, Rawles is well aware of the fact that he did not, in fact, start the movement toward self-segregation by Christians Conservatives in the Northwest. There is a long history of similar movements in this region, and it is a history that is profoundly marked by white supremacy.

### **THE AMERICAN REDOUBT AND THE HISTORY OF EMBODIED RACIAL PURITY**

Despite Wesley, Rawles's insistence that he created it, the American Redoubt is not a recent phenomenon, but is in fact the most recent chapter in a long history of white secessionism in the Inland Northwest that stretches back to the mid-nineteenth Century. John Shuford, of the Institute for Hate Studies at Gonzaga University, documents the long history of white secessionism in the region:

Racial exclusion, discrimination under law, and extralegal measures including domestic terrorism are just some of the means by which the Pacific Northwest as a whole, and specific subregions and locales in particular, became predominantly white and continued to privilege whiteness in myriad ways. Recurring secessionisms and nationalisms,

including the mid-nineteenth century vision for a Pacific Coast Republic or slaveholding Pacific Confederacy, also helped to shape this area as a predominantly white, whiteness-privileging region.<sup>15</sup>

While aspirations for a white ethno-state in the Pacific Northwest date back to at least 1865, with efforts to create a state in what is now eastern Washington and Oregon that would be called either Lincoln, Kootenai, or Jefferson, the idea of establishing a new conservative state within the Redoubt is hardly a historical relic. The House Joint Memorial 4000 bill was introduced in 2017 by three conservative supporters of the American Redoubt, Washington State Representatives Shea, Taylor, and McCaslin, and it petitioned then-President Trump and the U.S. Congress to establish a new state—to be called “Liberty”—in a portion of Washington State east of the Cascade Mountains.<sup>16</sup> Spokane journalist and novelist Shawn Vestal has documented Shea’s history of Muslim race-baiting and open hostility to law enforcement:

As a rising figure in the American Redoubt movement and leader of wingnutterati, he intervened in the Bundy standoff in Oregon, ignoring local law enforcement, relaying information to occupiers, and enlisting the aid of a man with a history of bizarre and threatening confrontations both inside and outside the world of right-wing extremists to go there and help provide “security.” Shea recently presented this man, Anthony Bosworth, with the Patriot of the Year award for 2016, and humbly claimed credit himself for saving the lives of the bird refuge Bundys from assault by murderous government agents.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the political movement to establish a separate state within the Redoubt, there have also been a number of less formalized efforts to establish enclaves of like-minded white people in the Northwest. They include the Montana Freeman of the 1990s, Richard Butler’s White Nationalist Aryan Nations compound in Hayden Lake, ID, and the Cascadian Independence project, all of which share a disdain for the federal government, a desire to live with like-minded (and overwhelmingly white) conservatives, a fetishization of firearms, and a long and well documented history of violence against people of color.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the closest precursor to the American Redoubt is the Christian Identity movement. Here one can observe a clearer conflation of white supremacy and devout Christianity in this congregation of conservative churches in Idaho and Montana whose doctrine hews closely to

fundamentalist evangelicalism with the added belief that “White Anglo-Saxons are ‘the true Israelites—God’s chosen people—not the Jews.’”<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, Wesley, Rawles espouses antiracist beliefs and asserts that his separatism is religious and not racial. However, as a well-read novelist and military intelligence officer steeped in the history of the region, he is likely aware of the fact that the American Redoubt movement fits hand-in-glove with a long history of explicitly white-supremacist movements in the region that share the Redoubters’ disdain for liberalism and Islam, hold contempt for people from “urban environments,” as well as a great affinity for firearms. He draws on the very same fears that motivated earlier white ethno-state movements in the region, and many of the contemporary preppers and Northwest homesteaders who share his desire for a pure and self-segregated de facto homeland in the Pacific Northwest also explicitly espouse white supremacist views. He gets to proudly absolve himself of racism by insisting that Black folks are welcome, while also knowing that few would join a movement with such a documented history of white supremacist racism.

Further, Wesley, Rawles exemplifies white privileged ignorance of the systemic and institutional factors that make it nearly impossible for people of color to participate in his movement. Joining the Redoubt requires privileges that are built into whiteness, most obviously a massive financial investment. The well-documented economic advantages that white Americans have enjoyed for centuries—including free or subsidized land, access to high quality and well-funded public education, and well-paying jobs—enable would-be white Redoubters to buy huge properties, outfit them with off-grid electrical systems, stock them with supplies, and fortify them.<sup>20</sup> They also enjoy the essential privilege of entering and leaving spaces at will while armed with military-style weapons without fear of being treated as threats by law enforcement.<sup>21</sup>

However, the deepest connection between the Redoubt and the history of racial whiteness, and the one which will make Anzaldúa’s voice essential for efforts to humanely respond to the Redoubt, is that both are predicated upon a logic of purity and isolation. G. Jeffrey MacDonald writes that since the inauguration of President Obama, there has been a resurgence of secessionist theology among American conservatives, pointing out that, “a deep-seated religious impulse for purity through separation is flaring up again.”<sup>22</sup> MacDonald shows us that the current quest for purity is but old wine poured into a new CamelBak™: “[s]eeking purity through separation has marked American religious history

since the Puritans sailed from Holland to establish a holy beacon in the New World.”<sup>23</sup> Wesley, Rawles himself likens the Redoubt Movement to the Puritan Exodus explaining, “They couldn’t fit in and said, ‘We’re going to move to completely virgin territory and start afresh. . . . In effect, we’re becoming pistol-packing Amish.’”<sup>24</sup>

This connection between the Redoubt and the Puritans is especially telling when we remember that whiteness itself was a legal category invented in seventeenth-century Virginia according to the same logic of purity for the purpose of justifying, indeed sanctifying, the genocide of Native Americans and the enslavement of people from Africa and their descendants, especially the mixed race children produced through the rape of African enslaved people.<sup>25</sup> Eric Weed, author of *The Religion of White Supremacy in the United States*, examines how “the epistemology of whiteness exemplifies . . . the particular way Puritan colonists cosmically understood their place in God’s world.”<sup>26</sup> A theologically consecrated notion of racial purity enabled the Puritans to act as if Pequot Land was “virgin territory” because the “Massachusetts Bay provided the newly arrived Puritans with a place to live out the power of Christianity at the center of the world. The Puritans enacted a theological system in which their God consecrated this new land for their domain.”<sup>27</sup>

With this history in mind, we can see the Redoubt as the culmination of the uniquely American conflation of whiteness and Christianity. Ever since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s desegregated public spaces, white folks have been increasingly re-segregating themselves away from people of color and enforcing that separation through private schools and redlining.<sup>28</sup> These white migrations have never been simply about property values or having room to stretch out. As Kevin Kruse points out, “[w]hite flight, in the end, was more than a physical relocation. It was a political revolution.”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the Redoubt movement is comprised of a group of overwhelmingly white and conservative people who want to separate themselves from the rest of civilization for ostensibly benign spiritual reasons by creating fortified gated communities for the express purpose of getting away from the hordes of the cities and “Commieifornia,” all while denying racism has anything to do with it.

The American Redoubt draws strongly from abiding cultural myths at the heart of whiteness. Its geography is based clearly on the “Myth of the Frontier” which holds that urban areas are decadent beyond hope of repair and that the only way for good people to thrive is to forge into

the “empty” wilderness to remake a pure society.<sup>30</sup> This myth requires various layers of ignorance and amnesia to function, just as whiteness has always needed particular epistemologies of ignorance to function.<sup>31</sup> As McKenna and Pratt remind us, white Europeans’ pretensions to “discovery” have always required a studied ignorance regarding place: “As an abstraction, whiteness lacks a history and a relation to particular places. By giving up ties to their homelands, their languages, stories and culture knowledge, Europeans in America have no roots.”<sup>32</sup> Whiteness requires and abets ignorance about why this land is “virgin” and the fact that the Salish, Crow, Spokane, and other peoples *are very much alive and have legal and moral claim to this land*. It involves ignorance of the racially-biased policies that made it easy for white homeowners and workers to reap the rewards of economic development in the second half of the twentieth century that were systematically denied people of color. It requires ignorance of housing codes and taxation policies that enabled white wealth to migrate out of cities, as white folks moved to the suburbs during the white flight of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>33</sup>

Ultimately, the American Redoubt rests on a philosophy of fear and abandonment. The Puritans have pushed their way all the way across the continent; they have manifested their destiny by expropriating Native lands and abusing the lives and labor of Asian, African, Latinx, and Indigenous people, and they have witnessed the expansion of white rule across the Americas and the globe. However, they now cower, terrified by the inexorable fact that their empire is receding, that American global dominance is waning, that the white America they thought they knew is fading, and that it will never be as “great” again as it was in their nostalgic fantasies. All that is left is to hoard the last material vestiges of the extraordinary wealth and privilege white Americans have accumulated for the last three centuries and abscond with them to huddle together with other like-minded, almost entirely white folks.

The saddest part of this all is that it is somehow supposed to be a Christian movement. Of course, now that the thinly gilded vice of the Prosperity Gospel has gone mainstream, and Donald Trump has been anointed the new American Evangelical King Cyrus, just about anything can be called Christian.<sup>34</sup> Even so, it is nearly impossible to see how the American Redoubt could credibly be called a Christian movement. Wesley, Rawles claims to only want to live with people who live according to a strict Christian, or Judeo-Christian, code. Yet he explicitly urges his followers to prep as quietly and unobtrusively as possible. “You don’t



want to be known as the guy who has 3–4 years' supply of food in the basement. Because one day you could see it confiscated by the government or stolen by neighbors like hungry locusts."<sup>35</sup> It is hard to see how holing up with other Christians can possibly align with Jesus's exhortation for his followers to go into the world to spread the Gospel. It is even harder to reconcile Wesley, Rawles's advice to stockpile provisions with the teachings of the Nazarene in Matthew's Gospel who, when asked by a would-be follower how to follow him to eternal life, answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matt. 19:21 NIV). The Nazarene fed the poor and reminded us that as we do to the least among us so we do unto him, yet the Redoubters arm and barricade themselves against the hungry multitudes. This warrants the dim view taken by Alan Wolf, a scholar of religious politics in America, when he says that the impetus behind the American Redoubt is "primarily political and economic, and then they just find a religious cover for it [as] they tap into preexistent religious language."<sup>36</sup> Jesus calls us to give up everything and follow him; Redoubters respond by telling each other to lock up their food and load their guns.

This is just the latest chapter in a long story of Europeans coming to the Americas, claiming to be representing God's interest, all the while focusing only on their own. Perhaps more white people will move into gated, armed compounds in the woods. Perhaps they will turn their guns on the meek and those who thirst for justice. Or, perhaps we might finally learn there is a better way.

### **ANZALDÚA'S CRITIQUE OF THE AMERICAN LOGIC OF SEPARATION AND PURITY**

In the last three decades, a wide range of scholars have hailed Gloria Anzaldúa as one of the most important writers and cultural theorists of the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> Her genre-defying work speaks bravely to issues ranging from embodiment, spirituality, queer theory, race and racism, redemption, language, and love. Anzaldúa lived a life too brief—she was 62 when she passed—that was tested by physical challenges and great suffering. It was also filled with loving friendship and wise writing that offers us the best antidote to the purity-obsessed fear that drives people to seek false promises in the isolation of the American Redoubt.

The American Redoubt and the work of Gloria Anzaldúa face each other like opposed prophecies of an American Zoroastrianism: one

promises a return to pristine Eden through strict adherence to purity through separation, while the other calls us to communion with humanity and the world by embracing the truth of ambiguity and hybridity. The first is driven by fear of difference, the second by love of growth. Anzaldúa saw over a decade ago that America was at a crossroads, and the two paths she saw then perfectly describe our current choice between the American Redoubt and Anzaldúa's spiritual activism:

[W]e totter between two paths: The path of *desconocimiento* [ignorance] leads human consciousness into ignorance, fear and hatred. It succumbs to righteous judgement and withdraws into separation and domination. . . . This easier path uses force and violence to socially construct our nation. *Conocimiento*, the more difficult path, leads to awakening, insights, understandings, realizations, courage, and the motivation to engage in concrete ways with the potential to bring us into compassionate interactions.<sup>38</sup>

While many of its adherents *mean* no harm, the American Redoubt is a dangerous embodiment of the habits of whiteness, especially those that prioritize one group or spiritual system and encourage stubborn ignorance of privilege and antagonism towards cultural pluralism. This essay argues that Gloria Anzaldúa's work is the best medicine for the spiritual illness that has caused so many Americans, especially white Americans, to fear and harm other people in the name of purity and sanctity. Her work is uniquely suited to this problem because she, more than any other philosopher, spoke wisely about the dangers of purity, the fear at the heart of American whiteness, and the need for a radically new and loving way of relating to ourselves, each other and the world.

In "Spiritual Activism and Praxis: Gloria Anzaldúa's Mature Spirituality," Chris Tirres explains the significance of Anzaldúa's "overriding interest in epistemology" and specifically her idea of *conocimiento*, which was key to understanding her insightful harmonizing of epistemology and spirituality.<sup>39</sup> Tirres explains that "[f]or her, *conocimiento* is a non-binary, connectionist mode of thinking that draws on non-rationalistic forms of knowing, such as sensing, intuiting, and dreaming. . . . *conocimiento* in its highest expression is spirituality: it is a "form of spiritual inquiry" that offers a "larger frame of reference."<sup>40</sup>

Anzaldúa described her early epistemology through the metaphor of *mestiza* consciousness, a form of embodied consciousness that is conducive to a spiritual praxis directed at cultural healing:

In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, [*la mestiza*] is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts of ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formation; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.<sup>41</sup>

*La mestiza* in Anzaldúa's writing speaks to the fact that people who are mixed—*mestiza*—like her inhabit intellectual and cultural borderlands. As a consequence *la mestiza* must be a kind of world-traveler who has learned to navigate and incorporate incongruous worldviews.<sup>42</sup> *La mestiza* represents the fact that as a world-traveling soul, she has learned to survive by developing a set of overlapping epistemological standpoints as well as the practical wisdom (*phronesis*) to know how to switch between them.<sup>43</sup> We can liken her description of *la mestiza* to W. E. B. DuBois's description of Black folk in *The Souls of Black Folk* as people whose context, lived experiences, and suffering makes them potential moral prophets, "a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world."<sup>44</sup> *La mestiza* has developed an epistemological framework that enables her to see problems that others might miss. And like DuBois, James Baldwin, and many other prophetic American writers of color, she sees the problems of white America much clearer than her white counterparts.

Anzaldúa was a prescient prophet of the false promise of the Redoubt. She calls out the dualistic thinking and obsession with violence, purity, and separation at the heart of the Redoubt movement. Anzaldúa writes,

The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, or violence, of war.<sup>45</sup>

It is not hard to see the dualism at work in the Redoubt: good and faithful Christian families against Commie governments; hardworking prepared Redoubters versus godless, undeserving hordes; like-minded (just-so-happens-to-be-almost-entirely-white) people in contrast to people of color who would probably be more comfortable somewhere else “with their own kind.” As a movement based on fear and purity, it reifies and patrols a clear border between those who belong (and therefore deserve to be fed and protected) and those whose needs represent existential threats to be kept at bay by walls and deadly arsenals.

It is therefore essential to place Anzaldúa in dialogue with the American Redoubt because it is the culmination of the dualistic attitudes, fears, and habituated responses that have made white folks in America such poor and deadly neighbors for centuries. Anzaldúa is a prophet of the Americas whose call we must heed if white folks are to find redemption, learn to live in peace with others, and heal a badly wounded world. Anzaldúa sees a long history of dualistic thinking undergirding so many of our problems. In place of such an inheritance, she calls us to engage “in participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and the planet.”<sup>46</sup>

#### **REMEMBERING THE AMERICAS THROUGH THE COYOLXAUQUI IMPERATIVE**

In her posthumous work *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, Anzaldúa offers a vision of how we might create an integrated, humane, greater America—by this I mean one America/*una América* that encompasses all the nations and peoples of the American hemisphere—that is free from the literal and figurative borders that divide us from each other. The first step toward healing is to recognize that we are dismembered—as a people and as individual persons—and to face the very fears that motivate the people of American Redoubt to arm and isolate themselves. We find the best antidote to the narcotic amnesia of American Redoubt in a form of spiritual praxis Anzaldúa called the *Coyolxauqui imperative*. Where the American Redoubt promises its followers the chance to cut themselves off from and forget the realities of a complex, multicultural, multiethnic, polyreligious, queered America where lives are inexorably linked, Anzaldúa uses the metaphor of the Aztec Goddess Coyolxauqui to describe our need to “heal and achieve integration.”<sup>47</sup> *Light in the Dark*

was exactly and lovingly edited by Anzaldúa's long-time friend and "writing *comadre*" AnaLouise Keating, who beautifully explains the transformative power of Coyolxauqui for Anzaldúa:

According to Aztec mythic history, when Coyolxauqui tried to kill her mother, her brother, Huitzilopochtli (Eastern Hummingbird and War God), decapitated her, flinging her head into the sky and throwing her body down the sacred mountain, where it broke into a thousand pieces. . . . Coyolxauqui serves as Anzaldúa's "light in the dark," representing a complex holism—both the acknowledgement of painful fragmentation and the promise of transformative healing.<sup>48</sup>

Anzaldúa herself referred to Coyolxauqui as "a symbol for both the process of emotional psychological dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially conscious work done in the night by the light of the moon, a labor of re-visioning and re-membering."<sup>49</sup>

Coyolxauqui reminds us that we are dismembered and calls us to remember. Anzaldúa describes this process of remembering as the Coyolxauqui imperative,

[a] struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the *sustos* [fears] resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation que hechan pedazos neustras almas [that shatter our spirits], split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us . . . The shadow beast and attendant desconocimientos (the ignorance we cultivate to keep ourselves from knowledge so that we can remain unaccountable) have a tenacious hold on us . . . Grappling with (des) *conocimientos*, with what I don't want to know . . . sometimes results in discovering the positive shadow: hidden aspects of myself and the world. Each irritant is a grain of sand in the oyster of the imagination. Sometimes what accretes around an irritant or wound may produce a pearl of great insight, a theory.<sup>50</sup>

Here we see why the American Redoubt fails as a strategy for survival and growth. Apart from its many ethical and practical problems—not to mention its failure to follow its purported mission of walking the Nazarene's path of love—it fails to grapple with the shadow beast within white American culture and instead hides from it by cultivating ignorance about reality. If "shadow beast" sounds too mystical, then call it "implicit bias," or "habituated racialized responses," or just plain old

“propaganda and bad history.” Either way, her idea is that we cannot get better unless we engage the centuries-old problem we—especially white folks—want to forget.

So, what is it that we desperately want to forget, when we should be remembering? In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa exhorted white Americans: “Gringo, accept the doppelgänger in your psyche. By taking back your collective shadow the intracultural split will heal.”<sup>51</sup> What is the shadow, the doppelgänger that haunts the psyche of white, Christian America? What, or who, are we running from and arming ourselves against? What sorts of people do Redoubters associate with California? Who was Trump trying to keep out when he falsely promised he would “Build the Wall”? What has happened for the last three-hundred-plus years that makes white folks so fearful of losing their power?

We are afraid to admit what we’ve done to other peoples and to the earth in the name of Manifest Destiny, Social Progress, Liberty, and The White Man’s Burden. We are afraid that people of color will look to the same books of the Hebrew Bible that white folks used to justify chattel slavery of African people and the story of Jacob’s theft of Esau’s birthright that white American Christians read as a sanctification of the theft of Native land, and recall the *lex talionis*: an eye for an eye. The white folks streaming into the American Redoubt are afraid that people of color might do to us what we’ve done to them for centuries. White fear is at the heart of “The Black Legend,” stories used by early Protestants to justify their expansion into new territories to protect themselves against what they thought was the inherent brutality of the Spanish and Spanish-descended peoples.<sup>52</sup> We fear the updated version of this legend where Mexicans and Central Americans are all in cahoots as they sneak into the United States to destroy civilization. This racist, centuries-old conspiracy theory bookended Trump’s disastrous presidency, which started with an inaugural campaign speech that stoked fear of so-called Mexican rapists and murderers breaching the U.S.’s southern border and culminated with the storming of the Capitol by a horde of conspiracy theorists who sought to overturn the results of an election they deemed fraudulent. Their belief in the illegitimacy of the election was predicated on the fact that the votes that tipped the scale were cast by people who did not look or think like them.

Anzaldúa would not have been surprised by the widespread appeal of a candidate who pointed south of the border and said, “The danger is over there and we need to keep it out.” Our privilege often leads us down

the easy, well-trodden path of forgetting history and ignoring reality. That path is far easier than the steep one Anzaldúa asks us to walk, that starts with the real history of white, Protestant American interactions with Latinx Americans and other people of color in a land whose history is replete with rape, murder, theft, and the destruction of civilizations. Anzaldúa, more than any other writer or thinker, helps us attend to the fact that white Americans are deathly afraid of what violence might befall them when they lose power. And, while white folks move towards becoming a demographic minority, some of them will continue to be dangerously unhinged, unless we accept the shadow beast of the violence that we have and continue to inflict upon others. We have not accepted the fact that anyone who survived genocide, slavery, least thinking expulsion, and the legalized theft of land and labor would be completely justified in trading an eye for an eye. We whip up fears of dark skinned monsters—Central American gangs like MS-13—to help us forget how our foreign policy destabilized Latin American countries and catalyzed drug wars, or how our government literally created a school for training assassins and death squads how to inflict violence on their own people.<sup>53</sup> We continue to feed the myths of the deadly black male and indolent welfare cheats to help us ignore how specific policies designed to maximize white wealth starved urban centers of economic growth and denied people of color the access to affordable housing that was key to white, middle class economic prosperity in the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> Above all, these doppelgängers distract us from something so awful that none of us want to remember: namely, the real story of why the white conservative folks flocking to the Inland Northwest from across the country have such easy access to so much beautiful land that until recently held millions of Salish, Spokane, Crow, and other Native peoples.<sup>55</sup> Anzaldúa forces us to see that until we grapple with the shadows of our actions—actions whose consequences are very much alive now in disparities in wealth, education, and treatment under the law—and make amends, we will never be healed or whole. Worse yet, if we do not heed her call, the Redoubters and others who want to ride out the storm by relying on separation and violence, will fulfill their apocalyptic prophecies of a race war. If we continue to follow neo-liberal economic policies that exacerbate already extreme income inequality and worsen an already dire ecological situation, then we will usher in a future where millions of desperate people are driven inland away from inundated coastal cities. These people will likely be like the Puritans who first came to the Americas: scared,

starving, sick, and in no mood to consider other people's needs or property claims.

## CONCLUSION

In its original use within military jargon, a *redoubt* is a small, temporary fort. No redoubt can last. Even if the plan behind the American Redoubt works perfectly, it can only briefly delay calamity. Even if the Redoubters hold off the Commiefornian hordes and godless crystal channelers with their fences and AR-15s; even if they successfully fend off the hungry multitudes and manage to keep their shelf-stable loaves and canned fish for themselves; they still can't hide from the fact that our earth is sick—that *we* are sick—and there will be no healing by hiding. The ultimate irony is that the unprecedented wealth that enables white American baby boomers to cash out, buy land in the Northwest, and live comfortably, was generated through a capitalist economic system whose lifeblood is the unthinking consumption that has accelerated global warming and ecological devastation.<sup>56</sup> As a direct consequence of this global warming, the Inland Northwest has suffered three of its worst summer forest fire seasons in recorded history in the last four years, with summer Air Quality Index numbers frequently above 500. One model predicts massive forest fires will triple in frequency by 2050 inside the very same area where the Redoubters hope to reside.<sup>57</sup> In order to escape the problems of civilization burning down, their plan is to leap from the figurative urban pan into the literal rural fire.

Anzaldúa is the most recent wise prophet to teach us that the only way to deal with these fears is to face them together. Many great traditions teach this basic idea. Think of the Native American practice of welcome (*Wunnegen*),<sup>58</sup> Buddhist ideals of compassion, the Hebraic edict to “make whole the world” (*tikkun olam*), and, the Nazarene's ministry to love one's enemies, and to break bread with the despised, the forgotten, the unclean (Matt. 25:40). There is absolutely no logical way we will ever pull back from global calamity without radical and cooperative efforts directed at reversing our harm and healing the damage we have done. There is simply no way humanity stands a chance of a decent and livable future unless we cooperate and choose love over fear.

One of the reasons Anzaldúa remains revered by so many is that she tempered her critiques of our sins with reminders of the possibility of redemption. In *Light in the Dark*, she writes about the events of 9/11 in ways that not only make us realize our destructive tendencies toward



forgetfulness and violence but also show us that in these moments of horrific pain we see evidence of our positive shadow, our ability to grow through the pain towards greater health and humanity. Anzaldúa writes a loving hymn of praise to the firefighters and blue-collar Americans who responded to the horrors of that day:

I think of the humbleness, compassion, and generosity that the people of our nation are capable of, donating millions of dollars to the victim's families, driving across the country to assist at Ground Zero. Devastating events can help us to overcome our desconocimientos, which dehumanize other people and deny their suffering, prompting us to realize our common humanity. As we see beyond what divides us to what connects us, we're compelled to reach out beyond our walls of distrust, extend our hands to others, and share information and resources. The human species' survival depends on each one of us connecting to our vecinos (neighbors), whether they live across the street, across national borders, or across oceans. A calamity . . . can compel us to think not in terms of "my" country or "your" nation but "our" planet.<sup>59</sup>

The people of the American Redoubt hope to survive impending calamity through separation. Anzaldúa teaches us that we can hold out hope that we might survive—even thrive—but only if we are wise enough to reconnect and remember.

## NOTES

- 1 "I will survive; Preparing for the Apocalypse," 44.
- 2 Lincoln, "Letter to Albert G. Hodges."
- 3 I would like to thank Chris Tirres, AnaLouise Keating, and the participants at the "Logic of Racial Practice Symposium" hosted by the University of Pittsburgh in April 2018 for their advice and feedback on this essay. I would like to especially thank Brock Bahler for his charitable and insightful comments.
- 4 Frey, "New Projections Point to a Majority Minority Nation by 2044."
- 5 Wesley, Rawles insists on the inclusion of the comma after Wesley.
- 6 Rawles, "The American Redoubt—Move to the Mountain States."
- 7 Rawles, "The American Redoubt."
- 8 This is an acronym commonly used by preppers and redoubters for "the end of the world as we know it."
- 9 Russel, "Redoubt Movement Helps Push North Idaho Politics."
- 10 "Wilderness Living: The Last Big Frontier."
- 11 "Wilderness Living."

- 12 “Wilderness Living.”
- 13 Vestal, “What are you willing to kill for?”
- 14 See Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists* and MacMullan, *Habits of Whiteness*.
- 15 Shuford, “The Tale of the Tribe and the Company Town,” 1305.
- 16 Hallenberg, “A 51st State, Called Liberty.”
- 17 Vestal, “Republicans, It’s Time to Defend Ozzie Knezovich.”
- 18 Day, “Welcome to Hayden Lake.”
- 19 Benjamin, *Searching for Whitopia*, 138. Relatedly, one of the most active groups that shares a large number of adherents with the American Redoubt movement, as well as its focus on surviving an impending calamity, is the Northwest Front, which is described by its leader Harold Covington as “a political organization of Aryan men and women who recognize that an independent and sovereign White nation in the Pacific Northwest is the only possibility for the survival of the White race on this continent” (Covington, “The Fundamental Principles”)
- 20 Harris, “Whiteness as Property.”
- 21 Keilty, “Racism is Driving Modern American Gun Culture.”
- 22 MacDonald, “A Surge in Secessionist Theology,” 12.
- 23 MacDonald, “A Surge in Secessionist Theology.”
- 24 MacDonald, “A Surge in Secessionist Theology,” 13.
- 25 MacMullan, *Habits of Whiteness*, 28–29.
- 26 Weed, *The Religion of White Supremacy in the United States*, 37.
- 27 Weed, *The Religion of White Supremacy in the United States*, 38.
- 28 Squires and Kubrin, *Privileged Places*.
- 29 Kruse, *White Flight*, 6.
- 30 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*.
- 31 Sullivan and Tuana, *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*.
- 32 McKenna and Pratt, *American Philosophy*, 281.
- 33 Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” 54.
- 34 Posner, *God’s Profits*; Hasan, “Many White Evangelicals Stand by Trump.”
- 35 “I will survive; Preparing for the Apocalypse,” 44.
- 36 MacDonald, “A Surge in Secessionist Theology,” 12.
- 37 Keating, and González-López, *Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa’s Life and Work Transformed Our Own*.
- 38 Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 19.
- 39 Tirres, “Spiritual Activism and Praxis: Gloria Anzaldúa’s Mature Spirituality,” 124.
- 40 Tirres, “Spiritual Activism and Praxis,” 125.
- 41 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 79.
- 42 Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception.”
- 43 Martin and Potter, *Feminist Epistemologies*.
- 44 DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2.
- 45 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 80.

- 46 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 81.
- 47 Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 19.
- 48 Keating, "Editor's Introduction," xi.
- 49 Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 124.
- 50 Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 2.
- 51 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 86.
- 52 Horwitz, "Immigration."
- 53 Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*; Gill, *The School of the Americas*.
- 54 Coates, "The Case for Reparations," 54.
- 55 Alvarez, *Native America and the Question of Genocide*.
- 56 Klein, *This Changes Everything*.
- 57 Roberts, "Study Predicts Wildfires to Triple by 2050," 12; "Ravaged Woodlands; America's Forests."
- 58 Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*.
- 59 Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 20.

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