

Sienna Latham

Anth 4980

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Anthropology of Sienna Rose

My project begins with a childhood photo of me at about three years old, my black hair framing a big, joyful smile on my face. I am the embodiment of my ancestors' deepest dreams - their longing for happiness, heritage, and the survival of our people all captured in one small, precious baby, Sienna Rose. Even my name carries great significance - Sienna, meaning red and Rose a flower, stunning in its beauty yet also symbolizing the strength of self-preservation. This name holds immense significance for me, embodying the purpose I am meant to fulfill in this life. It is a heritage entrusted to me, to uphold and defend. Which I am dedicated to honoring.

I start my project by proudly declaring my tribe and clan affiliations, as it is a powerful way for us to assert our presence and reclaim our place in non-indigenous spaces. We have been taught that this is how we ground ourselves and honor our ancestors. An elder once told to me the importance of speaking our language, even if no one else in the room understands. It is a tribute to our past and a reminder to others that we are still here, not forgotten people.

Noon Payomkawichum pi Qeenqikuktum

(I am Luiseño and of the Ground Squirrel clan).

No\$uun 'ahuyaxi looviq nooto omqalqla

(I am happy you are here with me)

Noon pilachikat chamteela pi chamteela kwaavichukat

(I am a language learner and language protector).

Being a language protector is a role that was given to me by my elder, so that I may follow in his footsteps and continue to awaken what we call a sleeping language. One might ask why it is sleeping. Well, as part of a national policy of assimilation, in 1864 Congress prohibited Native Americans from being taught in their own languages. They were quoted as stating that “The first step to be taken toward civilization, towards teaching the Indians the mischief and folly of continuing in their barbarous practices, is to teach them the English language.”(Saville-Troike 1984) This law was not reversed until the 1990s, meaning that my generation of cousins - typically referred to as the 7th or 8th generation - are the first to be born not under these laws and restrictions. The reference to the 8th generation pertains to how many generations you are removed from the mass colonization event, so for my tribe, that was my Nopiiwika Neshmal, Juana Machado. My tribe, the Payomkawichum meaning people of the west, are from southern California. This actually makes me of the 6th generation, as we were colonized a hundred or so years after our east coast cousins.

My project includes language snippets from my aunt, Villiana Calac, from the 1930s speaking to anthropologists about language preservation. She discusses how the younger

generation is scrambling to save whatever knowledge is possible. She emphasizes that language is integral to understanding our ancestors and serves as the backbone for decolonizing our indigenous existence. Understanding how our ancestors interacted with the world around them extends to the plants and animals with which we coexist. Decolonizing our medicines enhances our understanding of traditional healing practices and establishes a bridge between our ancestors and descendants.

Preserving our language is something my family has been working on for over a century in the midst of colonial occupation. If it were not for their brave resistance against colonial assimilation, our culture and I would not exist today. I am dedicated to continuing this tradition of learning, teaching, and preserving our heritage. My goal is to pass down the invaluable gift of speaking chamteela as a first language to my future children, a practice that has not been upheld for over a century.

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