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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Native American Placenames of the United States. By William Bright

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2r84b29n>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 30(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2006-09-01

DOI

10.17953

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Native American Placenames of the United States. By William Bright. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004. 608 pages. \$59.95 cloth.

The author, who is widely and justifiably acknowledged as “the dean” of Americanist linguistics, has produced a remarkable reference work dedicated to the myriad place-names in the United States that can be traced to Native American languages and cultures. Arranged in alphabetical order, some eleven thousand place-names are listed along with their etymologies and source languages. These place-names range from Abalone (in California and named after the mollusk that is labeled by a loanword traceable to the Costanoan Rumsen language family) to Zuni Pueblo (a place-name derived from the Spanish borrowing of a Keresan name). In his introduction Bright articulates his goal of producing “the first comprehensive dictionary of U.S. Placenames, used in English, which have American Indian origins or associations.” He does not limit this study to the influence of American Indian languages narrowly construed (as the indigenous languages north of the political boundary with Mexico) but rather lists those US place-names that derive from the indigenous languages of Mesoamerica (as in place-names involving the word *coyote*, a loanword borrowed through Spanish from Aztec). Bright’s research involved the use of the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS), a variety of US place-name dictionaries, regional place-name dictionaries, and regional Indian place-name dictionaries. In many cases, the author updated existing sources by supplying and/or correcting authoritative information on the linguistic origins of these words either through his own fieldwork or that of a large network of linguists who had appropriate knowledge of those languages based on their own research.

Most entries contain the following information: (1) the location of the place-name, (2) pronunciation information that follows the phonetic system of Random House dictionaries, (3) information on the etymology of the place-name and its source language(s), (4) citations of published sources or of personal communication with members of the Americanist network (most etymologies), (5) information about the occurrence of the place-name in other parts of the United States, and (6) information about possibly related place-names with different spellings and/or pronunciations (for example, Cheboygan [MI] and Sheboygan [WI]—both derived from an Ojibwa word for “tobacco pipe”). Regarding the central component of etymology, Bright acknowledges that there are two areas in which he could not consistently find appropriate information. One of these areas is the Atlantic coast where many of the source languages are both extinct and insufficiently documented and where he states that English spellings of Indian words tend to be the most degraded and unreliable. The second area of difficulty is Alaska where Bright notes that reliable etymologies are available for only a small percentage of the vast number of English place-names there that are traceable to indigenous origin. He predicts that future research in this region, aided by the existence of relatively vital speech communities and a considerable amount of ongoing linguistic investigation, will improve upon what is currently published in the present volume. Bright is understandably less hopeful for regions like the

Atlantic seaboard where the plethora of living languages necessarily makes place-name research a philological matter and imposes greater barriers to what can ever be known.

Bright offers eight categories in an attempt to construct a typology of place-names based on the large sample he has collected. The first category, "Traditional Native American Placenames," includes those English place-names, such as *Chicago*, which is based on "wild onion place" in Fox, and *Tucson*, which is based on "black (mountain) base" from O'odham, that are based on indigenous toponyms. The second category, "Native American Derivations," includes names derived from prominent Indian individuals (for example, Seattle and Spokane) as well as words that take Indian generic terms and use them as specific place-names. An example of the latter case is *Lake Tahoe*, which derives from the Washo term, *da'aw*, for *lake*. Bright also distinguishes a third category based on derivations from Amerindian-based contact languages like the Chinook Jargon of the Pacific Northwest. The place-name *Siwash*, which occurs in Alaska, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, represents a Chinook Jargon term for *Indian*, which is actually a loanword from the French word *sauvage*. A fourth category, "Transferred Derivations," consists of English terms that have been carried outside of their original areas of contact. Teepee Flats in Idaho, based on the Siouan term for *house* has moved from the Great Plains to the Great Basin. In a similar fashion the place-name Milwaukie (OR) is derived from the better-known place-name for the Wisconsin city that is based on an Ojibwa term for "good land." Bright also distinguishes four additional types including dubious Native American terms, instances in which Indians have adopted European names (as in Adams, MA), terms that have entered English from indigenous languages through the mediating role of either the Spanish or French, and hybrid Indian names (for example, Clackamette Cove in Oregon, which is based on the mixing of *Clackamas* from Chinook and *Williamette*). Although Bright's brief explication of this typology is accompanied by a disclaimer that all typologies must be tested by use and judged by their utility, readers might want to know a bit more about the history of this typology and how it has evolved from earlier place-name studies. In other words, specialist readers might enjoy a slightly more elaborated typology than the author has chosen to provide.

Those same specialist authors will both marvel at the ambitious scope of the project yet also recognize its inevitable omissions. Though the author's network of more than one hundred editorial consultants and linguistic experts offers an important and authoritative resource for providing more definitive etymologies, many Americanists who were not part of this network will note that any compilation of this type will necessarily display the need for further expansion of the network and inclusion of more detail that is currently only known to the experts of those languages (and, of course, their Native speakers). I was struck by one entry that seemed to me, on the basis of my own research, as incompletely analyzed. The Arizona Tewa and Hopi town of Polacca at the foot of First Mesa on the Hopi Reservation is described as "named for Tom Polacca, a member of the Hopi-Tewa (Tanoan) community." Although it is certainly true that this community was

named after the first man who chose, at the suggestion of missionaries, to reside at the foot of the mesa rather than “on top” in the traditional villages, Bright misses the opportunity to analyze the Anglicized surname as deriving from Arizona Tewa *pulakaka* or *butterfly*, which is a much older loanword from Keresan languages.

Though readers may begin to form an impression about this volume as an important but technical and perhaps peripheral reference work, I want to suggest the relevance of Bright’s work for the greater “project” of American Indian studies. He briefly contrasts his attempt to provide accurate and complete etymologies for English place-names in the United States that properly trace their Indian origins to an earlier pejorative approach to indigenous languages and cultures that was considerably less ambitious. He discusses Erwin G. Gudde (1889–1969)—a professor of German literature at UC Berkeley who authored the often heralded *California Placenames* and founded the journal *Names (Journal of the American Name Society)*—and his reluctance to examine American Indian etymologies. Gudde based this reluctance on a view of Native American languages and cultures as deficient. “The original inhabitants had very few geographical names, and practically all of these were descriptive. . . . Mountains themselves were of no practical importance to the Indians and probably had no names” (quoted from Gudde’s introduction to *California Placenames* in Bright). Bright openly refutes Gudde and other ethnocentric scholars in the field who seem to construct Native Americans as unreflecting children of nature and then denigrate their place-names as evidence of this purported intellectual inferiority. Bright sees himself as attempting to correct this “erasure” and marginalization of Native American languages and their speakers by more fully demonstrating their influence and properly analyzing relevant phonological, morphological, and semantic structures in the Native vocabulary.

Although Bright does not frame his work as especially political, he provides information, making it available to a nonlinguistic reading public, that can restore an accurate understanding and assessment of the powerful influence that Native American languages and cultures have had on US place-names. In the world of place-name studies this work may not be as valuable; however, as an expression of both decolonization and cultural sovereignty as the reclamation of indigenous toponyms by groups like the Western Apache (as detailed in Keith Basso’s *Wisdom Sits in Places*), Bright’s state-of-the-art volume on English place-names runs a close second and provides an unparalleled reference work for those of us in the business of showing our students and the larger public the profound but often taken-for-granted nature of Native American influence on the English language and on the cultures of the United States.

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