Foreword

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In the year 2000 the U.S. Census counted 35 million Latinos, marking a substantial increase since the previous census. The Latino population is increasingly dispersed, and Latinos are now the neighbors of other Americans in every region. Many are immigrants who work hard under difficult conditions and for little pay. They harvest crops, build and clean houses, dig ditches, cut lawns, cook, and wash dishes for other Americans. Yet, they and their native-born relatives are often treated as unwanted or hated outsiders.

Across the United States today, growing numbers of Latinos report housing, policing, and other discrimination, usually at the hands of white neighbors. For example, the village of Mount Kisco in New York agreed, under a consent decree with the federal government, to stop using building codes and park regulations to discriminate against Latino laborers. Last year this consent decree was extended because of continuing complaints that a housing ordinance was being used to discriminate against Latino immigrants.

Sometimes the anti-Latino hostility is expressed violently. Some Mexican immigrants have been killed near the U.S.-Mexican border, apparently by white vigilantes. In Bloomington, Minnesota, a Latino worker was badly beaten for speaking Spanish at his workplace. In Farmingville, New York, a “quality of life” group has been formed, apparently to help keep Latino immigrants out of the town. The beating of two undocumented immigrant laborers by tattooed white supremacists there in late 2000 has not yet spurred significant state action against such anti-immigrant violence.

On their Internet Web sites and in their videos and books, members of white supremacist groups often refer to Latino/a immigrants as a “cultural cancer,” as a “wildfire,” or as a “gang of illegals” that is making “America less beautiful,” as people with a plan to “reconquer” the United States. Similar verbal attacks on Latinos can be found in all parts of the country. Recently, homeowners in a heavily white Bronx village received letters warning residents that their area was being overrun by Latino immigrants, who were described as “forces of evil” and “low-income trash.”

Clearly, those whites who control the nation’s mass media and its reporting on immigration issues would condemn violence against Latinos and

would reject the more stridently racist language used by white supremacists against Latino immigration.

Yet, as the pioneering linguist Otto Santa Ana clearly demonstrates in this pathbreaking book, the “liberal” stalwarts of the mass media sometimes collude in such attacks on immigrants by using metaphorical language that is similar to that asserted by the white supremacists. A negative metaphorical language is commonplace in newspaper discussions of Latino immigrants across the United States. Santa Ana’s examination of articles, from a distinguished national newspaper, on undocumented immigrants around the time of the Proposition 187 vote finds that the dominant metaphors are of immigrants as animals or immigrants as invaders and other disreputable persons. Numerous articles speak of public programs being “a lure to immigrants,” of the electorate’s appetite for “the red meat of deportation,” of INS agents catching “a third of their quarry,” of Proposition 187 supporters who “devour the weak and helpless,” or of the need to “ferret out illegal immigrants.” Other articles portray the process of immigration as dangerous or threatening—as a burden, dirt, a disease, an invasion, or waves flooding the nation. The impact of this metaphorical language, as Santa Ana so well demonstrates, is to reinforce a negative public view of the immigrants and to hide the individuality and humanity of these human beings, people who are seeking only to make better lives for themselves and their families.

Clearly, the language and metaphors of this mainstream reportage are not as consistently strident as the language of the aforementioned white supremacists, and this metaphorical reportage is not linked to overt racist diatribes against immigrants. Yet, there is still significant overlap with those more disreputable sources in the mainstream media’s metaphorical representation of immigrants, especially the latter’s representation of immigrants as threatening, dangerous, animal-like, an invasion, or a disease attacking the nation.

While the mainstream media reporters and editors may editorialize against the white supremacist groups, and even against anti-immigrant legislation, their language and metaphors are similar to those used by the white supremacists, which suggests that at some level they may also share some of the supremacists’ views on immigrants and immigration. A number of researchers, such as James Ridgeway, have shown that the white supremacy movement is not an aberration but rather broadcasts racist views about people of color that overlap to some degree with some mainstream white views in the mass media and in politics. The difference between the main-

stream language and metaphors of some media people and some major politicians on race or immigrant matters, and the language and metaphors of the white extremists, often seems to be one of degree and not of kind.

Perhaps more importantly, the negative language and metaphors targeting Latino immigrants have serious action implications. Once a group of people is defined as somehow not fully human, as animal-like, or as a disease or national burden, then it is easier to treat such individuals like debased people or animals. This is not just a theoretical proposition, for such a connection can be seen in the numerous recent cases of anti-Latino violence and overt discrimination, the latter in areas such as housing code enforcement. Anti-immigrant groups in California forced Proposition 187 onto the California ballot, which passed with a substantial majority in 1994. Proposition 187 attempted to sharply restrict the access of undocumented immigrants to public services, including schools and hospitals, and to reduce them to a very debased status. Across the country, immigrant-bashing has been common among some business leaders and politicians since that time.

In California, the anti-immigrant and anti-Latino public sentiment did not end with Proposition 187. In 1996, California voters, the majority of whom were Anglo whites, passed Proposition 209, ending affirmative action in California's educational institutions. Santa Ana shows that the opponents of affirmative action cleverly appropriated the traditional civil rights discourse about racism by framing affirmative action as itself racist and thus promoting Proposition 209 as an anti-racist measure, even as the "California Civil Rights Initiative." In this way they destroyed one of the few remaining government programs aimed at remedying centuries of discrimination against Americans of color. Santa Ana also examines public discourse around the 1998 California Proposition 227, which ended bilingual education for 1.3 million non-English-speaking children. Using the tools of the linguist, Santa Ana explains how the uninformed electorate was convinced to accept the referendum, which again was cleverly described as insisting on "English for the children." Yet, in reality, this referendum was an attack on non-English-speaking children which put them at even greater risk of educational failure.

Today, the United States is becoming ever more multiracial and multicultural. Major challenges to white control and domination are arising from population and political changes. European Americans are a decreasing proportion of the U.S. population; they are a statistical minority in many of the largest cities and in the states of New Mexico, Hawaii, and California. If

current migration and birth rates continue, about 2004, whites of European background will be a minority of the Texas population; between 2015 and 2040, they will be a minority of the population in many other states; and by the 2050s, they will be a minority of the U.S. population. White Americans, who have been used to being the unchallenged group demographically, economically, and politically in the United States, are increasingly facing the challenge of living up to their long-asserted ethic of “liberty and justice for all” and of helping, with Americans of color, to build a true democracy in a nation of people of highly diverse backgrounds and cultures. At this point in U.S. history, it is not clear whether the majority of white Americans will join in that effort to build a multiracial democracy, or will instead retreat into a new American apartheid.

In this original book Otto Santa Ana presents important empirical data and an innovative theoretical perspective on the dominant public discourse that legitimates public policy in regard to such critical societal issues as immigration, bilingual education, and affirmative action. Santa Ana asks us to listen with new ears to the apparently balanced debates between conservative and liberal commentators and policymakers. With a unique combination of empirical data and theory, Santa Ana helps us to raise, and often to answer, some of the critical questions about the present realities and possible futures of this increasingly troubled and conflict-ridden society.