



# Place Names, Origins and Traces of Colonization in California, Arizona & Oklahoma



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I acknowledge that this research topic was inspired by conversations with Secwepemc women in Vancouver, British Columbia and their generosity, hospitality and patience in educating me about struggles faced by Indigenous people everywhere in the world. It is because of conversations with them that I now understand, in part, the significance of places, names, language and land for Indigenous people and how Indigenous ways of life must be protected

## Introduction



The global relevance of Indigenous issues has always been of prime importance, regardless of whether governments treat it as such. Amnesty International's 2017/18 Report showed that Indigenous peoples everywhere in the world and the United States continue to face violence, discrimination and the denial of their economic, social and cultural rights on their land (Amnesty International 27). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples specifically lays out in Article 13, the right to respect Indigenous history, language and oral traditions by preserving Indigenous names for "communities, places and persons" (United Nations 12). This study seeks to understand whether place names in California, Oklahoma and Arizona reflect either colonial or indigenous history.

## Theory



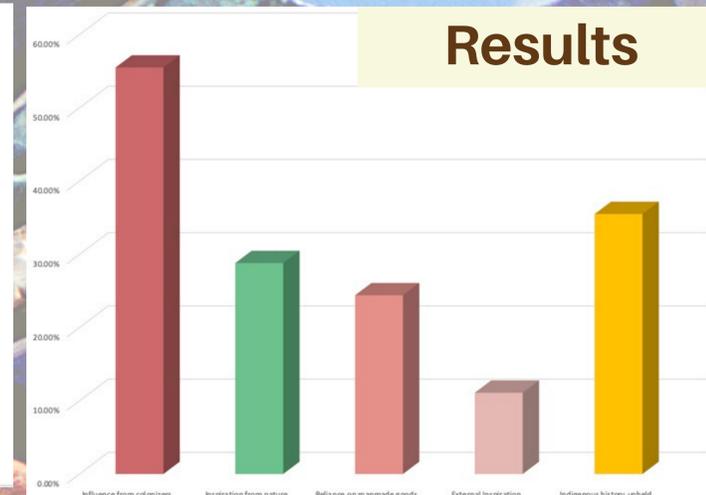
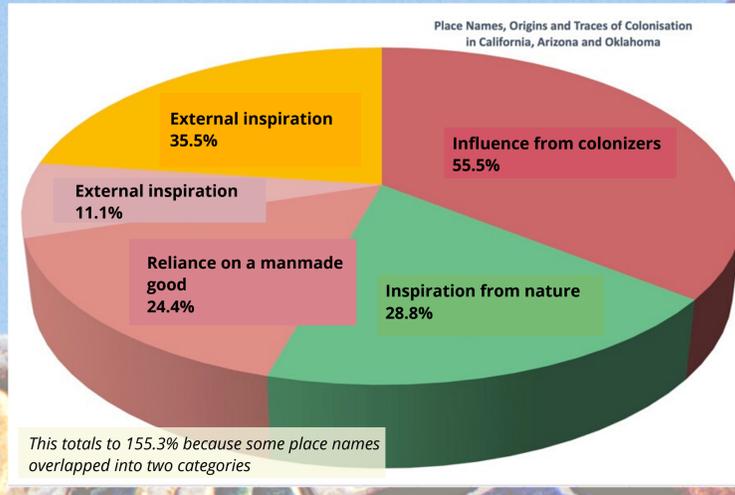
**W.E.B Du Bois** Du Bois states that society forces African American people to "always (look) at one's self through the eyes of others" (Du Bois, 3). Indigenous peoples struggle similarly, longing to understand their identity whilst needing to learn what it means to be an "American"



**Edward Said** According to Said, the formation of an Oriental "Other" is a "European Invention". Said's notion of orientalism highlights the "otherizing" that occurred during Europe's role in colonization. Imaginative geography enables distinctions to be made by categorizing people into rigid opposites

## Literature Review

Language that revolves around history and land origin is itself capable of determining which social groups belong and which do not (Nevins 194). A study about place names specific to the Arapaho tribe in Colorado confirm the notion that place names are reflective of cultural values and sacred ways of life for the Arapaho (Cowell and Moss 377). Another study shows that place names are a vital area of research because they include important domains for cultural analysis such as "language, thought and environment" that can speak to migratory patterns. Research on place names is therefore significant because it has the potential to give voice to aspects of Indigenous history on that go unnoticed.



**Influence from colonizers** 55.5% of the entire dataset showed direct influence from colonizers. Fellows, California was named after Charles Fellows who originated from Nottingham, England and is known for his expeditions in what is now known as Turkey. Taft, California is named after William Taft (27th U.S President) who was appointed as the civilian governor of the Philippines.

**Inspiration from nature** Both the Indigenous and colonizers named places after features in nature. However, colonizers did so 8.8% of the time while Indigenous people did so 22.2% of the time. For instance, Covina in California was named after an engineer named Frederick Eaton who combined the words "cove" and "vine". Meanwhile, Big Pine in California also known as Payahuunadu "land of flowing water", carries meaning that links to generational wisdom about caring for waterways

**Reliance on a manmade good** Colonizers were more likely to name places after manmade goods (24.4%) than after features of nature (8.8%). An example of this is seen in Mammoth, Arizona which was named after a mine named "Old Mammoth Mine" in which large gold ore could be found. Quartzsite, Arizona was named after the quartz stones in the area. Moreover, Holdenville in Oklahoma was named after a construction site supervisor who built a railroad that passes through Creek Indigenous territory

**External inspiration** 11.1% of the time colonizers named places after fictional works or places in other countries. For example, Alhambra in California, originally inhabited by the Tongva people, is named after Washington Irving's "Tales of the Alhambra". Carlsbad, California, originally inhabited by the Luiseno people, was named after a famous spa in Czech Republic.

**Indigenous history found** In 35.5% of the entire dataset, Indigenous / original names for places were still preserved. These tended to be Oklahoman cities as there is a higher percentage of Indigenous presence there than in California. Moberly, Oklahoma, has been historically occupied by the Lakota Sioux tribe. Although the name Moberly is given by European Americans, inspired by a railroad of the same name. Moberly's native name is Khowákatari Othúnjwahe which means "Over The River Town".

## Methods

This qualitative study will make use of unobtrusive methods in the collection of data. Online public archives will then be used to study the place names and their origins. The sample for this study consists of place names and explanations of their origins for 45 cities. The 45 cities are drawn from areas in the United States with the highest population of Indigenous Americans: California, Oklahoma and Arizona. Applying the open coding method, the origin explanations for each place name was analyzed using five codes: listed in "Results".

## References

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## Discussion

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) outlines in Article 13 that Indigenous peoples have a right to preserve their own names for "communities, places and persons" (United Nations 12). The current study points to the beginning steps that a nation can take to prioritize its Indigenous peoples. Governments can decide to bring back the use of original place names beginning in areas where there is a high percentage of Indigenous presence. Subsection 2, Article 13 of the UNDRIP explicitly state that governments have a responsibility to "take effective measures to ensure that (the right to retain place names) is protected" (United Nations 13).

## Conclusion

The limitations to this study include the fact that Indigenous American tribes have a different selection process for what geographical regions receive a name. As a researcher with limited understanding of Indigenous naming conventions and languages, the analyses in this research is relatively restricted. Lastly, as a non-Indigenous individual, I will never fully understand in its entirety, the significance of these issues to Indigenous peoples

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