

***Squaw Teats**, *Harney Peak*, and *Negrohead Creek**: A Corpus-Linguistic Investigation of Proposals to Change Official US Toponymy to (Dis)honor Indigenous US Americans**

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Each year, the US Government receives hundreds of petitions to alter the official name of a geographical feature. Since the nineteenth century, the US Board on Geographic Names (USBGN) has had the task of assessing these requests with a view toward standardizing the nation's toponymic inventory. During its decision-making, the Board seeks to maximize consistency in the formation, selection, and application of official toponyms, while minimizing potential public injury. The challenges in this regulatory balancing act are particularly apparent with regard to indigenous place names. Using an original corpus compiled from 10 years of USBGN petitions, this empirical study identified patterns in the type, motivation, and argumentation used to (dis)honor Native American identities, histories, and cultures via names and naming. After introducing the USBGN's policies and practices, these findings are presented with several illustrative examples. The article ends by contextualizing the findings within the broader PC debate and offering future research suggestions.

KEYWORDS Native American, toponym, language policy, indigenous.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background information on the US Board on Geographic Names

The US Board on Geographic Names (USBGN) was first instituted in 1890 under the auspices of President Benjamin Harrison. According to his Presidential Executive Order

signed on the 4 September 1890, the express purpose of the Board was to regulate “all unsettled questions concerning geographic names” (Orth and Payne 1997, 4) and was to be considered the supreme regulatory authority for the development and maintenance of all official place names within the United States. The primary charge of the USGBN was to heighten the level of national (and by extension international) consistency in the usage, application, and formation of toponyms. Since its inception, the USGBN nomenclature decisions have set the official toponymic standards for all governmental departments and agencies. Since the World War II era, the work of the USGBN has been divided into two committees: (1) the Foreign Name Committee (FNC) that, since the mid-20th century, has been charged with standardizing the US government’s use of foreign place names; and (2) the Domestic Name Committee (DNC) that, since a 1906 order issued by President Theodore Roosevelt, has been responsible for governing the spelling, use, and application of geographic names for topographic features within the United States.

The DNC is informed by a federally-run network of scientific advisory committees, governmental agencies, and academic institutions with expertise in names and naming. Just a few of its advisory bodies include the US Department of Agriculture, the US Department of Commerce, US Department of Defense, the Government Publishing Office, the US Department of Homeland Security, and the Library of Congress. The variety and number of advisors involved in the BGN-DNC operation reflect its official guiding institutional policy-stance. In short, despite its considerable discretionary power, the DNC operates under a strict principle of collaborative decision-making. Where the subject of indigenous place naming is concerned, DNC policy mandates a “government-to-government relationship” between the US federal government and Tribal authorities as independent political sovereignties (Orth and Payne 1997, 64).

This cooperative approach to the regulation of domestic toponyms stands in direct contradiction to US governmental policies of the past, where federal decisions governing the use of place names were imposed upon indigenous peoples of the North American continent without consultation or consideration. It would be naïve, however, to assume that this historic shift in policy is singularly the result of widespread institutional changes in cultural, political, and historical sensitivities. Although centuries have successfully raised the conscientiousness of governmental policymakers toward the rights of indigenous peoples, this altered approach toward the development and implementation of toponymic policies and practices is also born of pragmatism.

As modern language policy and planning research has demonstrated (Baldauf 2010; Mühlhäusler 2010), top-down approaches which fail to take into consideration the opinions and wishes of the community at large can quickly and definitely undermine even the best-laid plans of language policymakers. Importantly, the imposition of such policies may not only have immediate but long-lasting effects, where communal feelings of frustration, resentment, suspicion, and rebellion over one toponymic policy may poison the waters for future onomastic initiatives. Where the indigenous peoples of the United States are concerned, centuries of top-down discriminatory, disrespectful, toponymic policies not only may have helped to erode already tenuous inter-governmental relationships, but also may have contributed to the veritable erasure of the nation’s oldest inhabitants and with that the progressive erosion of the country’s precious cultural heritage.

With an eye to acknowledging and avoiding these past wrongs, the DNC as a matter of official policy works in close tandem with Native American communities. Aside from actively and regularly soliciting the expertise and opinions of Native American Tribal authorities during the decision-making process, the DNC has also prioritized the elimination of potentially offensive toponyms. As with most forward-looking governmental policies, this task is far easier said than done. As will be shown here, the goal of cultivating culturally sensitive toponymy for both the indigenous and non-indigenous communities must also be weighed against the equally important tasks of maintaining national terminological standards.

1.2. BGN-DNC petitions to take toponymic action

To ensure administrative transparency in the decision-making process, all official petitions to add or alter US toponyms are made a part of the public record. For example, through a regularly updated “Action List”, the USGBN publicizes all ongoing toponymic proposals as well as any decisions made within the last 12 months. Also available via the BGN website is an itemized listing of reports or “Review Lists” (RL) that provide detailed information about toponymic proposals under consideration.

These Review Lists are numbered in reverse-chronological order and are internally organized in alphabetical order by state and date. For toponymic scholars or names enthusiasts, these reports contain a wealth of information. Some of the most important factors include the following (1) a detailed summary of the case; (2) the name(s) and often times position of the agency or person that proposed the petition; (3) the specific type of geographic feature (e.g. summit, stream, lake, valley, etc.); (4) any previous and pending proposals for that geographic feature; (5) the location of the geographic feature; and (6) the specific toponymic request.

Generally speaking, DCN petitions fall into two basic categories. The first involves a formal request to officially name a previously unnamed geographic feature. To do this, there must be detailed verifiable evidence of the geographical feature’s existence, its importance to the (local) community, and justification for the toponym suggested. In cases where multiple onomastic petitions have for one and the same geographic feature, the BGN faces a difficult decision.

To illustrate this challenge, consider the fictionalized example of an elevated land formation upon which a Native American tribe reportedly performed sacred ceremonial dances in celebration of the summer solstice. Over the years, the location may have received varying unofficial names amongst locals: *Sun Mountain*, *Red Man’s* Hillock*, *Indian Hill**, *Squaw* Dancer’s Mesa*.¹ Each of these fictional monikers differs not only in the “generic name” used (i.e. mountain, hillock, mesa), but also in the “specific name” for the location’s perceived distinct appearance, function, and/or history. In real cases where multiple toponyms are proposed, the BGN-DNC examines all petitions. Then, after consultation with potentially affected members of the Native American and non-Native American community, the Committee would select a single toponym to be used in all official local, state, and federal levels. This is one type of proposal.

The second type of onomastic petition reviewed by the DNC involves propositions to change a pre-existing toponym. There are several different types of changes that may be requested. Two of the most common involve the correction of orthography and the

replacement of offensive, derogatory terminology. Once again, it is not unusual for the DNC to receive several different proposals for the same pre-existing toponym. In some cases, the DNC can take on a negotiator role and encourage the various petitioners to consider other petitions. Not infrequently, this collaboration will result in the voluntarily withdrawal of one petition in favor of another one that is considered to have more public, academic, or governmental support. Though desirable, such amicable resolutions do not always occur. In cases where no consensus or compromise is reached, the DNC carefully reviews the relative merits of the competing proposals and selects the one which best adheres to the Committee's governmental mandate. It is not unusual for decisions to take several months if not years.

This painstaking deliberation process can be further complicated by significant, oft unpredictable, changes in public sensibilities where language use is concerned. What is considered neutral or even attractive in one generation may be summarily rejected as negative or vulgar in the next.

Because geographic names are part of the historical record in the United States, the BGN prefers to proceed cautiously with regard to the use of names in everyday language, as attitudes and perceptions of words considered to be offensive vary among individuals and communities and can change over time. (Orth and Payne 1997, 15)

Alongside this diachronic variability, there is also the simultaneous challenge posed by sharp differences both between and within ethnolinguistic communities concerning what is an acceptable, appropriate, desirable toponymy.

2. Methodology

According to Tent (2015, 65), place name research has tended to be focused either on the "etymology, meaning, or origin of toponyms" (qualitative) or on the underlying "patterns of relationship, including classifications of types of phenomena and entities" (quantitative). The current research takes a mixed-method approach.

The purpose of this research was to explore the nature and substance of toponymic petitions involving Native American toponyms. To do so, a decade of official Review Lists issued by the DNC were gathered. More specifically, between the dates 6 February 2006 and 30 December 2016 (inclusive) a total of 35 Review Lists containing 2170 petitioned names were systematically examined and cases involving indigenous toponyms were extracted. The result was an original toponymic corpus with 281 indigenous names cases.

For each of these cases, the following information was recorded: (1) the state where the geographical feature is located; (2) the year in which the petition was made; (3) the geographical feature involved; (4) the name of the petitioner; (5) the type of petitioner (e.g. private citizen, government agency, or both); (6) the reason(s) given for the petition; (7) the Native American communities listed as being directly involved; (8) the listed meaning of any pre-existing or proposed indigenous names; (9) any arguments in favor and against the petitioned action; (10) the decision of the DNC, when made available; and (11) any socio-historical facts surrounding the pre-existing or proposed names.

Once this information was assembled and coded, the data was statistically analyzed to determine whether discernible patterns existed in the toponymic petitions. Given both the limited size and scope of the corpus as well as the exploratory nature of the

investigation, the decision was made against the use of inferential statistics. Instead a series of descriptive statistics was run. As the following will demonstrate, a number of intriguing patterns were uncovered.

3. Results

3.1. Non-onomastic findings

Although the BGN-DNC is authorized to accept petitions involving any state in the Union, the 281 cases identified came from just 29 states. These states showed considerable variation in the number of petitions submitted. While some states such as Georgia, Indiana, and Virginia had fewer than five cases, others had tens of dozens of cases. The top 10 states with the highest percentage of cases in the corpus were the following: (1) Oregon (29.18%); (2) Montana (18.86%); (3) Alaska (9.25%); (4) California (5.34%); (5) Arizona (4.98%); (6) Idaho and Wisconsin (4.27%, each); (7) Washington (3.90%); (8) Maine (3.20%); (9) South Dakota (2.85%); and (10) Florida (1.78%).

The fact that these states were found to head the list is no doubt due, in part, by the fact that all of these states had already passed legislation mandating the removal of potentially offensive words from geographic place names.² These states seemed to demonstrate a tendency to submit multiple toponymic proposals at once rather than in a slow and steady fashion. This behavior may help to explain another finding; namely the remarkable variation in the number of petitions made per year. This fluctuation is clearly evident in the line graph in Figure 1.

As shown in the graphic above, across the 10-year period examined, there was considerable fluctuation both in the total number of such cases registered by the BGN-DNC and the number of relevant cases extracted for the corpus. With regard to the corpus, three peaks were apparent: 2007, 2012, and 2015 which made up 21.61, 22.81, and 22.37% of the total number of cases registered for these years. To a certain extent, this fluctuation may be accounted for by the fact that several states in the corpus seemed to

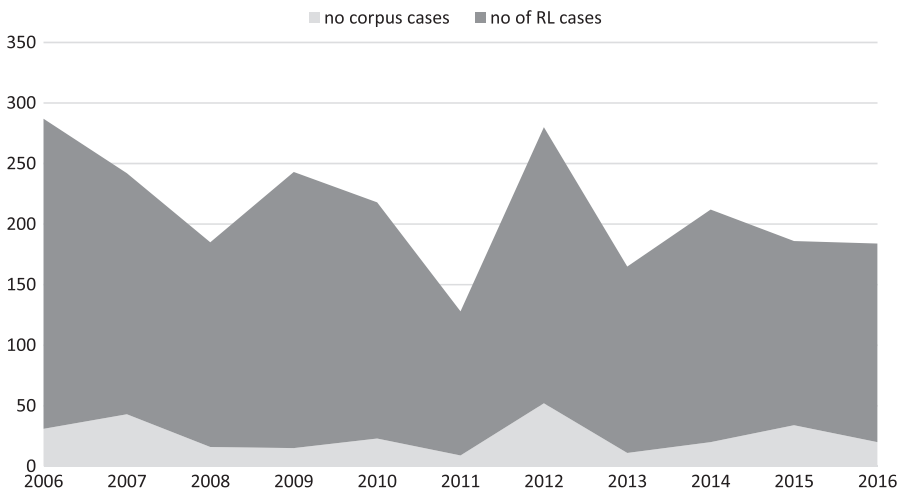


FIGURE 1 Number of petitions submitted to BGN-DNC for both the corpus and the Review Lists (RL) between 2006 and 2016.

have submitted several proposals at a time to change possibly derogatory toponyms. For example, between the two-year period of 22 February 2010 and 12 December 2012, there were 42 petitions to replace an Oregonian place name featuring the prohibited word *squaw** (e.g. *Squaw Flat* → *Puhi-Pane Na-De Flat Paiute* for “Pretty Blue Lake Flat”; *Squaw Creek* → *Ede huudi Creek*, Paiute for “near hot spring creek”; *Squaw Butte* → *Cúuy’em Butte*, Umatilla for “fish”; *Squaw Spring* → *Aspen Spring*).³ The over-representation of certain states within the corpus may also have skewed the results obtained in other ways. For example, of the 19 different features mentioned in the corpus, the two most frequent were streams (49.47%) and summits (16.73%), two natural landmarks that are fairly common in the US Northwest. By comparison, the percentage of cases involving toponyms for beaches (0.356%) and cliffs (0.356%) was relatively small. By the same token, it will also be important to bear in mind the comparative absence of states from the Mid-Atlantic, the Northeast, Midwest, and Southeast, when interpreting patterns found presented in the next section.

3.2. Onomastic findings

3.2.1. Officially unnamed geographical formations⁴

Approximately 16.37% of the cases in the corpus involved petitions to name a geographical formation without an official, registered, toponymic designation. An examination of this sub-corpus revealed several different reasons for submitting an onomastic petition. In 52.52% of these cases, the motivation was simply to finally make official an unregistered local toponymic moniker.

For example, the Review List 391 from 6 February 2006 contains an Alaskan petition to have the name *Teack Lake* made official. The petition was placed by the Kenaitze Indian Tribe who reported that local residents had come to refer to the local lake using the name *Teack* which is an acronym for “Together Everyone Achieves Collective Knowledge” (5). According to the Keanitze Tribal leaders, the lake’s traditional Dena’i name had been lost over time. According to the official case BGN-DNC summary, this proposal was accepted. The desire to make a toponym in broad local use was one of the top motivations found in this portion of the corpus, making up 26.09% of the cases recorded.

Another reason identified for seeking to name an unofficially unnamed geographical feature was to commemorate a significant event or personage in the community’s history. This motivation was listed in 13.04% of the cases contained in this sub-corpus. An example comes from Review List 404. Released on the 16 July 2010, this list contains the case of an unnamed summit in Arizona. The name proposed for the nameless elevation was *Jeffords Peak*.

According to the case summary, this eponymous toponym was selected to honor Thomas Jeffords (1832–1914), a Native American US Army Scout who, according to the petitioner, had “enabled the US government to negotiate a peace treaty with the Apache chief Chocise in 1872” (4). The petitioner goes on to detail that this peace treaty was instrumental in bringing “peace and stability for Southeast Arizona for the very first time” (4). In this instance, the motivation for the naming act was to recognize an hitherto unsung indigenous hero in Arizona’s state history. In other instances, the motivation of the commemoration was to attempt to address a past wrong. Such is the case with a Washington State petition listed in Review List 404 and released on 16 July 2010. In the words of the local resident who issued the petition, the intended recipient of

this onomastic honor was none other than the last Nisqually chief whom the petitioner described as being “wrongly accused, convicted, and hanged for a murder he did not commit” (34). To draw attention to this historical injustice, a proposal was made to name a previously unnamed stream *Leschi Slough*. Although such commemorative naming was relatively common, the vast majority of the cases in this sub-set (56.52%) fell into a different category: to bestow an unnamed feature with a new indigenous name and thereby reclaim native naming rights without having to first expend the resources and time to remove a pre-existing Anglo-American toponym. An excellent example of this expediency was located in Review List 405 from 2010 where a New Hampshire petition is made to name a summit the name *Agiocochook Crag*. Based on information provided by the petitioner, this act would restore an indigenous name “that was once applied to Mount Washington and which means ‘Home of the Great Spirit.’” (28).

A similarly interesting case involving cultural restoration was found in Review List 410 (release date: 30 May 2012). This time the geographical feature to be officially named was a body of water with a local, unofficial name: *FUBAR Creek* or *Fucked Beyond All Recognition Creek*. According to the official DCN record, the stream was given this informal nickname by local residents in the 1950s and 1960s when destructive, logging practices decimated the once rich spawning grounds for Alaskan salmon and trout. Now that those practices have been outlawed and the stream has slowly recovered, the local tribal councils in conjunction with the Forest Service petitioned the DCN for the adoption of an official toponym, *Gandlaay Haanaa*, that reportedly means “beautiful stream” in the Haida language (3). This case in combination with the others in this sub-set demonstrate that the act of naming is not merely logistical. In this corpus, it was used as a tool for both honoring and reclaiming indigenous cultural identity.

3.2.2. Named geographical formations

The second sub-set of the corpus involved cases petitioning to change the official, registered name of a geographical feature. This sub-set comprised 83.63% of the compilation. The fact that the overwhelming number of cases fell into this category may come somewhat as a surprise, given the BGN-DNC’s policy against changing an official toponym without a compelling reason (Orth and Payne 1997). An examination of the cases which met this stringent standard revealed two reasons which the DCN found sufficiently persuasive.

The first involved petitions to correct the spelling of a pre-existing toponym. In Table 1, a few of the cases that fell into this category are presented. In the first column of the table, the reference information is given for the sources: the official RL number assigned by the USBGN, the RL year, and the two-letter state abbreviation for each example.

TABLE 1
EXAMPLES OF PETITIONS TO CHANGE THE NAME OF GEOGRAPHICAL FORMATIONS

Source	Original name → Proposed correction “meaning”	Tribe listed in Review List
398:2008:FL	<i>Wekiva Springs</i> → <i>Wekiwa Springs</i> “Spring of water or babbling water”	Seminole/Creek
409:2012:WI	<i>Pesabic Lake</i> → <i>Lake Pesobic</i> “lake view”	“Indian origin”
411:2012:WA	<i>Sooes Beach</i> → <i>Tsoo-Yess</i>	Makah
421:2015:NH	<i>Cochecho River</i> → <i>Cochecho River</i> “river of great falls or many falls”	Abenaki
423:2016:AK	<i>Thachkatnu Creek</i> → <i>Lach Q’atnu Creek</i> “clay hole creek”	Dena’ina

Ultimately, the success or failure of such petitions relies heavily upon the accuracy and credibility of the documents provided. As straightforward as the resulting assessment may seem on the surface, in point of fact, this decision-making can prove extremely difficult due to a number of factors. Chief among them are the lack of attested, standardized writing systems amongst many Native American Tribes; and the existence of variant spellings available for the transliteration of Native American languages and their dialects. A variation on this type of petition were those proposals to correct the application of an existing toponym by, for instance, limiting the use of a place name to a particular segment of a landmark (e.g. the mouth of a river as opposed to the entire waterway). Taking these and other corrective proposals together still formed a small minority of cases in the sub-corpus.

The lion's share of the compilation was made up of requests to replace official toponymy considered potentially offensive. Interestingly, not all of the cases falling into this category were epithets for Native Americans. An excellent example is found in Review List 409 from 7 February 2012. In this registry, it is suggested that an Alaskan stream registered as *Negrohead Creek* be replaced by a new Native American name *Lochenyath Creek*. Based on the information provided in the case summary, the proposed alternative moniker means "grass tussocks" in the Lower Tanana Gwich'in language and offers a positive alternative to local names for cotton-ball-like tufts of grass (i.e. *Negroheads** and *Niggerheads**). This case was exceptional in the corpus, however. As a general rule, toponyms listed for possible replacement contained lexemes believed or known to be objectionable to the Native American community. A few of these names contained regional dysphemisms that may not necessarily be recognized outside of the immediate area. Outside of the Golden State, the toponyms *Digger Creek* and *Digger Ravine* might not be considered derogatory. However, within California, the term *digger** has been used since the 19th century as a term of approbation for Native Americans. Interestingly, in the corpus, objections were not only lodged against the continued use of pejorative anthroponyms in geographic names. Eponyms were also a source of concern. An excellent example is provided by the South Dakotan geographic landmark, *Harney Peak*.

The highest point in the state, the summit was named after Major General William S. Harney. While US American history books celebrate him for his military successes as a hardened cavalry commander, among members of the Native American community he is remembered as a war criminal (Adams 2001). In the DCN petition to remove this eponymous toponym (RL 419), it is argued that "particular objection is raised about his role in the Battle of Ash Hollow in September 1855 [...] Harney and his men were reportedly brutal in their attack, killing women and children" (31), an act which earned him the name "The Butcher" among the Lakota (31). Understandably, the fact that the sacred peak overlooking the modern Lakota-Sioux Nation carried the name of a man known to the Nation as "The Butcher" was intolerable to many indigenous South Dakota residents. In view of this fact, the DCN petition recommended that *Harney Peak* be renamed *Black Elk Peak*, in honor of the 20th-century Lakota leader who spent his life attempting to educate the US American public about indigenous culture. On 11 August 2016, this toponymic request was granted. As much media attention as this toponymic change and other analogous changes (e.g. *Mount McKinley* → *Denali*) garnered, the most common place name alteration in this corpus was not eponymous.

Instead, a full 79.31%⁵ of the cases calling for a toponymic replacement involved a lexeme widely felt to be the equivalent of *nigger* for Native Americans: *squaw**.⁶ Despite the commonality of offense taken to place names featuring this word, the onomastic strategies suggested to replace them were extremely varied. In total, five different approaches were identified: (1) replace *squaw** with an indigenous name and maintain generic geographical name; (2) replace *squaw** with an English name and maintain generic geographical name; (3) delete entire name and replace with an indigenous name; (4) replace *squaw** with an indigenous name and alter generic geographical name; (5) replace *squaw** with personal name of an Anglo-American and maintain generic geographical name; and (6) other. Figure 2 shows the prevalence of each of these six strategies within the sub-set of the 183 cases requesting a change in a pre-existing “s*-place name”. Table 2 presents several illustrative examples of these toponymic strategies from the compiled corpus.

As demonstrated above, the second most common linguistic strategy resulted in a completely English-language toponym. The advantage of this approach, aside from the removal of *squaw**, was that the majority of US American residents could be expected to have little or no difficulty in correctly spelling and pronouncing the proposed replacement. The disadvantage of this majority-friendly approach is that they tended to erase any overt historical connection between the place name and the indigenous peoples who live(d) there. This onomastic set was in stark contrast to the bilingual toponyms yielded by strategy 1. An examination of the motivations offered for toponyms within the category revealed a dual-agenda amongst the petitioners. While an indigenous linguistic unit was chosen to unambiguously honor the significance of the geographical feature to the Native Americans, a concerted effort was often also made to avoid lexemes that may be considered completely unpronounceable to non-indigenous language-users. The

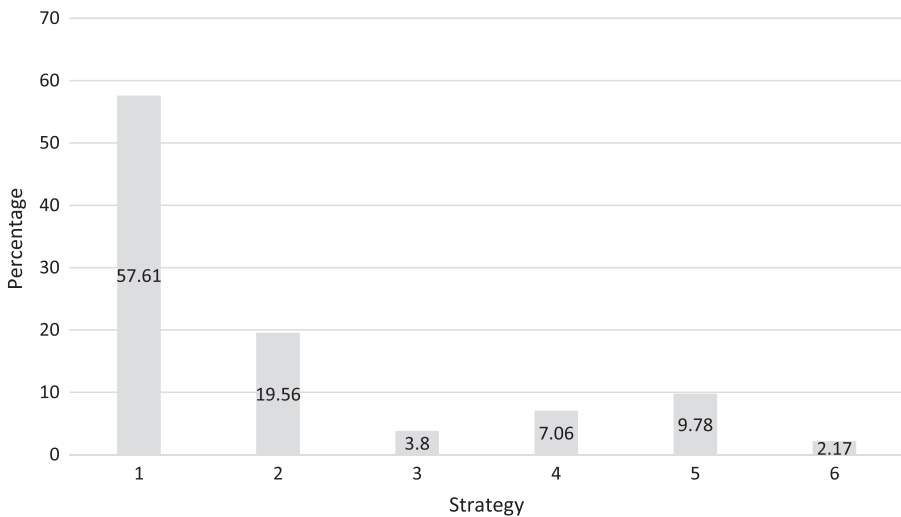


FIGURE 2 Most common strategies proposed to replace US toponyms featuring the word *squaw**.

TABLE 2
STRATEGIES USED TO REPLACE TOPONYMS FEATURING SQUAW*

		Examples		
Strategy	RL#:Yr:State	Original name → Proposed replacement American word(s)	"meaning of Native American word(s)"	Tribal language
1	Replace squaw* with an indigenous name and maintain generic name	392:2006:ID 394:2007:WI 410:2012:OR 421:2015:OR 395:2007:MT 397:2008:ME 417:2014:AZ 411:2012:OR 425:2016:NY	<i>Squaw* Spring</i> → <i>Lockensuit Spring</i> "sweat lodge" <i>Squaw* Bay</i> → <i>Mawikwe Bay</i> "weeping woman" <i>Squaw* Creek</i> → <i>Ka Kwi-Tuhu-u Creek</i> "cougar" <i>Squaw* Spring</i> → <i>Patósway Spring</i> "alpine fir" <i>Squaw* Creek</i> → <i>Sun Creek</i> <i>Squaw* Point</i> → <i>Defense Point</i> <i>Little Squaw* Creek</i> → <i>Little Maiden Creek</i> <i>Squaw* Meadow</i> → <i>Shooting Star Meadow</i> <i>Squaw* Island</i> → <i>Unity Island</i>	Coeur d'Alene Ojibawé Burns-Paiute Nez Perce
2	Replace squaw* with an English name and maintain generic name	395:2007:MT 417:2014:AZ 411:2012:OR 425:2016:NY	<i>Squaw* Creek</i> → <i>Dawussuu Ashkaate</i> "million dollar creek" <i>Squaw-Humper* Table</i> → <i>Tahc'a Okute Aglehan</i> "deer hunting grounds" <i>Middle Fork Squaw* Creek</i> → <i>Iiyá Draw</i> "dry"	Crow Oglala Sioux Apache
3	Delete entire name and replace with an indigenous name	395:2007:MT 415:2013:SD 419:2015:AZ	<i>Squaw* Teats*</i> → <i>Mil-mil-teh Hill</i> "quaking aspen tree"	Confed. Salish & Kootenai Tribes
4	Replace squaw* with an indigenous name and alter generic name	396:2007:MT 412:2012:OR 419:2015:AZ	<i>Squaw* Teats*</i> → <i>East Fork Scru Creek</i> "East Fork Grandmother Creek" <i>Squaw* Creek Spring</i> → <i>Sai-be Spring</i> "Cattail Spring" <i>Squaw* Creek Mesa</i> → <i>Hósh Flat</i> "Cactus Flat Top"	Confed. Tribes of Siletz Indians Paiute Apache
5	Replace squaw* with personal name of an Anglo-American and maintain generic	392:2006:MT 397:2008:WA 400:2009:OR	<i>Squaw* Lake</i> → <i>Christiansen Lake</i> <i>Squaw* Creek</i> → <i>John Paulson Creek</i> <i>Squaw* Butte</i> → <i>Rettie Buttte</i>	
6	OTHER	392:2007:OR 396:2007:MT	<i>Squaw* Point Marsh</i> → <i>Egret Marsh</i> <i>Squaw* Grave Butte</i> → <i>In-matl-qe Butte</i>	

fact that strategy 1 seems to address the needs of both the majority and minority community may help to explain the relative popularity of this approach within the corpus.

4. Conclusion

As with any study, this research raises more questions than it answered. Just a few issues worthy of future exploration include the following: (1) the potential relationship between linguistic strategies for toponymic replacement and governmental acceptance/rejection rates; (2) regional, temporal, and national preferences in the linguistic used to add or alter the names of geographical features; and (3) comparisons of governmental policies regarding the development and maintenance of toponyms with pertinence to other ethno-racial/national groups. Given the limited scope and size of the current investigation, it was not possible to address these and many other intriguing research questions.

Nevertheless, the current investigation did reveal important information about the relative complexity of regulating place-naming. In addition, it corroborated previous research (e.g. Heikkilä and Fondahl 2010; Kana'iaupuni and Malone 2006) that has highlighted the many ways in which indigenous peoples have used place-naming to publicly reaffirm their historical, and social, identities. As Merskin (2010, 346) explains: “to many Native people, renaming is not just a matter of politeness, it is an effort to reclaim indigenous identity and decolonize the landscape”. Moreover, as shown here and elsewhere (David 2011) tracing alterations commemorative place-naming can lay bare palpable shifts in the official presentation of the nation’s evolving value-system, as eponymously encoded in its public landmarks. In this way, the onomastic analyses often offer important insights into not only “linguistic form but also of the politics of language” (Makoni, Makoni, and Mashiri 2007, 445).

Finally, this investigation also shed light on the many challenges and benefits of a collaborative institutional policies and practices in implementing language changes. Indeed, one of the most significant findings of this investigation was the importance of institutional policies and legislative acts for eradicating language use injurious to minorities. This final result is particularly gratifying given the current climate in which calls to respect linguistic sensitivities are regularly ridiculed and denigrated.⁷ Though by no means perfect, the collaborative policies and practices explored here demonstrate that it is entirely possible to actively promote communal unity *and* diversity without compromising institutional demands for organizational efficiency, accuracy, and consistency.

Notes

¹ For historico-political discussions of the *s-word use in US toponymy, see: Bright (2000, 2004); King (2003); Merskin (2010).

² For a detailed discussion of state legislation prohibiting potentially offensive official toponymy, see: Gasque (2000); Monmonier (2006).

³ For more on the Anglicization of Native American place names in Oregon, see McArthur (1996).

⁴ The word “official” is underlined to emphasize the point that many geographical formations registered as “nameless” by governments may well carry longstanding indigenous names (Wilkinson, Marika, and Williams 2009).

⁵ Cases involving this potential opprobrium constituted 65.48% of the total corpus. This prevalence may say more about the effectiveness of recent bilateral Tribal and federal efforts than substantive changes in the attitudes of many local residents. Repeatedly, in the case summaries, it was noted that non-indigenous community members insisted that *squaw** was a positive semantic equivalent to “maiden”. This insistence upon privileging non-indigenous linguistic sensitivities is endemic of racism.

⁶ For more on the controversy over the etymology of this term and its impact on official toponymy, see Bright (2000).

⁷ For example, in an editorial featured in the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, legislation to prohibit the use of

squaw* in US toponyms was ridiculed as “political correctness on crack” King (2003, 3).

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