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On Two William Morgans in Navajo Studies

Charlotte J. Frisbie

While reading Susan Berry Brill de Ramirez's *Native American Life-History Narratives: Colonial and Postcolonial Navajo Ethnography* (2007), I was struck by the inclusion of William Morgan on a list of non-Navajo, non-Native scholars the author views as largely responsible for establishing the foundation of Navajo studies scholarship.¹ Since the William Morgan I knew was a Navajo friend and colleague who received an honorary doctorate from the University of New Mexico (UNM) in 1970 at the same ceremony where I earned my PhD, I decided something was wrong. I quickly emailed five colleagues in Navajo studies and discovered that four others, like me, knew of only one William Morgan—the Navajo linguist. The fifth colleague, however, said, “no, there was another one but all I know is that he was not Navajo.” That reply, of course, made me stop what I was doing, delve into this “other one,” and eventually revisit some of the ethnographic work produced in Navajo studies by those scholars devoted to what later became known as the psychoanalytical school in anthropology.

The upshot of all this was a decision to call attention to this possible source of confusion and remind myself and everybody else in Navajo studies that there really were two William Morgans who contributed to the field.

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Neither of them ever included a middle name when publishing. Given the digging it took, I did not try to unearth every single detail about the Anglo William Morgan's life but believe a short summary of what I learned is worth including.

This William Morgan, whose date of birth continues to elude me, graduated from Harvard University in 1918 and served in World War I. He married Christiana Drummond Morgan (6 October 1897–14 March 1967) on 9 May 1919 after the war ended and eventually became a clinical psychologist trained in Jungian analysis. The couple settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and had one child—son Peter Councilman Morgan born in 1920. Christiana, a lay psychoanalyst at the Harvard Psychological Unit, apparently became the better known of the couple because of her work with Henry Murray, the behaviorist. Serving as an indication of her fame, Christiana's papers (1925–1974) are archived in the Center for the History of Medicine, Countway Library of Medicine at Harvard University. Among those associated with the Harvard Psychological Clinic from its inception in the 1920s, Christiana and Henry Murray coauthored the Thematic Apperception Test, more commonly known in clinical psychology as the TAT, in the 1930s.

Christiana and William Morgan became friends with anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn probably in the late 1920s. At some point, William worked with Navajos. These experiences, which mainly occurred near Gallup, New Mexico, led to several publications, both during his lifetime and after his death from tuberculosis in 1934. This William Morgan's five publications on the Navajos consist of two articles published during his lifetime: "Navaho Treatment of Sickness: Diagnosticians," *American Anthropologist* (1931); and "Navaho Dreams," *American Anthropologist* (1932).² The three posthumous publications include *Human-Wolves among the Navaho* (1936); "The Organization of a Story and a Tale" (with an introduction by Alfred N. Whitehead), *Journal of American Folklore* (1945); and an essay, "Some Notes on Navaho Dreams," in *Psychoanalysis and Culture: Essays in Honor of Géza Róheim* (1951), coauthored with Kluckhohn.³ Herein, Kluckhohn, listed as the primary author, states that Morgan's widow gave him access to William's unpublished field notes so he could combine Morgan's data with his own.

Unlike the Anglo clinical psychologist, the Navajo William Morgan (15 May 1917–6 January 2001) was a well-known linguist "who was born into the Tsínaajinii clan and born of Haltsooi." His Navajo name translated as "He who Walks with Warriors."⁴ At least part of the Navajo William Morgan's

reputation derived from his long-term association and collaboration with friend and colleague, linguist Robert “Bob” W. Young, who died on 20 February 2007 at age ninety-four.

This William Morgan, known to his friends as “Willie” and formally named William Morgan Sr., graduated in 1936 from Fort Wingate High School located in New Mexico. He and Bob, then a graduate student in linguistics at UNM, met in the fall of 1937 when both were working at the government’s Southwestern Range and Sheep Breeding Laboratory, then at Fort Wingate. Studying wool under a microscope by day, Bob and Willie worked on a Navajo orthography in the evenings. Willie told Bob how to say things in Navajo, and Bob wrote the answers down. This work continued a project Bob was doing for John P. Harrington, the Smithsonian linguist who had a contract from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to develop a practical orthography for writing the Navajo language. These evening discussions, which lasted from 1937 to 1938, led Willie to become deeply interested in reading and writing his own Navajo language and were the beginning of a partnership and personal friendship with Bob that lasted over sixty-three years. The orthography work, which has a long story filled with strong personalities and arguments among linguistic anthropologists Edward Sapir and Harry Hoijer, ethnographer Gladys A. Reichard, museum founder Mary C. Wheelwright, Fr. Berard Haile, O.F.M., and others, was eventually followed by other jobs, such as translating primers, children’s stories, and other texts to be used in schools on the reservation. By 1940 both Bob and Willie were working and producing materials for the BIA literacy program, which had the about-face goal of teaching all Navajos to read and write in Navajo.

Willie worked both on and off the reservation for the Navajo tribe and the BIA as a translator, interpreter, teacher’s aide, and college language instructor. He also worked with the Navajo-Cornell Field Health Research Project in Many Farms, Arizona, from 1956 to 1962 and the Native American Materials Development Center. At one point, he and Bob launched the monthly Navajo language newspaper *’Ádahooinítgíí*, “which began in the early 1940s and lasted into the mid 1950s.”⁵ In an article published in the Navajo Nation’s newspaper, *Navajo Times*, in 2001, Bob underscored the importance of Willie’s written language versions of the policies and procedures that needed discussion and vote in the Tribal Council, such as grazing, election, and development, to the whole Navajo Nation from the mid-1930s through the 1950s.⁶

Perhaps best known of all William Morgan Sr.'s works are the numerous dictionaries that he started to coauthor with Robert W. Young in 1943; he occasionally collaborated with others, such as linguist C. Leon Wall, in similar projects as well. The University of New Mexico Press published the results of a huge bilingual Navajo-English dictionary project, supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities beginning in 1975, as *The Navajo Language: A Grammar and Colloquial Dictionary* in 1980. This tome was revised and republished in 1987. Several years later, with assistance from linguist Sally Midgette, Young and Morgan also published *An Analytical Lexicon of Navajo* in 1992. As Bob noted, "Willie's expertise was of primary importance in both of these works . . . [his] expertise and dedication were essential—without these elements the dictionaries could not have been produced."⁷

William Morgan Sr. was honored on numerous occasions and in many places. In addition to an honorary doctorate from UNM, some of his colleagues in linguistics dedicated a collection of working papers on Navajo linguistics to him.⁸ Other discussions of William Morgan Sr.'s contributions to Navajo studies include two articles: one by Wayne Holm (1996), written when he was the Navajo Nation's director of education; and another by linguist David W. Dinwoodie (2003), which includes some life-history information that Willie provided Dinwoodie in an interview.⁹ After William Morgan Sr.'s death, *The Navajo Times* honored him with two tributes: one by a granddaughter, Jennifer Henderson (2001); and another by his lifetime friend and colleague Robert W. Young (2001). Many of these articles included photographs.

On the basis of my own experiences and those of colleagues, this informational piece is being offered as a cautionary tale. Anyone interested in Navajo studies needs to be aware of the existence of *two* William Morgans in Navajo studies' literature. These men cannot be distinguished by a middle initial in their publications. Moreover, both authors published by themselves and with coauthors. Perhaps the easiest way to distinguish them in bibliographic works is to remember that the psychological topics such as dreams, analysis of tales, "human-wolves," and the diagnosis of illness were studied by the Anglo William Morgan, a clinical psychologist and friend of Kluckhohn. The two works this William Morgan published before his death, "Navaho Treatment of Sickness: Diagnosticians" and "Navaho Dreams" (1931 and 1932, respectively), were destined to become famous in Navajo studies. Equally well known is his study on "human-wolves," which emerged in 1936,

two years after his death. His other two contributions to Navajo studies were published in 1945 and 1951, with Kluckhohn bringing the latter to fruition.

The Navajo William Morgan, who went by Willie, was a personal friend to many of us now working in Navajo studies. He is perhaps most readily distinguished as “the Dictionary Morgan,” and as a collaborator, colleague, and close friend of linguist Bob Young. Both men passed away recently—Morgan in 2001 and Young in 2007. Linguistic expertise most easily summarizes the significance of this William Morgan and his contributions to Navajo studies. As already noted above, Bob acknowledged that without Willie’s dedication and expertise, the dictionaries they did together, and in the 1990s with Midgette, could not have been produced.

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Notes

1. Susan Berry Brill de Ramirez, *Native American Life-History Narratives: Colonial and Postcolonial Navajo Ethnography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 41.
2. William Morgan, "Navaho Treatment of Sickness: Diagnosticians," *American Anthropologist* 33, no. 3 (1931): 390–402; and William Morgan, "Navaho Dreams," *American Anthropologist* 34, no. 3 (1932): 390–405.
3. William Morgan, *Human-Wolves among the Navaho*, Yale University Publications in Anthropology, no. 11 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1936); William Morgan, "The Organization of a Story and a Tale," *Journal of American Folklore* 58 (July–September 1945): 169–94; and Clyde Kluckhohn and William Morgan, "Some Notes on Navaho Dreams," in *Psychoanalysis and Culture: Essays in Honor of Géza Róheim*, eds. George B. Wilbur and Warner Muensterberger (New York: International Universities Press, 1951), 120–31.
4. Jennifer Henderson, "A Pioneer's Work to Preserve the Navajo Language," *Navajo Times*, 11 January 2001, p. A-8.
5. David W. Dinwoodie, "William Morgan (1917–2001): Navajo Linguist," *Anthropological Linguistics* 45, no. 4 (2003): 426, 426–49. This work includes a more complete bibliography of the works of William Morgan Sr.
6. Robert W. Young, "A Tribute to William Morgan: Educator Played Key Role in Evolution of Tribal Council and Courts," *Navajo Times*, 25 January 2001, p. A-9.
7. Ibid.
8. Theodore Fernhald and Kenneth L. Hale, eds., *Diné Bizaad Naalkaah: Navajo Language Investigations*, Working Papers on Endangered and Less Familiar Languages, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass.: MITWPL, 2000).
9. Wayne Holm, "On the Role of Young and Morgan in the Development of Navajo Literacy," in *Athabaskan Language Studies: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Young*, eds. Eloise Jelinek, Sally Midgette, Keren Rice, and Leslie Saxon (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 391–405; and Dinwoodie, "William Morgan."