



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on May 4, 2011

Indians On Warpath Over bin Laden Operation Code Word: Geronimo

American Indians are on the warpath to protest the code name used during the operation to kill Osama bin Laden. U.S. operatives used “Geronimo,” a reference to the 19th-century Chiracahua Apache (pictured, left) who died in captivity in 1909 after a life spent fighting Mexicans and Americans.



As well, the U.S. Senate [will convene](#) a pow-wow tomorrow to discuss Indian stereotypes. The Senate Committee On Indians Affairs had scheduled a hearing to ponder the weighty issue of “Stolen Identities: The Impact of Racist Stereotypes on Indigenous People,” and its deliberations will now include using “Geronimo” to describe either bin Laden or the operation to kill him.

Only a medicine man can know with certainty the result of the alleged effrontery of the pale faces, but the safe bet is that the rhetorical tomahawks will be out and scalps will be taken.

Wounded Pride

The latest trail of tears began, [ABC News reports](#), almost immediately when Indian activists learned, from early reports, that Geronimo’s hallowed name was taken in vain. The White House blurted out the name as a code-word for Osama. Yet it is unclear whether Osama’s name was Geronimo, or whether the name for the operation was Geronimo.

The Navy Seals who killed the world’s most wanted man dispatched this message when their mission was done: “Geronimo E-KIA.” E stands for enemy.

[Said CIA Director Leon Panetta:](#)

Once those teams went into the compound, I can tell you that there was a time period of almost 20 or 25 minutes where we — you know, we really didn’t know just exactly what was going on. And there were some very tense moments as we were waiting for information. But finally, Adm. McRaven came back and said that he had picked up the word “Geronimo,” which was the code word that represented that they got bin Laden.

Time magazine, on the other hand, [reported the use](#) of the Apache warrior’s name thusly:

The President sat stone-faced through much of the events. Several of his aides, however, were pacing. For long periods of time, nobody said a thing, as everyone waited for the next update. ... So when word came that a helicopter had been grounded, a sign that the plan was already off course, the tension increased.



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Minutes later, more word came over the transom. “Visual on Geronimo,” said a disembodied voice, using the agreed-upon code name for America’s most wanted enemy, Osama bin Laden. Word then came that Geronimo had been killed. Only when the last helicopter lifted off some minutes later did the President know that his forces had sustained no casualties.

Perhaps, as [ABC News reported](#), it is a distinction without a difference. A website titled “Indian Country” has published a war cry from a Harvard professor who is, apparently, also an Indian. [She claims](#) the White House speaks with forked tongue.

The “bin Laden is dead” news story will make thousands of impressions on the minds of people around the globe, and the name Geronimo will now be irrevocably linked with the world’s most reviled terrorist.

Potentially the most disturbing fact is what this says to American Indian children. It equates being Native American with being hated, an enemy to the world, and someone to be hunted down and killed, and re-casts one of their heroes into a villainous role.

[Time Magazine’s Swampland blog](#) first reported the details yesterday that the target, Osama bin Laden, was code-named Geronimo, in keeping with The White House’s afternoon press conference.

But the story coming from the White House evolved by evening, with what appears to be a “re-tooling” of the message, which now states that the “mission” was code-named Geronimo.

The CNN White House blog featured a historic black and white photo of Geronimo and the headline, “Osama bin Laden codename “Geronimo”, for the duration of the afternoon at [whitehouse.blogs.cnn.com](#). There is currently a post with the title “Osama bin Laden mission codename ‘Geronimo’ (emphasis added) with a timestamp of 4:46 PM, though some commenters express outrage over the earlier title.

Tribal members from around the country are turning to social networking sites Facebook and Twitter as an outlet to express their anger and sadness at the unwelcome association. “This sucks,” said Harold Monteau, an attorney and tribal member from Rocky Boy, Montana, “A lot of people are angry about the obvious stereotypes it implies.”

“It’s another attempt to label Native Americans as terrorists,” said Paula Antoine from the Rosebud Sioux Tribe in South Dakota. Beaver North Cloud, a Jemez Pueblo tribal member from Albuquerque, New Mexico expressed her frustration, saying “Damn it!!!! Why am I not surprised, yet so disappointed beyond words.”

[The writer recited](#) Indian voluntarism for the American military that supposedly goes back “200 years.”

Senate Convenes Powwow

However accurate these tales of Indian exploits many moons past, the Senate [will bang](#) the tom-toms about stereotypes at tomorrow’s hearings, ABC News reported, quoting the chief of the Indian committee’s staff.

“The hearing was scheduled well before the Osama bin Laden operation became news, but the concerns over the linking of the name of Geronimo, one of the greatest Native American heroes, with the most hated enemies of the United States is an example of the kinds of issues we intended to address at Thursday’s hearing,” Loretta Tuell, the committee’s chief counsel, said in a statement.



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“These inappropriate uses of Native American icons and cultures are prevalent throughout our society, and the impacts to Native and non-Native children are devastating,” Tuell said. “We intend to open the forum to talk about them.”

The hearing will feature [Suzan Shown Harjo](#), who launched a legal attack on the Washington Redskins for obvious reasons.

Who Was Geronimo

[Geronimo was](#) the legendary Apache who eluded the U.S. Army for years. He was widely known for his daring exploits and physical courage. He went to war against Mexicans and American after the former slaughtered his family in 1858.

In 1886, the Army finally captured and imprisoned him. He converted to Christianity and rode in President Theodore Roosevelt’s inaugural parade. He died of pneumonia in 1909 after falling from his horse.

Most commenters on stories at the ABC News site think the uproar over using Geronimo’ name is a ridiculous. [Wrote one:](#)

One would think Native Americans would be proud to have a great warrior like Geronimo linked to the death of the world’s worst terrorist. I guess not.

Next time, call it Operation White Guy. Nobody will be offended.

A commenter who claimed Indian ancestry [opined thusly:](#)

As a native american myself i do find the use of geronimo a badge of honor. People use it to symbolize bravery! To symbolize going against odds! To my other brother and sisters, stop ctying about everything the states do and start worrying about fixing our communities. It was a long time ago and its time to stop blaming and start living.



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