

## SAN ANTONIO TALK

The Aztec Indians never lived in San Antonio, nor in south Texas, for that matter. They roamed around what is now Arizona, California, and northwestern Mexico. *Aztec* is the present-day English word we use to designate the tribe that I'm talking about. We derived our word, however, from a former derivative, *Azteca*, which, in turn derived from the word *Aztlan*. The Indian word *Aztlan* meant "white land" and, supposedly, described the terrain that comprised their homelands--present day northwest Mexico and southwest United States.

The Aztlan Indians explored as far south and east as east-central Mexico. Some of them settled around a lake east of present-day Mexico City--a lake they referred to as *Texcoco*. That particular sub-tribe of Aztlans started referring to themselves as *Tenocha*; later the Spaniards shortened the name to *Tenoch*. The U.S. anthropologist Voegelin referred to the combined tribes as *Aztec-Tanoan*.

Scholarship begins to fizzle out at this point. As important as the information is, we know only that "somebody" also referred to the *Tenocha*, or *Tanoan*, Indians as the *Meztliapans*; today's *Mexicans*. The word *Meztliapan* meant "Moon Lake," and evidently referred to Lake *Texcoco*.

So there you have it. They never lived here, but a group of Pacific Coast Indians, who wandered down to the central part of Mexico have given those of us up north in San Antonio a rather rich linguistic legacy.

Admittedly, the two words *Tenocaha* and *Tanoa* have not influenced our San Antonio talk at all; and the link to the word *Texas*, from

Lake *Texcoco*, most likely has no direct *Aztlan* connection.

Nonetheless, no less than thirty-five San Antonio businesses today carry some sort of name that utilizes the *Meztliapan* derivative.

Most of these businesses use the straightforward words *Mexico*, *Mexican*, or *Mexicana*; or the compound *Mexican-American*; or the shortened *Mex*. A significant number, however, show contemporary creativity, with blended names such as: *Mexart*, *Mexcinema*, *Mexicocina*, *Mex-Link*, *Mexicor*, and *Mexiport*.

One San Antonio business has stuck to the original Indian source-word, *Aztlan*. Seventeen businesses utilize the Aztec derivative, seven *Azteca*. And one enterprising linguist uses the word *Aztex*.

We also have three streets in our city that bear the Aztec influence: *Aztec Alley*, *Aztec Village*, and *Aztec Lane*.

All of this brings, to me at least, a new understanding of one of south Texas's most famous contemporary poets. Twice, in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldua writes:

This land was Mexican once

was Indian always

and is.

And will be again.

-#-

Scott Baird  
April 2, 1995