

# DENVER ART MUSEUM

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DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

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## TRIBAL NAMES: PART I



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1. **INTRODUCTORY.** The names by which most Indian tribes are commonly known today are not usually those applied by the tribes to themselves. The names given to them are from various sources, the main ones being the following: corruptions of native names by French, Spanish and Americans; nicknames applied by one tribe to another; corruptions of these in non-Indian languages; translations into English, often incorrect, of native names and nicknames; names in non-Indian languages which have no connection with the native name. The tribes do not use these names themselves except in dealing with Whites. The native name is usually the word for "people," "men," or the like.

2. **ACCURATE INFORMATION** about these matters is difficult to obtain. Many of the books which discuss them were written before the study of native languages had advanced as far as it has now, with resulting mistakes about names. The information given in this leaflet has in many cases been obtained from modern authorities on the various language groups. Thanks are due to these authorities for their assistance.

3. **PLAN OF THE LEAFLET.** This is the first of several numbers of this series devoted to tribal names. In each the names are divided by geographic areas. This number has to do with some of the tribes which are best known to the public.

#### NORTHWEST

4. **KLIKITAT** (Klíh-kih-tat). A corruption of the native name of a village of the tribe, "Khlah-tee-khat," of which the meaning is unknown. The native name for the group is approximated by "hwalth-hwy-pam," meaning "klikitat speaking people."

5. **NEZ PERCÉ** (Nay Pair-say, French pronunciation; Nez Purse, or Pursay, American pronunciation). The French name for the tribe, meaning "pierced nose" and referring to the old tribal custom of piercing the septum of the nose to receive a shell ornament. The native name is "Nu-mée-pu," meaning "people of numi."

6. **SIWASH** (Sy-wash). This is one of the most misused and misunderstood words applied to Indians. It is not an Indian word, but a corruption of the French "sauvage" (so-vahj), meaning "savage." It was not and is not applied to any single tribe. The early French in the Northwest called all Indians "sauvages," "savages." In the Northwest, especially in the Columbia drainage, there developed around 1800 a simplified trade language, called the Chinook jargon. It was made up of words taken from a number of Indian and non-Indian languages. In this jargon "siwash" was the word for "Indian" as distinguished from "White man." Only in this sense and in this language is the word correctly used. There is no Siwash tribe and there never has been.

7. **UMATILLA** (You-ma-tíl-la). A corruption of the native name for one of the villages of this tribe, "Ee-ma-tih-luhm," meaning "lots of rocks." There appears to be no native name for the whole tribe.

8. **WALLA WALLA** (Wáh-lah Wáh-lah). A corruption of the native name "Wa-la-wa-la-pu," meaning "people of the little river." Walula is another version of the common name.

9. **WENATCHI** (We-ná-tchee). A corruption of the name applied to this Salishan tribe by Indians speaking Sahaptin languages. This name is "Wih-náh-shuh" and means "waters (large stream) flow out." The tribe's own name for itself is "N-spik-wáh-us." Its meaning is unknown, though it may have the connotation of "our people."

10. **YAKIMA** (Yáh-kih-ma). A corruption of "Yáh-kuh-muh," meaning "pregnant ones." This is the native name.

#### PLAINS

11. **ARAPAHO** (Ah-rá-pah-ho). A nickname for this Algonkin tribe in the Siouan language of the Crow tribe, meaning "tattooed on the breast people," or "many tattoos." The Crow word is accented on the last syllable. The native name is written in several ways, "I-nu-na-i-na" (Ee-noo-nah-ee-na) and "Hi-na-nae-inan" being two of these spellings. This name appears to mean "our people."

12. **BLACKFOOT**. A translation of the native name "Sik-si-ka," referring either to the fact that the tribe painted moccasins black or to the discoloring of their moccasins by the ashes of grass fires.

13. **CHEYENNE** (Shy-en). This name is a French corruption of the Yankton Sioux nickname for the tribe, "Sha-hée-yay-na," which means "those who speak a different or strange language." The word may also have something to do with "red," referring either to a Cheyenne use of red paint or to the fact that the Sioux are said to have called a foreign tongue a "red" language. There is no connection with the French "chien," meaning "dog." The native name is "Dzi-tsis-tas" (Dzee-tsis-tas) or "Tsis-tsis-tas," according to different spellings. It appears to mean "people," but might mean "cut or gashed people."

14. **COMANCHE** (Ko-mán-tchee). The Spanish or Mexican name for the tribe since at least the 18th century. Its meaning is not known. The native name is "Nu-ma," or "Num," meaning "people."

15. **CROW**. An American translation of an incorrect French translation of the native name "Ap-sá-ro-ke." This word refers to a kind of fork-tailed bird which is not now identifiable, the Indians saying that it is no longer found in their country. The early French mistakenly identified this bird with the crow and called the tribe "Gens du corbeau," "Crow people."

16. **SHIUX** (Soo). An American corruption of part of a French corruption of the Ojibwa name for the tribe. The Ojibwa called the Sioux "Na-do-wés-si-weg;" a diminutive plural derived from "na-do-we" (nah-do-way) and meaning "snake," and, by metaphor, "enemy." The French changed this name to "Na-do-wes-si-oux" (Na-do-wes-see-oo). In the early 19th century the Americans took the two last syllables of the French name, "si-oux" (see-oo), and pronounce it "Soo." The tribal name is "Dakota," "Lakota" or "Nakota," depending on the dialect used. This name means "allies."

#### SOUTHEAST

17. **CHEROKEE** (Cháir-o-kee). This name is most probably a corruption of the Creek word "Tci-lo-ki" or "Chi-lo-ki," meaning "people of different speech." The native names are two: "A-nee-yung-wee-yah," "real people" or "A-nee-ki-tu-haw-gi," "people of Kituhwa," (an important ancient town).

18. **CHICKASAW** (Chíck-a-saw). A native word of unknown meaning. The ending indicates that the word is a place name.

19. **CHOCTAW** (Tchók-taw). The origin and meaning of the word are unknown.

20. **CREEK**. The tribe now called by this name formerly lived on what is now called the Ocmulgee river. The 17th century name for this stream was Ochesee Creek, "O-che-see" probably being a Hitchiti word meaning "people of a different speech." The English colonists called the tribe "Creek" because

it lived on Ochesee Creek. The native name is "Mus-kó-gee" of which the origin and meaning are unknown. (The final syllable is not "jee.")

**21. MUSKOGEE.** See Section 20.

**22. SEMINOLE** (Séh-mih-nole). The name is derived from the Creek word "si-ma-no-le," meaning "separatist" and referring to the separation from the Creek tribe of a band which fled to Florida in the 18th century.

### SOUTHWEST

**23. HOPI** (Hó-pee). A contraction of the native name "Ho-pi-tu," meaning "peaceful people." The name "Mo-ki" or "Mo-qui," once often applied to this tribe, is a Navaho nickname meaning "monkey." It is much disliked by the Hopi and is little used today.

**24. MOKI or MOQUI.** See section 23.

**25. NAVAHO** (Ná-va-ho). Apparently a corruption of the Tewa (Tay-wa) Indian name for a ruined pueblo in the upper Rio Grande Valley in northern New Mexico. This name is "Na-va-hu" and means "place of great planted fields." The first members of the tribe mentioned by the Spanish lived in this vicinity and were called by them "Apaches de Navahu." "Navahu" became changed to "Navajo" by the Spanish, "j" being the Spanish letter used to denote the sound we indicate by "h." Since we use the English alphabet and not the Spanish, there seems to be no reason to keep the spelling of this name with "j." The native name is "Din-néh," meaning "people" or "men."

**26. PAPAGO** (Pá-pa-go). A corruption of the Pima name for the tribe, "Pá-pa-vee aw-aw-tam," meaning "bean people." The native name is "Toch-ó-nò o-o-tam," meaning "desert people."

**27. PIMA** (Pée-mah). A corruption of the native expression "pee-match," meaning "I don't know." The native name is "Ah-kee-mult aw-aw-tam," meaning "river people."

**28. PUEBLO** (Pwáy-blo, Spanish pronunciation; Pwéb-lo, American pronunciation). A Spanish word meaning "town." The Spanish explorers of the Southwest found certain Indians living in towns and called these towns "pueblos." The word came to be applied to the Indians who lived in these towns. There is no single Pueblo tribe. The 44 villages of this type are occupied by groups of Indians belonging to four linguistic families; Keresan, Tanoan, Zunian, and Shoshonean. Not only do the Pueblo villages differ in languages, but also in customs and beliefs.

#### Compiled from the following sources by F. H. Douglas:

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