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FIELD NOTES

What's in a Name?  
Autonymia Meets Cartography  
in Tribal Nations Maps

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What *is* in a name? As it turns out, quite a bit, as was demonstrated when US President Barack Obama returned Mt. McKinley to its original, indigenous appellation, *Denali*, creating outcries from McKinley descendants and fellow Ohioans and exultations from First Nations Peoples (Ross 2015). Indigenous tribal names have become a lifelong passion as well for cartographer Aaron Carapella, publisher of a series of Tribal Nations Maps<sup>1</sup> showing the locations of approximately 750 Native nations of the three Americas using their indigenous autonyms, rather than the names assigned by European settlers. After 14 years and thousands of hours of research, Carapella created a map series that arguably represents what Turtle Island looked like prior to colonization (figs. 1, 2, 3, and 4).

Carapella was inspired to pursue his disciplinary blend of onomastics and cartography while working as a teen in his local Native American community (2015b). As a youngster growing up in Orange County, California, he became intrigued by his 'Oklahoma Native roots' (Carapella 2015b)—he is part Cherokee, or as he came to discover during his research, *Aniyunwiyah*. He began reading about Native history, attending powwows, 'working in areas such as...federal recognition for the Ajachamen and Gabrieleno peoples of Orange County, fighting racist

1. Online at <http://www.tribalnationsmaps.com/>.

mascots, bringing Native-friendly curriculum to local schools and also joining AIM [American Indian Movement]—going to land occupations, protests, city hall meetings, etc.’ (Carapella 2015b).

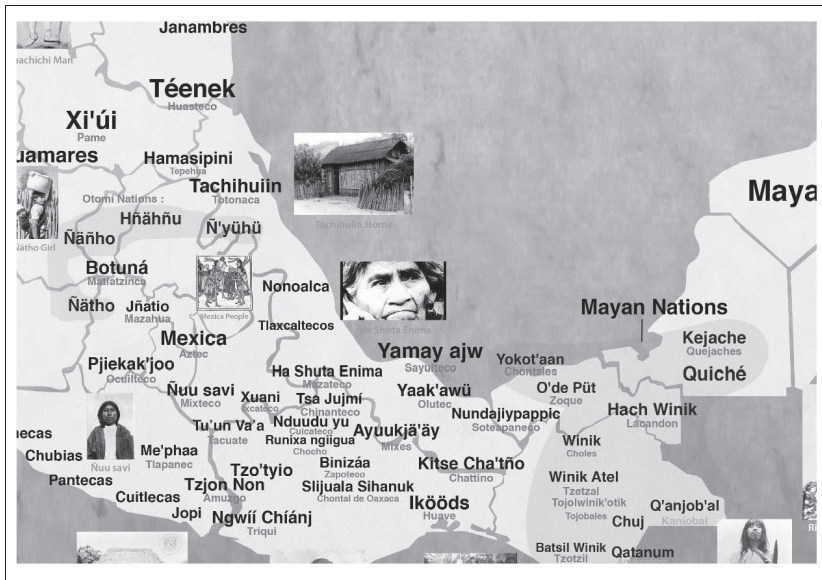


Figure 1. Section of Southeastern Mexico Tribal Nations map showing newly ascribed indigenous names and their previous Anglo names (Aaron Carapella 2015a).

By the age of 19, Carapella was already well-versed in Native Americana from listening to family and tribal-elder stories and from reading books about Native American history: ‘My Grandparents would tell me, you’re part Native American and that’s part of your history. They would give me books to read about different tribes’ histories, so I grew up with a curiosity of always wanting to learn more about Native American history’ (quoted in Brown 2013). During this period of study, Carapella occasionally came across maps of traditional tribal territories, but he ‘thought they looked incomplete, and the names mostly inaccurate. I filed away the idea of one day creating a more authentic-looking one myself’ (2015a). He kept seeking a more accurate map until finally deciding, ‘It’s time to make a REAL map of Native America, as WE see it’. It started with four poster boards and a rough pencil drawing of the United States. Over the next 14 years I would create the Tribal Nations Map’ (quoted in ICTMN Staff 2013).

For Carapella, collecting the accurate names of tribes was quite tedious, requiring seemingly endless study and numerous phone calls to individual tribes, but it was well worth the effort: ‘Some tribes, once contacted, wouldn’t know that information’ (quoted in Brown 2013). But someone from the tribe who could tell him what he needed to know to continue his research would always return his call. The diversity of names amazed him: ‘There were tribes I had never even heard of... Florida alone had 35 to 40 different tribes’ (Carapella in Yurth 2013). Clarendia Begay, exhibit curator at the Navajo Nation Museum was prompted to exclaim, ‘This is the first time I have seen this... What an informative map!’” (quoted in Yurth 2013). The maps demonstrate that tribes inhabited the entire United States and not just small portions of it.

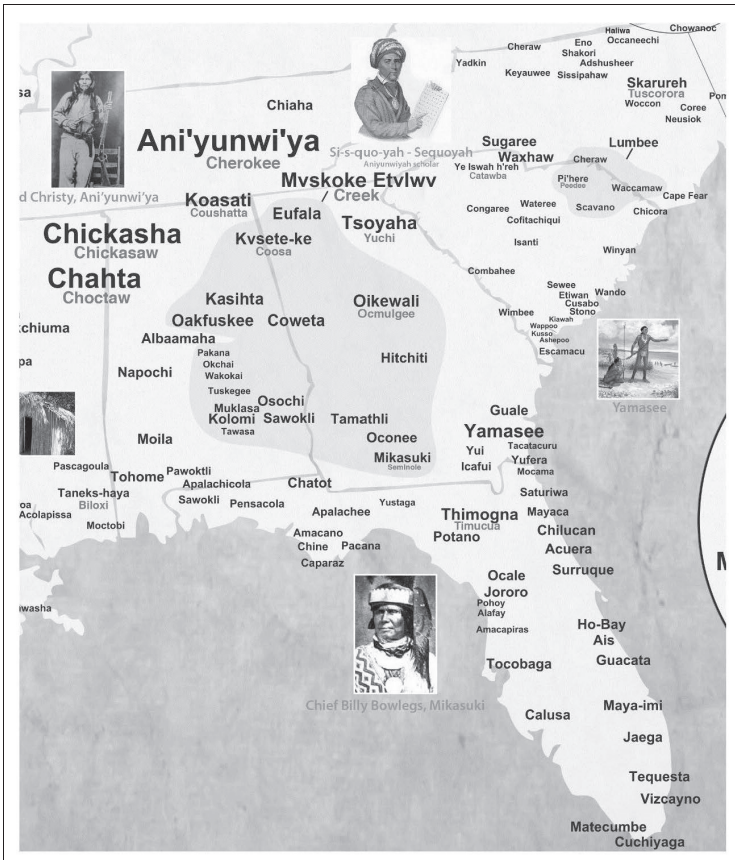


Figure 2. Section of Southeastern US Tribal Nations map showing newly ascribed indigenous names and their previous Anglo names (Aaron Carapella 2015a).

In his years of research, Carapella found 'maps of what our reservations look like now' and maps that had 'the 50 main tribes' (quoted in *ICTMN Staff* 2013). But he was especially 'interested in what our land really looked like circa 1490, before Columbus got here' (Carapella in *ICTMN Staff* 2013). To indicate the amount of land and population size of each tribe at the time of colonization, he varied the size of the typeface: the larger the typeface, the greater the population size. Colonial names are in a small, gray typeface. For example, 'Aniyunwiyah', 'Chahta', and 'Mikasuki'—the indigenous names—are shown in black typeface above 'Cherokee', 'Choctaw', and 'Seminole', respectively, in smaller, gray typeface (fig. 2).

During his study, Carapella was inhibited by the fact that some tribes were so decimated that he could find no living members to tell him what their autonyms were: 'It is...sad that I can't find a tribe's real name because they aren't here anymore' (quoted in Brown 2013). As has been confirmed by many scholars, some tribes were victims if not of direct, physical genocide, then of cultural genocide;<sup>2</sup> some dwindled away from disease or other life-threatening situations;<sup>3</sup> and some were merged forcefully or willingly with other tribes to make one large tribe: 'Today some small tribes are enumerated under larger tribes, and do not have separate sovereignty. A good example of that is the Delaware Tribe of Oklahoma who recently split from the Cherokee Nation' (Carapella in Brown 2013) after being included with them since colonization. Of the 595 tribes on Carapella's US maps, nearly 175 represent those that were unwillingly 'merged' (Brown 2013). Federal recognition is important for tribal members; without it they may be denied funding and land.

The maps also show historical images of Natives and their dwellings because Carapella 'wanted to get away from the stereotypical images of Indians, with all the feathers... I wanted to show the diversity of our clothing, our homes' (quoted in Yurth 2013). His research led him to conclude that generally,

Americans are very ignorant about Native American history and the only time they deal with Native history or reality is when tribes have enough money to fight back against injustice happening to them. In my small way, making this map is to reinforce the true history of the injustice and the genocide that occurred (Carapella in Brown 2013).

2. See, for example, Kisken 2015a: 2B; 2015b: 4A; 2015c: 6A; 2015d: 2A; Bharath 2015; Castillo 2015; *ICTMN Staff* 2015; Jacobs 2015; Thanawala 2015; Walker 2015; Hackel 2013: 238.

3. See, for example, Beebe and Senkewicz 2015: 106; Kisken 2015a: 2B; 2015b: 4A; 2015c: 6A; 2015d: 2A; Hackel 2013: 238.



Figure 3. Change Figure 3 to: Section of Alaska Tribal Nations map showing newly ascribed indigenous names and their previous Anglo names (Aaron Carapella 2015a).

According to Arun Saldanha, an associate professor in the Department of Geography, Environment and Society at the University of Minnesota, naming disagreements can be traced to European colonization of the Americas: renaming was part of the colonizing process and told the original inhabitants: 'This is no longer the land of the people who live here' (quoted in Muskal 2015).

As for his purpose for conducting his research, Carapella said,

The intent of these maps is to instill pride in Native peoples and to be used as teaching tools from a Native perspective... My vision long ago was to create Tribal Maps that would reflect the Native point of view and use traditional names, and that would be worthy enough to be included in textbooks (Carapella 2015a).

To that end, Carapella's Tribal Maps have been included in George Price's *Past and Present: An Introduction to Native American Studies* (2015).

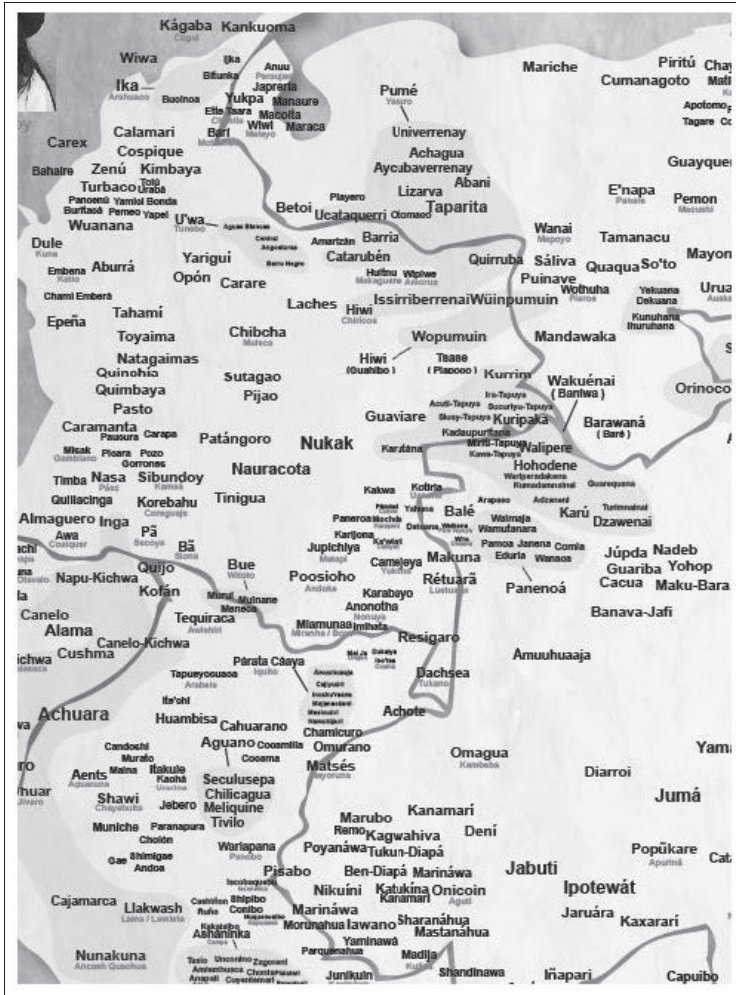


Figure 4. Section of Northwestern South America Tribal Nations map showing newly ascribed indigenous names and their previous Anglo names (Aaron Carapella).

Nor is Carapella alone in his Native cartography endeavors: LandMark—a collective of international indigenous NGOs—published what it called ‘the first online, interactive global platform to provide maps and other critical information on lands that are collectively held

and used by Indigenous Peoples and local communities' (2015).<sup>4</sup> LandMark's mission is supporting the land rights of these groups and helping them achieve sovereignty. By showing boundaries of indigenous and community lands, whether or not they are formally recognized, the map is intended to aid the protection of such lands.

Although indigenous and community lands may comprise as much as two-thirds of the world's land area, many are not recognized by the nations in which they reside (Wily in Fraser 2015). Yet, solutions to our climate change eco-crisis may be linked to such lands—and their *forests* (Tauli-Corpuz in Fraser 2015). This is because forests are critical for storing life-sustaining carbon. And because rates of deforestation have often been found to be lower on indigenous lands than in government-designated protected areas (Fraser 2015), it behooves us to help protect and keep them under the control of their indigenous owners.

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4. Online at <http://www.landmarkmap.org/>.

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