

Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

North American Cultural Group Names – Terms of Reference

As part of a larger project to change Collections Management Systems at the Pitt Rivers Museum, I have been working on updating the lists of Cultural Group Names currently used within the Museum to identify the cultures from whom the objects come. The original list was primarily composed in the late 1990's, at the same time as the original Collections database, from the information provided by the donors or collectors. This information was either accepted literally, or was checked against Ethnologue, a missionary-run website which identifies Peoples by their languages. It is also an un-controlled list, meaning that any Museum staff with read-write access to the database could add or change Cultural Group Names.

As the list grew over time, so did discussion about improving it. It was known within the Collections section that there were racist, derogatory and other inappropriate terminologies held within this list. However, it was felt that the historic language needed to be kept so that it could still be used as a means of searching the databases by members of the public. (The current database system is not fully relational, and would not allow searching for one term which had been superseded by another.) It was also clear that this would not be an easy thing to fix. An investment of research time and money would be needed to make any type of a dent in this work – two things in very short supply in the Museum. Small areas of work were done, and often by specialists working on specific projects, but nothing comprehensive.

Now, however, the Museum has a small window of time to not only update the list, but to create a new database dedicated to Cultural Group Names which will work in conjunction with the wider Object, Photograph, Sound and Manuscript database. It will allow for lists of appropriate and inappropriate synonyms so that any term can be searched for, although only specific names will be authorised for use in new cataloguing and retrospective data-cleaning.

What you will find in the attached table are the results of the research I have been doing into the Cultural Group Names for the Indigenous Peoples of North America who are represented within the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum. It is set up so that all the fields will be searchable, and so that any number of terms or federations or groups can be used as terms. Here is a description of what each field of information in the database represents:

Region – This refers to 'Cultural Regions' used by anthropologists, art historians, etc., to group Indigenous Peoples by where they live. This is where terms such as 'Arctic', 'Plains', 'Woodlands', 'Southwest', etc. will be found.

Federation or Culture Group Name – This is an inelegant heading for the highest level of Group affiliation I could discern. These may be umbrella affiliations – linguistic, cultural, and/or political – to which Peoples have been ascribed, or to which they have ascribed themselves. If I could attribute a Peoples to one of these groupings, then this section states Peoples' individual name.

Group Name – A specific name for a People who are, or may be members of one of the wider groups.

Band Name – A smaller unit of Peoples.

Community Name – The smallest unit of Peoples – sometimes a geographic community, like a village, or a specific Reservation.

Country/Countries and Geographic Location – This refers to the current Geo-political names for the lands where Peoples lived historically, and currently.

Appropriate Synonyms – These include the names used by Peoples for themselves. If this self-designated name is not already used in one of the previous fields, it will be marked with an *.

Inappropriate Synonyms – These lists are generally short, but only due to a lack of information.

Related Groups – These can be other Indigenous Peoples or groups of Indigenous Peoples who may have had relationships or affiliations with these People.

Corresponding Current Database term – How these People are referred to on the current database list.

Notes – Notes and explanations relating to use of terms, or other relevant information. This will be used to help direct data cleaning and new cataloguing going forward.

I am keenly aware of this database's shortcomings, and of the fact that I am doing this from a desk in Oxford, England, and so very far removed both geographically and culturally from the incredible work being done locally by so many collectives, individuals, Nations, Tribes and Councils. I have reached out as much as possible, but it will never be enough, and as I have no budget for consultations, I was compromised by how much information I felt I could reasonably request for free. I am also aware that the information is still organised using a highly taxonomic model. This is not my preferred way of conveying this information in the long term, but to populate the database this is where things must begin. I would like to highlight the following resources, organisations and individuals who have all generously contributed, either knowingly or unknowingly, to my education and challenged my thought processes and viewpoint. My great thanks to them all.

- Aaron Capella and Tribal Nations Maps – www.tribalnationsmaps.com
- Native Land Maps and Resources – www.Native-Land.ca
- National Indigenous Knowledge and Language Alliance/Alliance Nationale des Connaissances et des Langues Autochtones NIKLA – ANCLA, with permission from Camille Callison – nationalindigenousknowledgeandlanguagealliance.home.blog, 'First Nations, Metis and Inuit – Indigenous Ontologies (FNMIIO)'

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/e/2PACX-1vSOKcm9HB-28iSqNN3sQd5hV7bMLMGpCeGL0dkQgyg2AiZAMWUF0sp98GyxlvLXYIWqSZ3nX_j_q4UN/pubhtml

- Juanita Johnston, Collections & Tourism Manager, U'mista Cultural Centre for her help with Kwakwaka'wakw Peoples, and for directing me to First Voices, www.firstvoices.com/explore/FV/sections/Data
- Marge Bruchac, Ph.D., Abenaki, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Penn Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology
- Laura Phillips, Coordinator: Collections & Exhibitions, Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute

- Chip Colwell, Senior Curator of Anthropology, and Dominique Alhambra, Anthropology Collections Manager and NAGPRA Coordinator, Denver Museum of Nature and Science, and Restoring Ancestral Connections – www.restoringancestralconnections.org
- The writings of Chelsea Vowell, in particular *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada* (Winnipeg: Highwater Press, 2016).
- Laura Peers, Professor Emerita, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford
- Isabel Tovar, NAGPRA Liaison & Assistant Curator of Archaeology and Ethnography, History Colorado

Please do share this with as many friends, colleagues, and organisations as you would like. Unfortunately, due to the limited amount of time I have for this project, which encompasses Cultural Groups from across the globe, I will need to ask for any input by 31 March 2020. I look forward to any guidance or advice that you are willing to share, and I hope that this is just the first step in an ongoing process of improvements and reflection on the part of the Museum, and perhaps the opening of new lines of communication between Indigenous Peoples in North America and the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Please send any guidance or feedback directly to me at meghan.obrienbackhouse@prm.ox.ac.uk

Many thanks,
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