

Comparative Study: How “Indian” Differs from “Indi@”

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My Research Questions:

- ❖ Why is the Spanish term "Indi@" considered to be more offensive to Indigenous Peoples of Central and South America than the terms "Indian/NDN" to Indigenous Peoples of the north? How are they similar/different? What does the shift from Indian to NDN mean to northern Natives?
- ❖ **My findings/thesis:** Although the term Indian is controversial, the use of the term Indian/NDN does not carry the same negative weight or connotation as the term indi@ does for southern Natives. While it is usually preferred that non-Natives not use the word "Indian" and is more acceptable only when Native people themselves say it, the reclamation of the word creates a shift that counters the historical use of the word.

Historical Context-Similarities

The term Indian and Indi@ meant to:

- Create “Us v Them” positionality in times of war
- Used to differentiate between castes (throughout Latin America) with full-blooded “Indi@s” being at the very bottom of the caste; similarly, Indians was the primary racialized term used to categorize Native peoples from citizens and other racialized groups in the North
- Homogenize distinct tribes, groups, villages etc.; even anthropologists used the names of distinct tribes/peoples more than politicians

Civilizar a los Indios, he ahí el gran Problema Nacional

Translation: “Civilizing the Indians, This is the great National Problem” ;title for a section in a Mexican magazine in July 7 1918

INDIAN OUTBREAK FEARED.

**Alaskan Situation Serious—Indians Out-
number Soldiers.**

Methodology: Data collection through digitized national archives of newspapers

Contemporary Context: The Term Today

Differences:

- Shift among younger northern Natives in reclaiming the word Indian to “NDN”; From social media hashtags to company titles, the term is still widely used in both forms.
- Commonly accepted among northern Natives in using Indian or American Indian by older community members
- Throughout Latin America, the term Indi@ is used as an insult/slur by both Native and non-Native people; the term is very rarely used jokingly by Spanish-speaking Natives

Similarity:

- Wider preference by northern and southern Natives for non-Natives to NOT use the word at all; this recreates the power dynamic that existed (and still exists) during colonial times

Methodology: Data collection through digital platforms



La India María is the protagonist in a series of Mexican films that is based on stereotypes of Indigenous women

Youtube videos/interviews:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L81KdVPmqB0&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR0nkMpjdLKQNrKvkNS5yIbBoPFp4gzRyv5PEopSh3KCCYrVYGUzy203sKM>

“Llega alguien de algún rancho y también los propios, gente morena, les dicen: Pinche indio./When someone from the countryside comes [to the city], even their own brown people tell them: fucking indians.”-Rosendo Vallejo

DEFEND. DEVELOP. DECOLONIZE.

We are unapologetically, unabashedly, NDN. United like never before, we rise together—arm in arm—to equip all Indigenous Peoples with the tools needed to become architects of our future. Through a holistic approach to infrastructure, funding, advocacy, movement building, and philanthropy we are fostering a world of justice and equity for all people and the planet.

Take Action with NDN Collective

Company, founded by Crystal Echo Hawk, is called **NDN Collective**. This company clearly shows the acceptance of the reclamation of the term Indian with a full team of 23 members spanning across the globe.



Sticker sold by Native-owned company **Nsrgnts**

Statement by this news company: **Indian Country Today** is a daily digital news platform that covers the Indigenous world, including American Indians and Alaska Natives.



INDIAN COUNTRY TODAY

Digital. Indigenous. News.



The current interim president was found to have deleted this tweet about the former Indigenous President Evo Morales saying: The "poor indian" is clinging onto power.



American Indian, particularly, is legitimate to use by both Native and non-Native people. Again, not all northern Natives prefer the term but it has clearly gained acceptance as two major public platforms continue to use it in their respective titles



Methodology: Personal Reflections and Experiences

- I also highlight the personal experiences of those close to me such as my aunt Malxux (María) who is Native, specifically Maya Akateka.
 - Recently, she told me about her neighbor: “She started harassing me by calling me india, saying that we are dirty and out of control.”
 - She also told me about the time that someone at a hospital said something along the lines of: “Pobrecitos los indios. Ellos no saben, son mal educados./These poor indians. They don’t know anything, they’re ill-mannered.”
- I also reflect on the fact that I can’t speak Akateko, our Native language. My mother would tell me that as a young immigrant in the US, people would constantly call her “india” and I can’t imagine how much of a toll that took on her identity. I believe that this term contributed to the loss of connection to my heritage because she didn’t want me to go through the same discrimination she endured had I learned the language.

Conclusion

- My final conclusions are that southern Natives generally condemn the use of the word “indi@” in any context and by anyone. There is yet to be any reclamation, if any, of the Spanish term. Considering the nuances in the context of the North, there seems to be more wide acceptance of the term “Indian” as a personal identity and as a legal indicator. However, I still urge that non-Natives and Natives alike should refer to each other by our traditional names. Using our traditional names not only recognizes our differences as Indigenous Peoples but also restores our sense of identity that remained and survived through attempted erasure.

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