



May 2012

ZOOM

in on america

By the U.S. Missions of Austria and Poland

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LANGUAGES OF NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS



Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, right, a Northern Cheyenne Indian, stands as a Hopi honor guard helps open the ceremonies to dedicate the National Museum of the American Indian, on the National Mall in Washington, September 21, 2004. (AP Photo)

IN THIS ISSUE: LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

ZOOM IN ON AMERICA

ZOOM IN ON AMERICA ADDS A PAGE

DEAR READERS, FROM NOW ON ZOOM WILL HAVE 5 PAGES. WE HAVE ADDED ONE PAGE TO BE ABLE TO SHOW YOU MORE OF AMERICA. OUR NEW PAGE 5 WILL BE A SPACE FOR PHOTOS AND ... MORE PHOTOS. IN THE 4-PAGE FORMAT WE DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH ROOM TO ILLUSTRATE THE ARTICLES WITH PICTURES AND WE WANT TO INCLUDE AS MANY VISUALS AS POSSIBLE. WE WANT TO SHOW YOU THE UNITED STATES JUST AS MUCH AS TO TALK ABOUT IT. WE HOPE THAT YOU WILL APPRECIATE THE BIGGER ZOOM.

IS THERE A FUTURE FOR INDIAN LANGUAGES?

Many Families, but No Single Parent

Eskimoan, Algonkian, Iroquian, Appalachian, Muskogian, Siouan, Caddoan, Shoshonean, Athabaskan, Salishan are some of the names of families of Native American Indian languages used north of the Mexican border. When the great migration of Europeans started in the 17th century, there existed in North America about 300 different languages belonging to different language families. Unlike in Europe, where almost all languages derived from one common source, the Proto-Indo-European language, there probably never was a language from which the Native American languages sprouted, though some families seem to have been related to each other in the remote past. In the 1890s scientific explorer John Wesley Powell recognized 55 families of Indian languages.

Enforced Americanization

Throughout the centuries, many Indian languages disappeared. The reasons for their extinction were complex. The encounter with European languages made Indian languages subordinate. Bad times for Indian languages arrived at the end of the 19th century when the government implemented strict measures to "Americanize" Indian children. In a now famous case in 1895, 19 Hopi men were sent to prison on Alcatraz Island for a year for refusing to send their children to a boarding school far from their homes, in Keams Canyon. They did not want their children to "learn the white man's ways." They were also concerned for their children's health as the school was known to be crowded and have very poor sanitary conditions, producing health risks for the kids.

More Reasons for Extinction of Languages

It was also at the end of the 19th century that some traditional Indian ceremonies were banned. The isolation of some reservations, the emergence of English mass media and the development of new technologies, which left the tribal languages behind as "old fashioned" helped contribute to the process. Many Indian languages existed only in their oral version so when the last speakers died, their language died with them.

Preserve What's Left

Today, there are still about 150 Native American Indian languages. Fortunately, the approach towards them has changed too. Efforts to preserve and save Indian languages from extinction are now visible in many Indian communities. The trend is supported by non-Native Americans who understand that linguistic diversity adds to the richness and variety of American culture and is in the interest of all Americans.

Some Are on the Rise

The language of the Navajo (Dine Bizaad) belongs to the Athabaskan family of languages. This language is the most-spoken of any Native American language north of the Mexican border with the total number of speakers exceeding 148,000 (some sources estimate 170,000.) There was also a time when the Navajo language did a lot of good for America...

The article on the next page has the story.

NAVAJO'S CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICA

Does the fact that an active knowledge of Dine is required for all candidates for the Miss Navajo title add to the popularity of the language? It surely does, but, more importantly, it is the attitude of the Navajo, proud of the ancient language of their forefathers as well as the overall improving attitude towards preserving Native American languages that is paving the road towards a secure future for the Navajo language.

Until recently, little was known about the contribution of the Navajo language to America's success in WWII. A secret code based on Dine Bizaad, devised to transmit secret communications in the Pacific Theater, was successfully used, saving thousands of American soldiers and helping win important battles. The code was never broken by the Japanese intelligence service that had easily broken every other cipher. However, information about the small group of Navajo Marines known as the Code or Wind Talkers was revealed only some twenty-five years after the war.

Indecipherable Code of the Navajo

It all started in 1942 when a civilian, Phillip Johnston, heard about the problem American cryptologists faced with codes. At the time the Japanese intelligence service quickly broke all new codes. Johnston, the son of a Protestant missionary who lived on Navajo reservations, was one of the few outsiders who spoke their language. Realizing the potential for a code based on the difficult and little-known language, he came up with the idea to create a code based on Dine, the Navajo language.

Next, the Marines recruited young Navajo vol-

unteers fluent in both English and Dine and created some 500 words useful in communications. The words were either directly taken from Dine Bizaad and associated with a military term (e.g. the Navajo word for turtle "chay-da-gahi" came to denote a tank, and "besh-lo" which means "iron fish" was used for a submarine,) or spelled out using Navajo words associated with a letter of the alphabet of its English equivalent (e.g. the letter "A" was "Wo-La-Chee" as this word meant "ant".)

Even though the code was based on Navajo, the coded messages were indecipherable even for Navajos that were not trained in its working. The first 29 Marines, who came to be known as "Walking Secret Codes" were not allowed to write down messages. The Marines served on many battlefields in the Pacific Theater. On Iwo Jima, where one of the most important battles was fought, the service of the Wind Talkers was invaluable for the final victory. During the first 48 hours alone, they coded over 800 transmissions, a task that would have taken much longer with older codes.

In 1968 the code was finally declassified, but it took another 33 years to officially recognize the contribution of the Navajo Code Talkers. In 2001 they received Congressional Medals of Honor.

The movie "Windtalkers" (2002) starring Nicholas Cage, Adam Beach, Peter Stormare and Noah Emmerich, tells the story of two U.S. Marines who are assigned to protect Navajo Marines who use the Navajo language as an unbreakable cipher.

Official website of Code Talkers:
<http://www.navajocodetalkers.org/>

THE MAN WHO WROTE DOWN A LANGUAGE

A man called Sequoyah (1776-1843) created a writing system for the Cherokee language. The son of a Virginia fur trader and a Cherokee woman, he became a silversmith. He took part in the War of 1812 and while in service, he learned how important it was for a soldier to write letters home, read orders and record events. When he returned home, he started creating symbols to represent the sounds of

the Cherokee language. It took him 12 years to devise the syllabary which he taught to his daughter, Ayoka. By reading out loud the texts he had written, she showed the Cherokees the usefulness of literacy. In 1821, when the system was completed, thousands of Cherokees wanted to learn to read and write their language. In 1828 the first national, bi-lingual newspaper "Cherokee Phoenix" was published.

ACTIVITY PAGE

DID YOU KNOW?

The largest Indian pow-wow in America and the largest North American Indian Fair is believed to be the **Navajo Nation Fair** held on the first weekend after Labor Day (the first Monday in September). About 100,000 people come to see this event which includes singing and dancing to celebrate the harvest season, an all Indian rodeo, a display of fine arts and crafts, concerts, the Miss Navajo pageant, an inter-tribal pow-wow, as well as events featuring Indian food and dress.

EXERCISE MATCH CAPTIONS WITH PHOTOS

Read the AP captions to the photos on p. 5. Which captions 1-7 go with the photos a-g?

1. *To change the image of Native Americans as trinket and blanket makers, Nora Begay, Navajo, shows that jewel-making ability pays off for Indians who work in electronics industry. The Kaibeto, Arizona, woman, Miss Indian America title holder, played hostess at National Congress of American Indians in Chicago, Sept. 29, 1971. Electronics devices are made in this case by members of the Zuni, New Mexico, group.*

2. *Libby Chee, a 20-year-old Navajo student, stands beneath a sign reading "Indian Power" in a classroom at Navajo Community College at Tsaile Lake, Ariz., on July 28, 1971. The first ever school created on a reservation, founded by the Navajo Nation two-and-a-half years ago, is progressive and also preserves Navajo culture.*

3. *A dancer with the Hopi dance group from Second Mesa, Arizona, performs the Magic Buffalo Dance during the first performance of the 86th annual Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial Dances on Thursday, Aug. 9, 2007, at Red Rock Park in Church Rock, New Mexico.*

4. *Corporal Henry Bahe, Jr., left, and Pvt. First Class George H. Kirk, Navajo code talkers serving with a Marine Signal Unit, operate a portable radio set in*

a jungle clearing, close behind the front lines on the island of Bougainville in New Guinea, (present-day Papua New Guinea) in this December, 1943, U.S. Marine Corps photo. On Thursday, July 26, 2001, Navajo code talkers and their surviving relatives will be honored with Congressional Gold Medals at a ceremony at the Capitol in Washington.

5. *In this photo provided by the Howe family, Everett Howe is shown with the portrait he was drawing in honor of his uncle, Navajo Code Talker David Tsosie. Tsosie has died at age 83. Tsosie died Saturday, Jan. 20, 2007, in Bloomfield, N.M., where he had lived for several years.*

6. *President Barack Obama smiles for a photo with a group Marine Corps Navajo Code Talkers after delivering remarks at the White House Tribal Nations Conference, Friday, Dec. 2, 2011, at the Interior Department in Washington.*

7. *Shanika Begay, left, and Darius Yazzie, pose for a photo in front of Tohatchi Elementary School on Thursday, Sept. 3, 2009, in Tohatchi, N.M. New Mexico Public Education Secretary Veronica Garcia called Tohatchi students, like Begay and Yazzie, "astonishing" for improving their math and reading scores.*

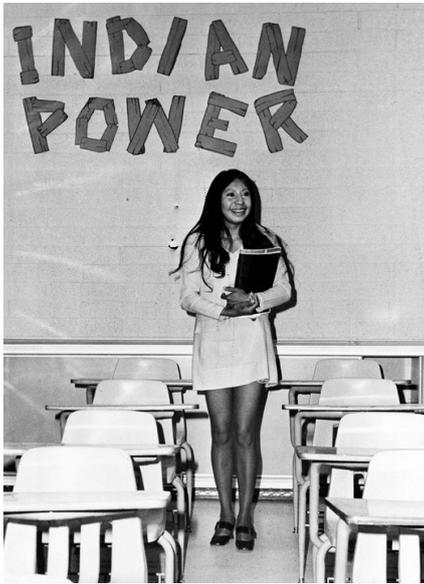
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a



b



c



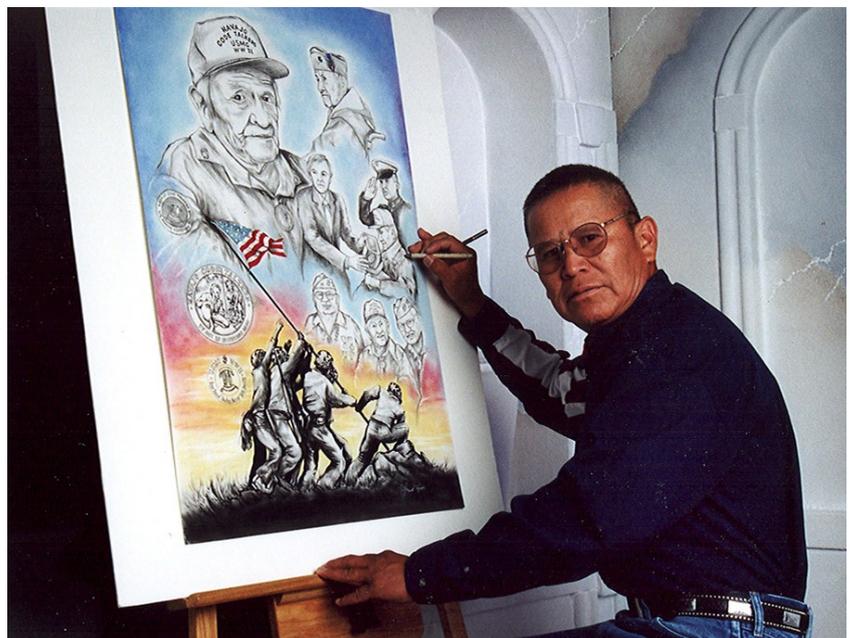
d



e



f



g