

The Native American Mascot Controversy

A Handbook

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The Problems with Native American Mascots

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Sport has not been widely discussed in the field of multicultural education, yet sport is central to the lives of many students. It is critical that multicultural educators attend to the field of sport, because it plays a significant role in the socialization of youth. There are many sport-related topics that multicultural educators could address. This article focuses on the existence of Native American mascots in school-sponsored sport.

Because of the prevalence of stereotypes of Native Americans in United States popular culture, many have difficulty understanding the problems with Native American mascots. Even those who oppose these mascots often have trouble clearly articulating the reasons for their opposition. The purpose of this article is to lay out the main arguments against the use of Native American mascots. All of the arguments mentioned in this article are used by activists who are working to eliminate these mascots.

THE MASCOTS ARE RACIST STEREOTYPES

The most common argument against Native American mascots (and by “Native American mascots” I also refer to the many other items that are popular in U.S. culture) is that they represent racist stereotypes of Native Americans. Stereotypes of Native Americans appear in movies; government seals; advertisements and symbols for products like butter, beer, and paper; and statues and paintings that non-Natives have in their homes. Scholars have observed two main stereotypes: the “bloodthirsty savage,” which conveys the notions that Native Americans are wild, aggressive, violent, and brave; and the “noble

savage," which conveys the notions that Native Americans are primitive, childlike, silent, and part of the natural world (Bataille & Silet, 1980; Hilger, 1986; Lyman, 1982; Williams, 1980).

It is the stereotype of Native Americans as bloodthirsty savage that led non-Natives to choose Native American mascots for sport. Traits associated with this stereotype—such as having a fighting spirit and being aggressive, brave, stoic, dedicated, and proud—are associated with sport; thus, selecting a Native American mascot links sport teams with such traits. The appeal of this stereotype to many in sport is illustrated by the following quotations from supporters of Native American mascots: "I can think of no greater tribute to the American Indian than to name a team's warriors after courageous, cunning—and feared—warriors of the Indian nations, the braves" (Shepard, 1991, p. 14A); and "I look at that mascot, that Indian head, and it stirs me up. I think of getting real aggressive, and it brings out the aggressiveness in me. And it makes me go out there and really wrestle hard and fight hard, you know, because that's what those Indians were" (cited in Davis, 1993, p. 15).

When all the mascots representing Native Americans are considered (e.g., Indians, Redskins, Braves, Chiefs), it turns out that Native Americans are the most common mascot in U.S. sport. The other mascots that are most common are animals, most of which are also associated with aggression and fighting (e.g., tigers). Many consider it offensive that Native Americans are perceived and used as symbols in the same way as animals.

Stereotypes are misleading generalizations about a category of people. When people believe stereotypes, they tend to think that all, or almost all, people who belong to a particular category behave in the same way, and they tend to ignore the wide diversity of behavior exhibited by people within the category. Regarding the stereotype associated with the mascots, not all Native Americans in the past were aggressive, brave, dedicated fighters. And today, most Native Americans do not occupy their time fighting. Many non-Natives are aggressive, brave, dedicated fighters. Of course, many Native Americans take pride in their ethnic/racial background and are dedicated people. But do they have more pride and dedication than other groups? And, since Native Americans have extremely high rates of suicide, health problems, and poverty, asserting that this racial group has more pride than other groups is shallow.

The stereotype of Native Americans as aggressive is particularly offensive because it distorts the historical reality of European and European American aggression (i.e., the white invasion of Native American lands and subsequent conquering of people on these lands). Belief in this stereotype works to obscure the oppression, violence, and genocide initiated by European Americans against Native Americans, and serves as justification for these

acts. This stereotype is part of a mythological history of the western United States, according to which cowboys and so-called pioneers led a glorious and adventurous life fighting Native Americans. One reason the resistance to elimination of Native American mascots is so vigorous and emotionally charged is because when the activists critique the mascots they are also criticizing a form of American identity that is linked to myths about the western United States (Davis, 1993).

Native American mascots, and most other images of Native Americans in popular culture, are stereotypes that focus on the past, and thus these stereotypes reinforce the problematic view that associates Native Americans only with the past. This stereotyping works to obscure the lives of contemporary Native Americans. As one interview subject said, "Respect the living Indian, you know. Don't memorialize us. . . . [The mascots are] almost like a monument to the vanished American Indian" (Davis, 1993, p. 13). Recognizing and understanding the lives of contemporary Native Americans challenges this stereotype.

Native American mascots misrepresent, distort, and trivialize many aspects of Native American cultures, such as drumming, dancing, singing, and some aspects of religion. As an interview subject stated, "I compose memorial songs, I compose burial songs for my grandmothers and my grandfathers, my family. And when people [imitate] that at an athletic event, like at a baseball game, it hurts me, to see that people are making a mockery of me. We don't do that, what they're doing, this chanting" (Davis, 1993, p. 13). Most of those who support the mascots do not understand the meanings or realities of Native American lives and cultures. Thus, it is particularly ironic that many who want to retain Native American mascots think they are honoring Native Americans. As another interview subject asserted, "How can you honor me, when you don't know the first damn thing about me?" (Davis, 1993, p. 14).

Another irony related to the belief that Native Americans are being honored by the mascots is that "positive" views of Native Americans, and the practice of using symbols of Native Americans to represent sport teams and the like, began soon after the last of the Native American nations were conquered or subdued (Davis, 1993). Thus, one has to ask, who is being "honored" by Native American mascots, Native Americans or those who subdued Native Americans?

The mascots and most other images of Native Americans in popular culture lump all nations (i.e., "tribes") of Native Americans together, incorrectly conveying that there is a single Native American culture and rendering the diversity of Native American cultures invisible. For example, only some Native American nations have political structures that are dominated by a male chief, and headdresses are worn by members of only some nations.

Ethnic and racial groups other than Native Americans have occasionally been used as mascots. There are several reasons why these mascots are not as problematic as Native American mascots. First, these other mascots tend to either represent a people that lived in the past and are not alive today (e.g., Spartans) or were selected by people from the named ethnic group (e.g., Scots). Second, most of the mascots that represent other ethnic groups do not have the same association with aggression (e.g., Irish). And third, Native Americans should not have to condition their responses to be the same as other ethnic/racial groups.

One of the reasons many do not see Native American mascots as stereotypes and as racist is that the majority of these images seem to be positive. Most stereotypes of racial and ethnic groups are obviously negative, such as African Americans as criminals and Mexican Americans as lazy. It is easier to understand that overtly negative stereotypes are stereotypes and are racist. On the other hand, some stereotypes appear to be positive, such as Asians as intelligent, Jews as good at business, and Native Americans as brave. Yet despite their positive tone, these are problematic stereotypes in that many people from these groups do not fit the stereotype, and underneath the positive facade lie some problematic beliefs and consequences. For example, the stereotype that all Asians are intelligent contributes to the extra pressure and discrimination many Asian Americans face, and this stereotype is often used to disparage other groups. The stereotype that all Jews are good in business serves as a foundation for another stereotype—that Jews are taking over the world economy, a stereotype that has been used to legitimate anti-Semitic actions such as the Holocaust. There are problematic beliefs and consequences that stem from the so-called positive stereotypes of Native Americans as well.

Some people argue that they should be able to retain their Native American mascots if they portray the mascots in a culturally authentic and nonstereotypical manner. There are three problems with this idea. One is that a school or team cannot control how others, such as the media and other schools or teams, use their mascot. For example, the media might print a headline announcing an "attack" by a team with the Native American mascot. The second problem with this idea is that the schools or teams with the Native American mascots will not be able to avoid stereotypes. Native Americans are a category of people who live in many different societies, each with a different culture, and within each Native American society there is much diversity. Thus, how does one portray what Native Americans are "really like?" Imagine creating a mascot that represented African Americans, Jewish Americans, Puerto Ricans, or European Americans. Because of the wide diversity of people within these

categories, any mascot one could imagine would be a stereotype. Third, it is inappropriate for non-Natives to imitate Native Americans, even if they do so in a culturally accurate way. We would find it offensive to see a Christian portray herself as Jewish or an European American portray himself as African American, even if the portrayal is culturally accurate (e.g., using an authentic dialect and clothing). Imitating another's culture, even if we do it accurately, seems like we are mimicking and mocking the other, especially if the imitation is done for entertainment, like it is at a sporting event.

The mascot stereotypes influence the way non-Natives both perceive and treat Native Americans. The mascot stereotypes limit the abilities of the public to understand Native American realities. As the late Michael Dorris (1992) put it, "War-bonnetted apparitions pasted to football helmets or baseball caps act as opaque, impermeable curtains, solid walls of white noise that for many citizens block or distort all vision of the nearly 2 million native Americans today" (p. 19A).

THE MASCOTS HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON NATIVE AMERICAN LIVES

A second argument against the mascots is that they have a negative impact on Native American lives. Many people argue that symbols, such as images and language, are trivial issues that do not matter, yet reams of scholarship demonstrate that symbols exert a significant influence on both our perceptions and behaviors.

Native American mascots create a hostile climate for many Native Americans and sensitive non-Natives in the schools and communities with these mascots. It is hard to feel comfortable in and committed to a school or community and perform to the best of one's ability in school or work when constantly surrounded by offensive stereotypes.

The mascots negatively influence the self-image and self-esteem of Native Americans, especially children. One activist tells the story of how she instilled pride in her children regarding their Native American heritage and she thought her children were secure—yet when she took them to a game with a Native American mascot, she witnessed a major "blow to their self-esteem" as they "sank in their seats," not wanting to be identified as Native American (Davis, 1993). Another activist called the mascot issue a "mental health" issue (Ode, 1992, p. 2E).

Mascot stereotypes affect more than mental health and comfort within a school/community. Other problems Native Americans commonly face, such

as poverty, cultural destruction, poor health, and inadequate education, are intertwined with public images of Native Americans. These images played a role in creating such problems, and now these images constrain Native American efforts to effectively address such problems.

Because of the current power structure in the United States, the quality of lives Native Americans will lead in the future depends on whether the general public has an accurate understanding of past and present Native American lives. If members of the public cannot understand the problem with Native American mascots, they certainly will not understand sovereignty or other issues that affect the quality of Native American lives.

NATIVE AMERICANS SHOULD CONTROL IMAGES OF THEMSELVES

A third argument against the mascots is that Native Americans should have control over societal definitions of who they are. Currently, Native Americans have little power to shape public images of themselves, and the voices of Native Americans are rarely heard. Non-Natives continually assert that the mascots are honoring Native Americans, despite the fact that most pan-ethnic Native American organizations (i.e., organizations consisting of Native American nations from throughout the United States) have stated otherwise (Rosenstein, 1996). One Native American writer said, "I'll decide what honors me and what doesn't. . . . Minority groups have had enough of whites telling them what to think" (MacPhie, 1991, p. 19A). It is plain arrogance and a lack of respect when non-Natives think that they know more about Native Americans and what honors them than do the Native Americans themselves.

Of course, one can find some people from every racial or ethnic group to agree with any opinion, as the various people from one racial or ethnic group never all have the same opinion, so supporters of Native American mascots have been able to find Native Americans (and other people of color) to defend their use of these mascots. Many Native Americans have learned stereotypes of Native Americans from the same sources that non-Natives have. Some Native Americans have even profited from selling images of these stereotypes to non-Natives. It is important not to blame these Native Americans but to recognize the social forces that affect them, such as the media, extreme poverty, and inadequate education. In light of the fact that most pan-ethnic Native American organizations have issued statements against the mascots, it is offensive for non-Natives to use Native Americans or other people of color to justify the position that the mascots should be retained.

OTHER ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH THE MASCOTS

Finally, there are several other issues associated with the Native American mascot controversy that need to be addressed. The first issues are tradition and intent. Supporters of Native American mascots regularly point out that they do not intend to offend anyone but to honor Native Americans, and they are just having fun and affirming tradition. It is worth pointing out that not all traditions are good ones. Some examples of bad traditions are racially segregated facilities and the exclusion of women from schools. Many people have benefited from the elimination of such traditions.

It is also crucial to note that intent is not the most important issue here. If a belief or action has problematic consequences (i.e., if it has negative societal effects), then we should eliminate it, regardless of intents. For example, drunk drivers or men who continually comment on the sexual attractiveness of women they work with usually do not intend to harm anyone, and yet the consequences of such actions are often problematic and thus we should work to eliminate these behaviors. Many times, despite our best intentions, when we lack the necessary knowledge, our behavior can be quite harmful to others. Although most people who support Native American mascots do not intend to harm Native Americans, the consequences of the mascots are problematic and therefore the mascots should be eliminated.

The final issue is the small percentage of people who object to Native American mascots. Many supporters of Native American mascots argue that the mascots must not be problematic because only a small number of people object to them. Polls do indicate that if this issue were put to voters, the majority of people in most parts of the United States would vote to retain the mascots (Sigelman, 1998). Yet there are two reasons that the focus on numbers and majority rule is problematic.

First, it is important to note that the majority of people in the United States are uncritical of stereotypes of Native Americans, including the mascots, because of lack of education about Native American issues. Most Americans have had little to no substantial contact with Native Americans, and thus have distorted perspectives that come from television, movies (especially westerns), and tourist traps that feature stereotypes of Native Americans. We have been inundated with stereotypes of Native Americans in U.S. popular culture from birth, so we have come to believe these stereotypes (Green, 1988). It is not surprising that large numbers of people do not understand this issue.

It seems that in areas of the United States where the Native American population is larger and politically active, the non-Native population has a greater

understanding of Native American issues because they have been educated by local Native Americans and media coverage of these Native Americans (Davis, 1993). The task of educating the U.S. public or regional populations about Native American stereotypes and lives is a difficult one.

Second, Native Americans represent only about 1% of the U.S. population, so issues they care about (and that most others do not) will not likely win public approval. People who are Jewish and people who travel in wheelchairs also represent a small percentage of the U.S. population, yet this does not mean that others should ignore their feelings and concerns. Even if the percentage of people who are offended is small, others should still try to be sensitive. Part of being a good citizen is trying to empathize with other people, especially those who are different from ourselves. We should attempt to understand why other people are offended by something, but even if we cannot achieve this understanding, the considerate thing to do is to respond to others' concerns.

Those who support the use of Native American mascots often claim that they want to retain the mascots because they "respect" Native Americans. Respect is a meaningless word when the positions of most pan-ethnic Native American organizations are ignored. Real respect is carefully listening to, attempting to understand, and addressing Native American concerns about this issue. On a related note, it is not accurate to say that every possible symbol or mascot will be objectionable to someone. There are many symbols, including most other sport mascots, that are not offensive to any groups of people.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, equality and justice in society depend on our abilities to empathize with those who are different from us. If we listen carefully to the Native American individuals and organizations that call for an elimination of Native American mascots, it is clear that there are valid reasons why we should work to eliminate these mascots and other problematic images of Native Americans in society. The State of Minnesota has made a coordinated effort to eliminate Native American mascots in its public schools and has been quite successful. The rest of the country needs to follow their lead.

NOTES

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What the “Fighting Sioux” Tells Us about White People

Robert Jensen

Appeals to the dominant white society to abolish the “Fighting Sioux” nickname and logo typically are framed in terms of respect for the dignity and humanity of indigenous people. That is the appropriate way to address the question, but it has failed—at least, in North Dakota—to persuade most white folks. Today I want to pursue another argument.

I want to suggest to my fellow non-Indian North Dakotans—those of us whose ancestors came from some other continent, primarily those of us who are white and of European descent—that we should support the campaign to change the University of North Dakota name and logo not just because it is offensive, exploitative, and racist (it is all of those things) but also for our own sake. Let us do it for our own dignity. Let us join this struggle so that we can lay honest claim to our own humanity.

I say this because I believe that we give up our dignity when we evade the truth, and we surrender our humanity when we hold onto illegitimate power over others. And I want to argue that is what the nickname controversy is really about—white America refusing to come to terms with the truth about the invasion and conquest of North America, and refusing to acknowledge the fundamental illegitimacy of its power over indigenous people as a result of that conquest. It is about denial of the realities of the past and the present. It is, to follow the analysis of Ward Churchill, about holocaust denial and the consequences of that denial (Churchill, 1997).

THE PAST MATTERS

Let's start with the past, which people often want to avoid. It's history, they say. Get over it—don't get stuck in the past. But this advice to forget history is selective; many of the same folks who tell indigenous people not to get stuck in the past are also demanding that schoolchildren get more instruction in the accomplishments of the Founding Fathers. It is commonly asserted, and undoubtedly true, that Americans don't know enough about their own history (or that of the world). The question isn't whether we should pay more attention to history; the relevant questions are: Who gets to write history? From whose point of view is history written? Which historical realities are emphasized and which are ignored? Let us not take the seemingly easy—but intellectually and morally lazy—path of selectively contending that “history doesn't matter.” Everyone knows it matters.

We can begin this historical journey in 1492, with the beginning of the European conquest of the New World. Estimates of the precontact indigenous population vary, but at the time there were approximately 15 million people living north of the Rio Grande, the majority in what is now the United States and perhaps 2 million in Canada. By the 1900 census, there were 237,000 Indians in the United States. That works out to an extermination rate of 97 to 99%. That means the Europeans who came to the continent killed almost all the Indians. It is the only recorded genocide in history that was almost successful. The Europeans who invaded North America, followed by their descendants who colonized the entire continent, eliminated almost the entire indigenous population, and in the process claimed almost the entire land base of those peoples.

But were those indigenous peoples really people in the eyes of the invaders? Were they full human beings? Some Europeans were not so sure. In the Declaration of Independence, one of our founding documents of freedom, Indians are referred to as the “merciless Indian Savages.” Theodore Roosevelt, whose name can be found on a national park in this state, defended the expansion of whites across the continent as an inevitable process “due solely to the power of the mighty civilized races which have not lost the fighting instinct, and which by their expansion are gradually bringing peace into the red wastes where the barbarian peoples of the world hold sway” (Roosevelt, 1901).

Among Jefferson's “savages” and Roosevelt's “barbarians” were the fighting Sioux—the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota, the people who lived in what we now call North Dakota. They fought the Europeans, and they eventually lost. They lost, for example, in the Wounded Knee massacre at the end of the 19th century, when U.S. soldiers opened fire on several hundred unarmed Lakota, killing most of them, mostly women, children, and elderly. That massacre

came at the end of what are commonly called the Indian Wars, an ambiguous term for the conflicts between Europeans and indigenous people in North America that helps obfuscate historical reality. Were these wars waged *by* Indians, or *against* Indians? Instead of the Indian Wars, we could be more precise and call them the “European/American wars to exterminate Indians.” We could call them part of a holocaust.

But wait, people will say, this ignores the fact that most of the indigenous people died as a result of disease. Today it is no longer considered polite to glorify the murder of Indians and the taking of their land; the preferred route to avoid confronting this holocaust is the disease dodge. But Churchill argues persuasively that the fact that a large number of indigenous people died of disease doesn't absolve white America. Sometimes those diseases were spread intentionally, and even when that wasn't the case the white invaders did nothing to curtail contact with Indians to limit the destruction. Some saw the large-scale death of indigenous people as evidence of the righteousness of their mission: God was clearing the land so that civilized whites could take their rightful place upon it. Whether the Indians died in war or from disease, starvation, and exposure, white society remained culpable.

That's history. It's not the history I was taught growing up in Fargo, North Dakota. But it is a real part of real history. It is every bit as real as the stories of courageous Norwegian farmers who homesteaded through brutal winters. For too long we have tried to keep those two histories separate. It is time to join them, to see that the homesteads were made possible by the holocaust.

Let me be clear: I am not asking anyone who is white to feel guilty about this. I do not feel guilty about this. I feel incredibly pained and saddened by it, just as I feel pained and saddened by other acts of brutality that litter human history. But I cannot take on guilt for events that happened before I was born. Feeling guilt for things outside my control would be illogical.

However, I can—and should—feel guilty about things I have done wrong in my life, over which I do have control. I should feel guilty not simply so that I feel bad but so that change is possible. Guilt is healthy when it leads to self-critique, to moral reflection, to a commitment to not repeating mistakes. We can feel that guilt both individually and collectively. We can see what we have done wrong or failed to do right, both by ourselves and with others. That brings us to the present.

The American holocaust perpetrated by Europeans and their descendants against indigenous people cannot be undone. But we can in the present work to change the consequences of that holocaust. One easy place to start could be eliminating a nickname and logo to which a significant number of Indians object. All that white people would have to do is accept that simple fact, and change the name and logo. It would cost no one anything, beyond the trivial

expense of changing the design on some stationary, uniforms, and university trinkets.

But wait, many white people say, isn't systemic poverty on reservations more important than a logo? Of course it is. Are there more pressing problems for Indians than the Fighting Sioux design? Sure. But there is nothing to stop anyone from going forward to address other problems and, at the same time, taking the simple step of changing the nickname and logo. It's not an either/or choice.

Why do so many people resist that simple change so fiercely? Individuals will have different reasons, of course; I cannot pretend to know what motivates everyone. Many people say it is out of a respect for tradition. But I don't think that's really what is going on. I would like to offer an alternative explanation for why white people will not take such a simple and easy step.

POWER RELATIONS IN THE PRESENT

Let me digress a moment for a story about another question of language that might be helpful. In the 1980s I worked at St. John's University, just down the highway in Minnesota. St. John's is a men's college run by a monastery that had a cooperative relationship with the College of St. Benedict, a nearby women's college run by a convent. As time went on, the level of cooperation between the schools increased, including more joint publications. At one point in the process, staff members at St. Benedict's suggested that in those joint publications we use the term "first-year student" instead of "freshman," for the obvious reason that none of the students at St. Ben's was a "man," fresh or otherwise. It struck me as a reasonable request, a simple thing to do. They weren't asking that we go back and reprint every brochure we had in stock, just that in the future we use the more accurate and less sexist term. I assumed this would not be a problem. But it was a problem for a number of men at St. John's. What a bizarre suggestion, they said. Everyone knows freshman is an inclusive term that means first-year students, male and female. How could anyone bring up such a silly point? I pointed out that to change the term was cost free—all we had to do was switch one term for another. No, they said—there's a tradition at stake, and besides, "first-year student" is clumsy. "But do we really care?" I asked. Yes, many of them did care, quite passionately.

Looking back, I don't think it was a question of tradition or the aesthetics of the terms. It was about power. In the Catholic Church, girls don't tell boys what to do. In the long history of those two colleges, the girls didn't tell the boys what to do. The real issue was simply power. Could the women tell the men what to do? Would the men accept that? Of course, one small request

about one term in a brochure was hardly a revolutionary change in the gender practices of Catholicism, the religious orders that operated the colleges, or those institutions. But that wasn't the point. The members of the dominant group were used to being in charge by virtue of who they were, and they were not interested in changing the underlying power dynamics.

Eventually the boys gave up fighting that one, and first-year students at the campuses are referred to today as first-year students. And the women's college over time has continued to challenge the male dominance of the partnership. Everyone is better off as a result, including the boys at St. John's.

Likewise, I think a similar power dynamic is at the core of white resistance to the simple act of dropping nicknames such as Fighting Sioux: Indians don't get to tell white people what to do. Why not? Polite white people won't say it in public, but this is what I think many white folks think: "Whites won and Indians lost. It's our country now. Maybe the way we took it was wrong, but we took it. We are stronger than you. That's why we won. That's why you lost. So, get used to it. You don't get to tell us what to do." I think for white people to acknowledge that we don't have the right to use the name and logo would be to open a door that seems dangerous.

Why should Indians have the right to make the decision over how their name and image are used? Because in the absence of a compelling reason to override that right, a person or group of people should have control over their name and image. That's part of what it means to be a person with full humanity. And in this case, the argument for white people giving Indians that power is intensified by the magnitude of the evil perpetrated by whites on Indians.

To acknowledge all that is to acknowledge that the American nation is based on genocide, on a crime against humanity. The land of the free and the home of the brave, the nation that was born as the vehicle for a new freedom, rests on the denial not only of freedom but of life itself, to a whole group of people—for the crime of getting in the way of what the European invaders wanted for themselves: the land and its resources.

To acknowledge all that is to acknowledge not only that the Fighting Sioux nickname is an obscenity but an artifact of our own barbarism. If Germany had won World War II, it would be equivalent of contemporary Germans naming a university team the Jews and using a hook-nosed caricature. I do not mean that hyperbolically. In heated debates, people often compare opponents to Nazis as an insult. This isn't an insult. It's an accurate comparison. The ideology of racial supremacy underneath the genocide of indigenous people here was not so different from Nazi ideology. Inferior people had to give way so that superior people could make use of land, just as Teddy Roosevelt said. The dominant group wanted something. The subordinated group was in the way. The easiest way to justify that is to define

away the humanity of the subordinated group, so a barbaric policy can be seen as natural and inevitable.

To take that simple step—to accord to Indians the basic dignity to control how they are named and represented—is to step onto a road that leads to a confrontation with the mythology of the United States. That can be painful, but not just because of what it forces us to face in the past. The larger problem with stepping onto that path is that it doesn't stop in the past. It leads to something more difficult—the confrontation with the enduring consequences of the genocide. To go down this path forces us to confront the fact that the poverty rate for American Indians (25.9%) is more than double the overall rate (11.3%) and nearly four times as high as the rate for white Americans (7.5%).

Why is that the case? Why, a century after the official end of the Indian Wars, are Indians the poorest racial/ethnic group in the United States? Why is Shannon County, South Dakota, home to the Pine Ridge Reservation, consistently among the poorest counties in the United States, with a 52.3% poverty rate? What does the massacre at Wounded Knee have to do with the living conditions today of the people on the reservation that includes Wounded Knee?

The past is past, but maybe some of that past also is present. Is white America afraid of looking too much at the past, lest we have to look at the present? Are we afraid of what we might see? What might we learn—about ourselves?

TRADITION OR JUSTICE?

Let me turn to the possible challenges to this position.

Can tradition, the common argument for keeping the Fighting Sioux, trump other considerations? Indeed, tradition makes some people (mostly white) feel good. Does that value to some outweigh the injury to others? Many traditions have fallen by the wayside over time when it became clear that the tradition imposed a cost on some other person or group. It used to be a tradition in some regions for white people to call adult African American males "boy." No big deal, they said; it's just a name. But it was a name that carried a message about power and dominance.

Supporters of the Fighting Sioux might offer a counterargument: In that example all (or almost all) adult African American males objected to the use of the term because it was so obviously a way to denigrate them. But not all Indians object to Fighting Sioux, and there is an argument that such nicknames are meant to honor Indians. So, it is argued, we shouldn't get rid of the nickname.

I do not know of reliable polling data that would tell us how the "average" Indian feels about the name. But, for the sake of argument, let's assume that the vocal opponents of such nicknames and logos are a substantial percentage, but not a majority, of Indians. Let's also assume that the most Indians do not have strong feelings, and that a minority genuinely support such nicknames. Can white people simply say, "Well, see, Indians can't decide, so we'll leave things as they are."

I think that is an attempt to avoid a simple choice. Indians are no more monolithic than any other group; there's no reason to think there would be absolute uniformity of opinion. However, over time many Indians from a number of different backgrounds have developed a clear critique of the use of Indian nicknames and logos, and they have put forward that critique with clarity, honesty, and passion. I find the argument compelling, but even if one doesn't agree, one has to at least acknowledge it is a rational argument and that it is easy to understand why people hold the position. In the absence of a universal demand from indigenous people, but in the presence of a strong argument that many indigenous people support, white people cannot dismiss the issue. It seems to me there are only two possibilities.

The first would be for the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education and the university to acknowledge the long-standing opposition to the team name and change it. The second would be to let the people affected by this—the Indian population of the state and the university—decide the question. In other words, the only dignified and humane positions for white people are to either accept the judgment already rendered by Indians, or, if one believes that judgment is not clear, allow Indians to go forward and make that judgment (without external pressure, such as threats to withdraw funding for Indian programs or students if the decision is to eliminate the name and logo).

I am calling for white people to acknowledge that we have no right to choose how Indians are named and represented. We have no standing to speak on the question. Our place is to shut up and do what we are told. Let me say that again, for emphasis: We white folks should shut up and do what Indians tell us. Let's try it, first, on this simple issue. We might find it is something we should do on a number of other issues.

And if we do that, individually and collectively we will take a step toward claiming our own dignity and humanity. The way in which white America refuses to come to terms with its history and the contemporary consequences of that history has material and psychological consequences for Indians (as well as many other groups). But in a very real sense, we cannot steal the dignity and humanity of indigenous people. We can steal their resources, disrespect them, insult them, ignore them, and continue to

repress their legitimate aspirations. We can try to distort their own sense of themselves, but in the end we can't take their humanity from them.

The only dignity and humanity that is truly diminished by the Fighting Sioux is that of white America.

NOTES

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American Indian Imagery and the Miseducation of America

Ellen J. Staurowsky

During the summer of 1998, the New York State Department of Education initiated an inquiry into the use of Native American mascots by schools for the purpose of determining if the practice is offensive and should be stopped. The study undertaken at the direction of the State Education Commissioner Richard Mills was in response to an appeal filed by Robert Eurich, a taxpayer from Orange County (NY). In 1996, Eurich sought to have the "Red Raiders" mascot eliminated from Port Jervis High School because he alleged it violated his civil rights and those of students attending the school (Associated Press, 1998a; Russin, 1998). Although Commissioner Mills dismissed Eurich's appeal, he did recognize the "seriousness of the issue the petitioner raises and that other districts statewide engage in similar practices" (Associated Press, 1998a, p. 1A).

The New York State Department of Education is one among many policy-making bodies to address the appropriateness of the use of American Indian mascots, symbols, and iconography in school settings. During the past three years, the issue has manifest itself from border to border and coast to coast in numerous discussions, debates, and disputes (Willman, 1997; "Hearing held," 1998). Saliently, the issue has even attracted the attention of the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ). The February 1999 investigation by the USDOJ at Erwin High School in North Carolina marks the first occasion when Native American images have been examined by a federal agency for the purpose of determining if the symbols contribute to a racially hostile learning environment (Pressley, 1999).

These incidents reveal the complicated dynamics that are invoked and/or provoked when educators and communities attempt to discuss this issue.

Schools throughout the state of Minnesota and institutions such as Cornell, Marquette, Miami University of Ohio, St. John's, Stanford, and Syracuse (Lapchick, 1996; Staurowsky, 1996) have found reasons to stop the practice of using American Indian imagery for sport teams. However, the potential for discussions on this issue to become volatile is evident as well.

Indicative of the palpable sense of the need for reinforcement when it comes to handling this issue, Superintendent Church of the Afton (NY) School District said she would welcome a directive from the state as a means of avoiding contentiousness at the local level. Church's prediction that constituencies may register a range of reactions to the prospect of eliminating American Indian mascots can be gauged from the immediacy of response generated when the proposed New York State Department of Education study was made known to the public. The mere announcement of such a study evoked definitive positions by educational decision makers before the investigation ever got under way. Several athletic directors from Section IV in central New York, where 13 school districts are known as Indians, Chiefs, Senecas, Blackhawks, and Warriors, were quick to note that their school names were a "source of pride" and "a reflection of our area" (Russin, 1998a, p. 1A). About the study, one local sportswriter in Ithaca, NY, recognized two years ago as one of the most "Enlightened Cities" in the United States, editorialized:

I guess if I lived on a reservation and a high school was nicknamed the "Iroquois Pale Faces" I would be offended. . . . But that's not the perspective I'm working from. Nope, this is the all common-sense channel. . . . There is absolutely nothing wrong with Indian-related names. (Russin, 1998b, p. 1A)

For the remainder of this article, I will focus on the cultural fallout confronted when addressing the issue of American Indian imagery as it has become infused into and perpetuated by school districts and communities. The complex racialized fabric of attitudes and beliefs fostered in adults and children through the reliance on American Indian mascots as the centerpiece of school, community, and team identities will be unraveled. The end result will be the identification of critical areas of inquiry that educators should address with themselves, their students, their families, and their communities about the continued use of these symbols.

Central to the argument presented in this article is an acknowledgment that few Americans, whether educators or representatives from any other sector of the population, have had the opportunity to acquire the depth of knowledge or understanding about this nation's history relative to American Indians that allows for a responsible consideration of this issue. A close examination of the dialogue surrounding American Indian imagery in sport reveals

that people who we typically think of as the beneficiaries of systematic and complete schooling consistently mistake "common sense" (a set of common understandings that permit consensus based on accurate information) for "nonsense" and yet feel confident and empowered even in their lack of knowledge. This realization is compelling because it raises questions about the very essence of the educational process that good teachers care about the most, that being educational integrity and accountability.

AMERICAN INDIAN MASCOTS AS SYMPTOMATIC OF CULTURAL ILLITERACY

At a theoretical level, school systems in the United States are vested with the responsibility of cultivating the intellectual skills in citizens essential for functioning productively and meaningfully within a human and humane society. A critical tool in realizing this goal is cultural literacy, a means by which the vast differences in individual and group experiences and knowledge can be bridged and accommodated in a democratic, pluralistic society. Although the central importance of cultural literacy in education is undisputed, how cultural literacy is conceptualized and achieved is very much up for debate. In his treatise on the failure of schools to create a literate society, Hirsch (1987) urged a return to commonly shared content areas as the basis for mutual understanding and societal stability. He argued that there is a need for the identification and implementation of a core curriculum that would be delivered uniformly to students throughout the United States so as to ensure that all students received a baseline level of knowledge.

One need only watch a "Jaywalking" segment on the *Tonight Show* as interviewees struggle to correctly identify the number of states in the Union or testify to the small number of Americans who vote to appreciate at some level the argument Hirsch (1987) makes. His fundamental premise is particularly relevant to the issue of understanding the dialogue that emerges surrounding American Indian imagery, however, for two reasons. First, Hirsch's conceptualization of cultural literacy and how to achieve it is reflective of a dominant value system that has been operating in education for a considerable portion of this century. As a corollary, because his conceptualization is anchored in an ethnocentric perspective that fails to adequately provide for American Indians, an examination of his approach explains the gaps that occur between Native American parents and their allies who advocate for change within schools and those who actively or passively resist change when it comes to the matter of mascots.

To elaborate, Hirsch (1987) contends, perhaps rightfully so, that the "civic importance of cultural literacy lies in the fact that true enfranchisement depends upon cultural literacy" (p. 92). He continues by suggesting that the illiterate and semi-literate (the poor and the marginal) will be doomed to poverty and to the powerlessness of incomprehension if they are not taught the markers, such as certain areas of literature and standard English, that would otherwise connect those disadvantaged groups to the power structure of the dominant society.

Inasmuch as Hirsch's (1987) perspective on this matter reveals how power structures may work and how access to power is achieved through education (ideas that are contested in and of themselves), his position also discloses the kind of cultural blind spots that discussions surrounding American Indian mascots ought to illuminate but consistently do not. Illustrative of this point is Hirsch's response to concerns about how nationwide requirements would be identified and defined. Referencing an American tradition of pluralism, Hirsch observes that "Because our country started out with a powerful commitment to religious toleration, we developed habits of cultural toleration" (p. 94).

Hirsch's (1987) logic, although sustainable when linked to the dominant culture, falls apart when placed in the context of white-Indian relations. The United States has not historically afforded American Indians any degree of religious freedom, and genocide can hardly be thought of as cultural toleration.

As a departure gate for expounding on what is needed with regard to cultural literacy, an American tradition of pluralism offers a model that simply does not work when it comes to either the historic or present-day treatment of American Indians by educational systems. This notion of the American melting pot, however, structurally undergirds much of public education and educational theory as seen in Hirsch's (1987) work and others like it. As Pewewardy (1997) explains, "American schools have been designed to either destroy Indian culture and tribal language or graduate Indian students with a Eurocentric value system which is individualistic, competitive, and materialistic" (p. 17A). In the process, schools have often destroyed the possibility of non-Indians appreciating the influences and forces that have shaped their own lives.

Confronting the myth of the American melting pot and its integration into approaches to cultural literacy sheds new light on discussions about the practice of schools using American Indian imagery. It highlights the fact that these images emanate out of communities that have, for the most part, been woefully undereducated about the stereotypes they have chosen to represent their schools.

This can be tested using a modification of Hirsch's (1987) model of a common list of things that all Americans should know. Would Americans' view the stereotypical fierce and fighting male Indian warrior in the same light

if they were fully aware of how the characterization of American Indians as "savages" in the Declaration of Independence affected the shaping of the policies the United States government adopted relative to the nation's First People? How might those images be viewed differently if thought was given to the connection between the actions of the principal writer of that document, Thomas Jefferson, who is credited with setting the framework for Indian removal in motion in 1803, and the fate of American Indians since that decision was made (Ellis, 1997)? How curious that the foe most feared and hated has been transformed by the dominant culture into the ultimate symbol of victory. To valorize the image of the "fighting Indian" without soberly recognizing the degree to which the United States sought to summarily conquer and control that very entity has created what Pewewardy labels "dysconscious racism" (as reported in Schroeter, 1998).

WHITE ASSUMPTIONS AND CULTURAL LITERACY

The distortions in logic that permeate justifications for American Indian imagery reflect what feminist researchers Maher and Tetreault (1997) call "white assumptions" which influence and mold the construction of knowledge as it is produced and resisted in classroom and school settings. Assumptions of whiteness circulate undetected throughout discussions and debates about the continued use of American Indian imagery. For example, rarely do educators preface discussions about this topic with an acknowledgment that these images are white inventions adopted by white educational power structures.

Despite public opposition by almost every Native American organization in the United States, some of which include the National Congress of American Indians, the National Indian Education Association, Advocates for American Indian Children, the National Coalition for Racism in Sport and the Media, and the Society of Indian Psychologists, patterns of non-Native American responses to formal requests by Native Americans for the elimination of mascots and imagery have frequently taken the form of denial, defensiveness, or dismissiveness (Brady, 1999; Pressley, 1999; Staurowsky, 1998). It is not uncommon that appeals for the eradication of stereotypical images, on the grounds that their elimination would abate forces that undermine the self-esteem and self-image of Native Americans, are met with allegations that these appeals are shallow attempts at "political correctness" ("Hearing held," 1998; Russin, 1998b; Yarbrough, 1998). As Colgan (1997) wrote in a letter to the editor of *JOPERD* about the issue of eliminating the use of American Indian mascots, "It is sad the way groups of citizens search so diligently to find something to be disgruntled about" (p. 4). Yarbrough (1998) extends

this one step further by equating all examinations of these issues to exercises in "political correctness," as if to suggest that there is no value in revisiting old assumptions with renewed insight or seriously assessing the educational welfare of all students.

What some educators and citizens appear unable and/or unwilling to grasp at a macro-level is the fact that this dynamic of American Indians explaining why something is offensive while non-Indians actively or passively choose not to respond or respond contrarily is the most persistent theme underscoring Indian-non-Indian relations. Locust (1988) argues that the fundamental differences between American Indians and non-Indians foster the discriminatory treatment American Indian students experience in school through a lack of appreciation for their belief and value systems. This is seen in the continuing use of eagle feathers, dancing, music, and chanting in association with American Indian mascots. On repeated occasions, attempts have been made to educate the public about the sacredness of these symbols and ceremonial practices (Rosenstein, 1997). And yet, a large portion of the public appears to believe that their right to use these symbols in frivolous, casual ways at the ballpark or an athletic contest is a matter of personal opinion. In this instance, the sanctity of a culture is not sufficient cause to protect certain revered symbols from being worn inappropriately, merchandised, or desecrated in some other manner. This practice cuts in two directions by violating Indian taboos and customs while also contributing to the collective ignorance of masses of Americans at the same time.

In his work on cultural literacy, Ferdman (1990) explored the process of becoming and being literate in a multi-ethnic society. According to Ferdman, literacy is culturally framed and variable. As a consequence, literate behavior may be defined differently from culture to culture. This conception offers a way for educators to rethink the issue of American Indian mascots, which has become so deeply imbedded in the average American's psyche due to the official sanction of institutional authority, collective ownership, and mass identification.

What this examination of race and cultural literacy reveals is a significant flaw in the way cultural literacy has traditionally been conceptualized by many influential educators and internalized by the majority of Americans throughout most of the twentieth century. Whereas Hirsch (1987) cautions that cultural illiteracy may impoverish and relegate certain groups to the "powerlessness of incomprehension," cultural illiteracy is not located solely or entirely among the marginalized. Impoverishment, in turn, need not be thought of only in economic or class terms. To grasp this point is to become aware that the non-Indian power structure has acquired its privileged status through its own intellectual impoverishment, selective incomprehension, and moral compromise. In order for genuine understanding to occur, one needs to consider that members of the

culturally illiterate group in these discussions about American Indian imagery are non-Indians. Hirsch's tenet that true societal enfranchisement is achievable only when one is culturally literate needs to be modified. For the majority, being culturally illiterate is sometimes acceptable, expedient, and profitable, particularly when it comes to American Indians.

As educators, if we begin to conceptualize the use of American Indian imagery as a form of cultural illiteracy that has historically benefitted the dominant group to the detriment of American Indians, the path is cleared to more fully appreciate the impact this long-standing practice has had in the shaping of a hostile cultural and classroom climate for American Indians and an intellectually numbing environment for both Indians and non-Indians alike.

A HOSTILE CULTURE AND CLASSROOM CLIMATE FOR AMERICAN INDIANS

In 1997, President Clinton established a Race Initiative Advisory Board for the purpose of promoting a national dialogue on race issues, to increase an understanding of the history and future of race relations, to identify and create plans to calm racial tension, and to promote increased opportunity for all Americans to address crime and the administration of justice (Gray, 1998). The findings from a presidential report entitled "One America: The President's Initiative on Race" showed that Native Americans experience more pronounced levels of racism in the form of economic and physical abuse than any other identified group. Further, Native Americans were found to manifest the "highest instances of suicide, the lowest life expectancy, the highest levels of infant mortality, and the highest rates of unemployment nationwide" (Gray, 1998). Despite acknowledging that the United States' record of mistreatment of Native Americans required acts that would ameliorate the neglect and isolation that Indians feel, the president did not appoint a Native American to his team of advisors (Associated Press, 1998c). President Clinton's omission or oversight in naming a Native American to the advisory board caused considerable consternation within the Native American community.

In a meeting with nine tribal leaders in Denver in March of 1998 to discuss the absence of a Native American on the board, the tribal leaders called the omission unconscionable and unacceptable (Griego, 1998, p. 1). Appreciation for the sentiment felt is revealed in Scott's (1998) response to the lack of awareness demonstrated by the White House when she wrote:

How can this government hope to address a problem as deep and pervasive as racism without providing an opportunity for equal representation to the people

most directly affected by racism for over 200 years. . . . No face more directly reflects the evils of racism, institutionalized and otherwise, than the face of Native peoples. . . . This country has only to look at its own history if it wishes to see where racism, unchecked, leads. Is it possible that this government fears to look too deeply into the mirror of its own beginnings? (p. 2)

It is possible that what is at work here is a clash between the fantasy, fictionalized Indians many non-Indians pretend to be during Halloween and while they are masquerading as Warriors and Indians and Renegades and Chiefs at the local level and the dilemmas encountered when real Indians raise issues that demand something that goes beyond pretense. Pewewardy (1994, 1997) connects the dots between the failure of American institutions (education, government, religion, the criminal justice system, health care, media, entertainment, sport) in general to comprehend lived American Indian experience and the reduction of American Indian life to little more than a singular stereotype of a mythical be-feathered fighting figure.

Pewewardy (1994, 1997) describes the practice of using Indian mascots as symbolic representations of teams and anchors for community identity as "cultural violence" which serves to distort the perceptions of both Indian and non-Indian children. The end result has been three-fold. Indian children have been left with "deep emotional scars" and what Locust (1988) refers to as "wounds of the spirit" as evidenced in Native American children having the highest dropout rates, the highest suicide rates, and the lowest academic achievement levels of any minority group (Ambler, 1997; Harjo, 1996; James, Chavez, Beauvais, Edwards, & Oetting, 1995; Lee, 1992; Wood & Clay, 1996). Non-Indian children have been raised as what I would call cultural narcoleptics, permitted to sleep the sleep of the uninformed and unknowing. For all children, Indian and non-Indian alike, the use of American Indian imagery introduced and replicated over and over in lieu of a comprehensive and extensive examination of the historical and social antecedents of Indian and non-Indian relations contributes to the miseducation of masses of Americans and a generalized level of ignorance. This realization signals a need for educators to struggle with areas of inquiry that frequently go unaddressed or unexamined.

CRITICAL AREAS OF INQUIRY OFTEN UNADDRESSED OR UNEXAMINED

In any given time period, an analysis of various meanings associated with familiar institutional practices reflects the changes that cultures undergo as

they evolve. The orchestration of major societal reversals on perspectives regarding women's right to vote (Sherr, 1994), slavery (Coakley, 1998), and the capability of older citizens as seen most recently in John Glenn's flight into space (Jackson, 1998) attest to the contested nature of seemingly intractable ideas and the potential for change. The educational importance of examining Native American mascots stems from the fact that such topics allow for a similar revisitation of the power of words, symbols, and images. By subjecting these terms to critical analysis, three areas of inquiry that educators might do well to explore become apparent: the prevalence of American Indian imagery, the cultivation of an educational facade, and the progressive miseducation of Americans.

The Prevalence of American Indian Imagery

Within the mass produced and commodified world of American capitalism, images associated with American Indians have long been the choice of twentieth-century advertisers seeking to contrast the primitive ways of the unsophisticated and uneducated with the civilized fortunes of the well-to-do (Staurowsky, 1998). One need only span the shelves of grocery stores to find "Land o' Lakes" butter with an "Indian" maiden on the label; survey vehicles in an auto mall to discover that "Cherokees," "Winnebagos," and "Pontiacs" are routinely available to buy or lease; or rifle through the Liz Claiborne collection to come upon the "Crazy Horse" line of women's clothing (Bordewich, 1996; Brouse, 1998; Coombes, 1996). The disproportionate degree to which American Indian imagery has been used in promoting the interests of corporate America is replicated in schools as well.

According to Pressley (1999), more than 2500 schools in total still employ these images. As an identifiable category, images that depend on some aspect of perceived American Indian culture and tradition are more popular by a wide margin than any other single group of ethnic symbols selected to represent athletic teams and educational institutions. Despite this remarkably high level of representation, there is little if any genuine curiosity expressed by educators regarding the disparity between the prevalent use of this imagery and the small percentage of American Indians within the population.

Whereas the average American tends to view these images as benign or innocuous, scholars suggest that this imagery taps into deep-seated Eurocentric cultural forms that enact and replay old conflicts between Indians and non-Indians. It is the case that the prevailing stereotypes of warring, wild Indians in paint, feathers, and buckskins or loincloths replicate images popularized by Wild West Shows and World's Fair exhibitions from nearly a century ago and the more recent western film genre of the latter part of the twentieth

century (Churchill, 1992; Coombes, 1996). As signifiers of the superior level of sophistication and accomplishment achieved by the "colonizers" then and now, the "primitive" images of American Indians have marked the growth of a capitalist consumer culture and in the process have created a degree of "cultural saturation" that does not encourage racial sensitivity. As Bordewich (1996) notes, Americans are more comfortable with fictional Indians than with real Indians.

In addressing the alarming level of unquestioning acceptance of these images by Americans, Kenneth S. Stern, the American Jewish Committee's expert on anti-Semitism and extremism remarked that "The use of mascots is a reflection of the limits of dehumanization our culture will allow. . . . It deeply concerns me that many people of goodwill find these dehumanizing portraits unremarkable" (as reported in "American Jewish Committee," 1998, p. 11).

American Indians as the "Face" of Education: The Cultivation of an Educational Façade

For those who seek to defend American Indian mascots, notions that these images are rooted in conscious decisions to celebrate virtues of Indian character, to honor an admirable people, and to memorialize a forgotten people are recurrent themes. In defending the representation of an Indian as a mascot for Menomonie (WI) High School, a 16-year-old football player told the Wisconsin Senate Education Committee that "We incorporate words like dignity, strength, honor, pride, and we really give a lot of respect to the tradition" (as reported in "Hearing held," 1998, p. 2). Similarly, advocates for the "Braves" mascot at Birmingham (CA) High School reported taking pride in the logo, regarding it as a positive symbol because it best represented "the land of the free and the home of the brave" (as reported in Willman, 1997). The incongruity in these statements deserves to be challenged at several levels.

Whereas the perspectives expressed are moving, they are nonetheless rhetorically and contextually empty. To project dignity, honor, respect, strength, and pride onto a manufactured image while simultaneously displaying an inability to accord those very same things to living Indians seeking to be heard speaks volumes about just how great the level of miseducation is on this topic. To comfortably assert that the symbol of the American Indian is a logical and consistent image with "the land of the free and the home of the brave" ignores the legacy of genocide, forced assimilation and acculturation, and repeated mistreatment to which American Indians have been and continue to be subjected to today (Brown, 1991; Churchill, 1997).

From a Native American perspective, Pewewardy (1997) asks, "Where is the honor in being introduced as the 'savages' at football games?" (p. 17A).

As educational institutions and educators come to grips with the issue of American Indian mascots, recognizing that there is an untidy and prickly thicket of contradictions that must be removed becomes part of the task of reeducation this requires.

American Indian Imagery as Tools for Teaching Racism

In articulating a reason why Indian schools choose Indian people as mascots, Veilleux (1993) observed that the preference is "based upon their misinformed stereotypical notion that our Indian ancestors were warlike, blood-thirsty, wild savages" (p. 6). If American Indians harbor these misperceptions, how pronounced are the effects of these images on non-Indians?

There can be little doubt that the racism reflected in the pages of the Naperville (IL) High School yearbook in 1987, which chronicled "87 Uses for a Dead Redskin," demonstrates that a school mascot can be a powerful tool in the miseducation of students on matters of race (as reported in Veilleux, 1993). The process through which distorted "race logic" (Coakley, 1998) becomes learned is outlined by Veilleux, who notes:

The purpose of a mascot in an athletic competition is to serve as a focal point or "target" for competing teams and their fans to express allegiance to the home team or opposition to the visiting team. When the "target" or mascot is representative of a race of people such as American Indians, it becomes a racial issue. (p. 7)

Although frequently acknowledged within educational circles in general that stereotypes form the bedrock of prejudice and racism, schools have been extremely slow to accept responsibility for miseducating students through the continued use of American Indian imagery as the most visible symbols of their enterprise.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATORS AND SPORT SCIENTISTS

In an age when schools are making concerted efforts to teach tolerance and to grapple with issues of diversity, it behooves educators to accept the challenge posed by President Clinton upon meeting American Indian leaders in the summer of 1998, when he remarked that Americans need to "fess up" to the mistreatment of American Indians. For physical educators, coaches, athletic administrators, and sport scientists, part of "fessing up" involves the

prospect of confronting and owning our shortcomings. This is never an easy undertaking but it is the thing that is most necessary if our students are to be best served. For many of us, myself included, we've grown up with our own community and personal identities linked to these images. This issue asks for our introspection, our courage, and our insight in facing the flaws and faults in our own education. If the students whom we care about are to have the best chance of apprehending the complex history that contributes to their world view, we, as their teachers, must be as culturally literate as possible.

In conclusion, professionals from the allied fields of sport science and physical education are perhaps positioned better than anyone else to provide leadership on this issue, given the integral role we play in facilitating athletic opportunities for students. By calling for the elimination of stereotypes in the form of American Indian images, we can contribute positively to the education of all of our children, Indian and non-Indian alike.

NOTE

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Defensive Dialogues: Native American Mascots, Anti-Indianism, and Educational Institutions

C. Richard King

Over 30 years after Native Americans began openly challenging the presence of disparaging names, logos, and images in athletics, such uses of Indianness remain central to sports spectacles in the United States. The prevalence of Native American mascots offers clear evidence of the persistence of anti-Indian sentiments in American culture. While activists have worked tirelessly to alert a broader public to this fundamental truth, academics have more recently supported their assertions with solid scholarship into the origins and implications of mascots (Banks, 1993; Churchill, 1994; Connolly, 2000; Coombe, 1999; Davis, 1993; King, 1998; King & Springwood, 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Nuessel, 1994; Pewewardy, 1991; Slowikowski, 1993; Spindel, 2000; Springwood & King, 2000; Staurowsky, 1998; Vanderford, 1996). To date, both political and intellectual accounts have largely focused on the symbols themselves and the arguments advanced in defense of them. That is, much attention has been devoted to unraveling the manner in which mascots depict Native Americans, the ways in which they appropriate aspects of indigenous cultures (e.g., dance and the headdress), the stereotypes embedded in such team names and sports icons, their connections with historic patterns of playing Indian and constructing Indianness, the misguided motivations for preserving them, and the racist ideologies informing both the creation and the defense of mascots.

The tactics employed by supporters and their implications for the place of Native Americans in American society have often been overlooked in these discussions. To fully appreciate the scope and significance of anti-Indianism in contemporary United States, it is necessary to get beyond stereotypes and engage institutional practices and strategies that, at their core, are anti-Indian

because of the manner in which they conceive of and affect Native Americans. That is, they disregard the lives and voices of Indians, consciously and callously work against their interests, and by design undermine the possibility of equality, dignity, and humanity for Native Americans.

This article explores the rhetoric and tactics deployed in support of Native American mascots at educational institutions through a reading of official arguments and sanctioned strategies designed to save imaginary Indians, often at the expense of the agency and humanity of embodied Native Americans. It also explores the unofficial ways that boosters and fans have sought to retain control over Indianness and its meaning. In conclusion, the article addresses some of the ways that audiences can critically engage mascots and counter anti-Indianism.

ANTI-INDIANISM

In 1999, residents of Anderson Township, a suburb of Cincinnati, wrestled with the uses of Indian imagery at the local high school, particularly the name given its sports teams, the Redskins. Although the name is disparaging, countless citizens defended the name as honorific, along with associated symbols of Indianness around campus, including a large statue of a warrior. A teacher of history at Anderson High School offered the following disturbing comments:

Your people came here a few generations before from Asia. You are no more native than I am. You just got here first. . . . Mr. Jones, I saw the videotape from the first meeting, I'd like to just offer this: maybe it's time we both looked at our own houses. But I'll make this deal to most tribes in America [*sic*] live under the same laws I do: no more reservations, no more tribal law and tribal courts, no more gambling on reservations, no more dressing up tall blondes in little Indian suits to be waitress' at those gambling casinos; no smoking dope at your religious ceremonies . . . no more killing whales or pillaging the salmon waters of the Northwest just because an old treaty says so. We both have a lot of things to fix. And I'll tell you what, I guarantee you I'll still teach good things. <<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1364/nmascots.htm>>

Uninformed at best, these ramblings underscore the rhetoric and ideologies grounding both the use of Native Americans as mascots and more recent efforts to retain them. They cast Native Americans as wild deviants, shiftless drug users who enjoy special privileges at the expense of European-Americans, and reckless "others" who ravage nature while exploiting white women. Ignoring the history and effects of American imperialism, they question historical cov-

enants between sovereign nations, seeking to terminate rights and obligations guaranteed within them.

Although more involved and overt than most arguments, these comments clearly express the tone and contours of anti-Indianism shaping struggles over Native American mascots. According to Cook-Lynn (2001), anti-Indianism has four key elements:

[I]t is the sentiment that results in the unnatural death of Indians. Anti-Indianism is that which treats Indians and their tribes as if they do not exist. . . . Second, Anti-Indianism is that which denigrates, demonizes, and insults being Indian in America. The third trait of Anti-Indianism is the use of historical event and experience to place the blame on Indians for an unfortunate and dissatisfying history. And, finally, Anti-Indianism is that which exploits and distorts Indian beliefs and cultures. All of these traits have conspired to isolate, to expunge or expel, to menace, to defame. (p. xx)

Mascots clearly embody all of these elements. So too do the practices and arguments employed by educational institutions to defend such symbols and spectacles of Indianness.

ORIGINS AND INTENTIONS

Native American mascots emerged in the late 19th and early 20th century in conjunction with the rise of intercollegiate and professional athletics, a crisis in white masculinity that was itself associated with the closing of the frontier, urbanization, industrialization, and the subjugation of Native America (Churchill, 1994; Drinnon, 1980). Playing Indian at halftime of football games has become a ubiquitous feature of American culture precisely because of the pleasures, possibilities, and powers it has granted its European-American performers. At the end of the 20th century, more than 2,500 elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools had Native American mascots (Staurowsky, 1999), including more than 80 colleges and universities (Rodriguez, 1998).

Native American mascots draw on clichéd images of Native Americans that are rooted in the imperial imagination. They play up or play off a set of cultural features that are often wrongly associated with the indigenous peoples of North America: the feathered headdress; face paint; buckskin pants; warfare; dance; and the tomahawk (chop). They make use of these elements to create moving, meaningful, and entertaining icons that many take to be authentic, appropriate, and even reverent. The condensed versions of Indianness rendered through signs and spectacles confine Native Americans within the past and typically within the popular image of the

Plains warrior. Whatever the precise image or reference (real or imagined), mascots trap Native nations within the many overlapping tropes of savagery. At one extreme are romantic renditions of bellicose warriors, including the University of Illinois (Chief Illiniwek and the Fighting Illini), Florida State University (the Seminoles with “their” Chief Osceola), and the University of North Dakota (Fighting Sioux). At the other extreme are perverse burlesque parodies of the physical or cultural features of Indians such as Runnin’ Joe at Arkansas State University (Landreth, 2001) or Willie Wampum at Marquette University (King, 2001).

Native American mascots derive from a long tradition of playing Indian (Deloria, 1998; Green 1988; Huhndorf, 1997; Mechling, 1980). European-Americans have always fashioned individual and collective identities by masquerading as Indians. Native American mascots are an extension of a long tradition dating back at least to the Boston Tea Party and continuing today in many manifestations of popular culture: youth groups such as the YMCA Indian princesses and the Boy Scouts; the Grateful Dead; and the ongoing appropriation of indigenous spirituality, dubbed “white shamanism.” Native American mascots are meaningful only in the context of American imperialism, where European-Americans not only controlled and remade Native America but also felt nostalgic for that which they had destroyed. Thus, European-Americans banned Indian dance and traditions while also appropriating them as essential elements of their athletic events (Springwood & King, 2000). Moreover, with the rise of public culture, the production of Indianness in spectacles, exhibitions, and other sundry entertainments proliferated, offering templates for elaborations in sporting contexts (Moses, 1996). Because of comments by fans or sportswriters, historic relationships between an institution and indigenous peoples, and regional associations, Native American mascots crystallized as institutionalized icons, encrusted with memories, tradition, boosterism, administrative investment, financial rewards, and collective identity.

Native American mascots have become increasingly embroiled in controversy (King & Springwood, 2001b; Spindel, 2000). Individuals and organizations—from high school students and teachers to the American Indian Movement and the National Congress of American Indians—have passionately and aggressively contested mascots, forcing public debates and policy changes. A handful of institutions (e.g., University of Utah) have revised their use of imagery, while many others, including St. John’s University and the University of Miami, have retired their mascots. At the same time, many school boards—for example, the Minnesota Board of Education and the Los Angeles School District—have opted to require that schools change them. Moreover, religious organizations and professional societies—including the Unitarian

Universalist Association of Congregations, the National Education Association, the United Church of Christ, the Modern Language Association, the United Methodist Church, and the American Anthropological Association—have condemned the continued use of Indian icons in education and athletics.

Indeed, the federal government has recently begun to play a more active role in the unfolding struggles over mascots. In April 2001, the United States Commission on Civil Rights issued a strongly worded statement opposing the continued use of Indian names, images, and logos. Two years earlier, the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board invalidated the Washington Redskins’ name because it disparaged Native Americans and brought them “into contempt or disrepute.” In addition, attorneys with the Department of Justice have sought legal strategies to challenge mascots and remedy their negative effects.

The actions of activists, educators, students, politicians, and administrators concerned with mascots and their effects have made a difference. Over the past 30 years, the total number of mascots has decreased markedly. Suzan Shown Harjo, director of the Morning Star Institute and past president of the National Congress of American Indians, estimates that nearly 1,500 mascots have been changed, retired, or reworked since 1970 (personal communication, December 2, 2001). Moreover, in 1994, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction urged all schools in the state to discontinue using “Indian” imagery. As of 1999, 21 of approximately 75 schools had retired such mascots.

COMMON ARGUMENTS

As important as such activism has been, it has often occasioned a virulent defense of antiquated uses of Indians long after parallel imaginings of African-Americans or Latino- and Latina-Americans have all but faded from popular culture. To be sure, the retention of mascots has hinged on the distinct ways in which European-Americans have racialized Native Americans (King & Springwood, 2001b; Springwood & King, 2000). Just as important has been the constellation of arguments offered in support of mascots by fans, alumni, students, pundits, journalists, politicians, and administrators (e.g., Davis, 1993; King, 1998; Prochaska, 2001; Springwood & King 2000, 2001). At root, these overlapping positions emphasize respect, intention, fairness, and common-sense notions of symbols, play, and politics.

Quite simply, these arguments can be summarized as follows: mascots honor Indians; they are not meant to defame, injure, insult, or give offense; they are not racist; mascots are all about fun; there are more important

problems to worry about; and critiquing is a form of political correctness. Such arguments, however, refuse to seriously engage living Native Americans in their defense of imagined Indians. Moreover, they often tell Native Americans how to think or how they should feel (namely, respected and honored). At the same time, these arguments question critics, enjoining them to “get real” or “get a life,” precisely as they infantilize them through demands that opponents “grow up.” Finally, supporters of mascots exhibit an inability and unwillingness to see or talk about race, history, and power. It is in this context that educational institutions endeavor to respond to and retain “their” Indians. In the process, administrators, boosters, students, and alumni implement an array of anti-Indian practices that can be grouped into six categories: myopia and misrecognition; possessiveness; compromising positions; endorsement; incorporating Indians; and invoking terror.

MYOPIA AND MISRECOGNITION

Mascots have always hinged on misrecognition. In fact, most Americans fail to see Native Americans for what they are or have been (Sigelman, 1998), misinterpreting, misusing, and misrepresenting them. Native American mascots tend to be false and clichéd. Chief Illiniwek at the University of Illinois—meant to represent the indigenous inhabitants of what is now Illinois—is a fictional figure, a figment of the European-American imagination, clothed not in Woodland dress, but the more familiar headdress and regalia generically associated with the Plains. Similar images abound throughout the United States, whether at Northeast Louisiana University or countless high schools, including those in Rahway, New Jersey; Martinsdale, Indiana; Marquette, Michigan; and Kingsport, Tennessee (see, for example, <http://stutzfamily.com/mrstutz/prejudice/Teams.htm>). Moreover, Native American mascots emphasize bellicosity and warfare, often framed in terms of honor and independence. At Florida State University, although Chief Osceola does portray a historic war leader of the Seminoles, he defines Indianness solely in terms of aggressiveness, savagery, and violence. At home football games, a white student in racial drag rides an Appaloosa to midfield and thrusts a lance into the turf. Still others make Indianness a joke, mocking Native Americans as they mimic them. For instance, at Marquette University in the 1960s, a white student donned a huge fiberglass “Indian” head with exaggerated features (e.g., a huge nose), performed crazy antics, and led students and fans in cheers. Elsewhere, Parks Elementary School in Natchitoches, Louisiana, uses an infantilized Indian—reminiscent of one of the ten little Indians—who stalks unseen prey. Whether noble, historic, authentic, humorous, or warlike,

Native American mascots always get it wrong, recycling stereotypes and well-worn imperial clichés.

Not surprisingly, the defense of mascots turns on misrecognition as well. Supporters of mascots argue that mascots do not constitute a problem because they are just names and images that are not meant to harm or offend. Supporters, moreover, argue that critics should “get over it,” “get a life,” “get real,” “grow up,” and otherwise worry about more pressing issues. Administrators forced to confront their mascots often rely on a similarly myopic reading. They cannot see Indians and exclude them from their institutional visions. School board members in Manhattan, Kansas, recently voted to retain the Indians as the mascot of the local high school. Some publicly expressed resentment over having to confront the issue, claiming it was “not the biggest problem facing the district.” In Des Moines, Iowa, administrators at the predominantly Latino East High School have suggested that their mascot is not a problem because they do not have Indian students, overlooking the fact that a majority of their students from Latin America have Indian ancestry (Jesse Villalobos, personal communication, August 15, 2001). At Wichita North High School—the alma mater of famed professional football player Barry Sanders—alumni, students, and staff have defended their mascot, the Redskins, as a symbol honoring American Indians and reflecting their collective pride for the native nations of North America. In response to charges of racism, Associate Principal Wardell Bell, himself of mixed African-American and Cherokee ancestry, officially legitimates such misreadings: “I’ve seen the real thing all my life, police stopping me, questioning me and no one else when there’s lots of white people around, people staring hard at me. Trust me . . . the Redskins name is not racism” (Wenzl, 1999, p. 12).

In Bell’s remarks—no less than in the administrative comments and political decisions in Kansas, Iowa, and countless other places—cultural categories obscure the visibility of Native Americans, undermining the viability of their claims. One should not be surprised to find Native Americans and other oppressed minorities invoking these categories or defending mainstream symbols. Some Native Americans and other peoples of color view mascots as appropriate, positive, and defensible simply because they have accepted and even internalized the values and assumptions central to such uses of Indian imagery (King, 2001). When all is said and done, anti-Indianism often hinges on an unwillingness and/or inability to see. Because educational institutions fail to recognize embodied Indians and choose, instead, to fall back on myopic and false renderings of Indianness, they do not and/or cannot discern why mascots might be problematic, how they might be meaningful to their students or a broader public, or how they could be construed as racist, denigrating, and painful.

POSSESSIVENESS

If the misrepresentations of Indianness animating mascots presuppose misrecognition, they also demand appropriation and ownership, promoting a possessiveness that often shapes struggles over mascots. Fans, students, and administrators must take from Indian communities—or at least from imagined versions of indigenous cultures—in order to craft their mascots. In the process, the appropriated attributes of Indianness (feathers, dance, headdress, and the like) become their property; the crafted Indian often becomes “their” own as they play at being Indian. Thus, in debates over mascots, when notions of tradition, culture, and Indian surface, more often than not they refer not to the traditions, cultures, and perspectives of actual Indians but rather to white fantasies, institutional practices, and local conventions. In other words, they refer to “their” Indians and their traditions.

Fundamentally, possessing Indians through racial cross-dressing grants European-Americans immense creative power to imagine themselves and their histories. Adamson Middle School in Rex, Georgia—a Georgia School of Excellence—offers a clear example of the possessiveness associated with Indian play at educational institutions. The school’s website proudly proclaims that “You have entered Indian Territory” as an animated group of five warriors, against the backdrop of a soft rendition of stereotypical “Indian” music, peeks over an embattlement at the visitor (<http://www.clayton.k12.ga.us/schools/019/sitemap.htm>). An animated Indian named Chop guides visitors through subsequent pages for chiefs (administrators), Indian guides (teachers), tribe (students), smoke signals (activities), and trading post (community involvement). Such possessiveness has profound transformative implications. At the University of Illinois and at Florida State University, claims of Indianness are not only a means of fashioning identity and community but also of legitimately laying claim to space, to possessing territory and the dispossessed (Springwood & King, 2000).

These entrenched claims and associations, in turn, frame the terms of subsequent debates. For instance, at Anderson High School (Cincinnati), defenders of the Redskins mounted a popular campaign in 1999 to preserve the school symbol. In a campaign dubbed S.O.S., or Save Our Skins, supporters distributed yard signs and actively participated in public forums, asserting the honor and integrity of their tradition and symbols, while denigrating Indians as inferior, deviant, and uncivilized. Clearly, the defense of mascots often has little to do with embodied Indians and their practices and everything to do with European-Americans and their own sense of self-worth. Consequently, efforts to defend the appropriation and reinvention of Indianness in the form

of mascots must be interpreted as efforts to preserve white power at the expense of embodied Native Americans.

COMPROMISING POSITIONS

When confronted about “their” Indians, educational institutions often defer and deny. They establish commissions to study the issue; they hold forums and public discussions; they may even meet with critics. Faced with mounting criticism over the name of its mascot, Glen Johnson, president of Southeastern Oklahoma State University, home of the Savages, adopted what can only be described as a typically academic strategy of obfuscation and meaningless loquacity.

I have asked the strategic planning council to determine if any change would be appropriate based on the school’s long-term goal and mission. At this time we are under no deadline to make a decision. We want to proceed slowly to ensure that all points of view are heard. (Southeastern Oklahoma State, 2001)

At the same time, administrators actively deny the charges of critics. They paint themselves and their uses of Indianness as innocent, harmless, respectful, and even educational. They refuse to take symbols or ideologies seriously. They insist that their school symbols are not meant to offend. They reject accountability, arguing that it is not their fault that some fans or students do ugly things or that some members of the public could read racism where respect is meant. For instance, in the early 1990s, then president Dale W. Lick (1993) sought to defend Florida State University’s continued use of Seminole imagery through active denial.

Recent critics have complained that the use of Indian symbolism is derogatory. Any symbol can be misused and become derogatory. This, however, has never been the intention at Florida State. Over the years we have worked closely with the Seminole tribe of Florida ensure the dignity and propriety of the various symbols we use. . . . Some traditions we cannot control. For instance, in the early 1980s, when our band, the Marching Chiefs, began the now famous arm motion while singing the “war chant,” who knew that a few years later the gesture would be picked up by other team’s fans and named the “tomahawk chop”? It’s a term we did not choose and officially do not use.

For Lick and other administrators, the best defense is a good offense. By means of such orchestrated public relations campaigns, institutions hope to

convey an image of action while avoiding engagement with the fundamental issues of stereotyping, dignity, and terror.

These tactics of deferral and denial set in motion a subsequent set of strategies centered around resolving the problem (i.e., the controversy over the mascot) without addressing its roots (i.e., reflecting on the illegitimate and inappropriate uses of Indianness and retiring the mascot). In fact, over the past 25 years, institutions have sought to contain critique and retain "their" Indians by seeking a middle ground and/or offering incentives. On the one hand, institutions and booster organizations have sought to bribe critics. They have proposed retaining Indian mascots but, at the same time, have offered to establish or expand Native American Studies programs or, alternately, have offered to create scholarship programs for Native American students. The Chief Illiniwek Educational Foundation (CIEF), an organization dedicated to the retention of said mascot at the University of Illinois, clarifies the anti-Indian core of such proposals and solicitations. In 1999 it planned an essay contest focused around the theme: "How does Chief Illiniwek best exemplify the spirit of the University of Illinois?" Significantly, CIEF sought not only to defend Chief Illiniwek but also to link its defense of an imagined Indian with the struggles of embodied Native Americans insofar as it planned to donate the prize money to a Native American organization that would support its cause.

On the other hand, educational institutions have endeavored to find workable compromises that ensure the retention of Indian symbols. These have ranged from modifying imagery to restricting marketing rights. For instance, at the University of Utah and at Bradley University, the team names (Utes and Braves, respectively) were retained, but team logos were made less offensive—both schools now use a feather in place of antiquated images of Indians—and embodied mascots were retired. At the same time, administrators at the University of Illinois have terminated licensing agreements for products bearing the likeness of Chief Illiniwek that were considered blatantly offensive (e.g., toilet paper and beer). What is noteworthy here is not only that compromise is defined in white terms but also that these proposals would be unimaginable for other ethnic groups in the United States. Can one seriously imagine a proposal that simultaneously encouraged an African-American Studies program but leaves unchanged racist practices toward blacks?

ENDORSEMENT

Educational institutions with besieged mascots frequently seek public endorsements to authorize their uses of Indianness. Often, alumni support plays

a crucial role in administrative decisions (e.g., Connolly, 2000). Colleges and universities not only want to cultivate a strong booster culture, but they also want to foster a spirit of giving among their alumni. The promise of donations—or the (real or imagined) threat that gifts will be revoked—shapes how administrators approach mascots. At the University of North Dakota, wealthy donor Roy Englestad threatened to revoke a \$100 million gift if the Fighting Sioux team name and logo were discontinued. Not only was the mascot retained, but the state board of regents hastily endorsed it in hopes of ending the ongoing public controversy. If anti-Indian images and practices increase the endowment, many administrators seem more than willing to make use of them.

Embattled institutions and their supporters also seek to protect mascots by engaging in what they believe to be real dialogue and subsequent consensus building, but which, in essence, is nothing more than a democratic masquerade. They stage elaborate public hearings where opponents and proponents speak their minds before a decision is made by the institution. The recent "dialogue" at the University of Illinois exemplifies this "staging" of democracy. A retired judge presided over timed statements from both sides and later issued a voluminous report seeking a middle ground that advocated the retention of Chief Illiniwek. Elsewhere, the governing bodies of colleges and universities and local school boards commonly pass resolutions supporting individual mascots and dismiss criticism as misdirected political correctness. In fact, both the Illinois and Florida legislatures have sought, in the past five years, to legally sanction mascots as the honored and appropriate symbols of their respective state institutions (Legislature, 1999). Sadly, notions of real justice and equality are missing from such sham procedures.

INCORPORATING INDIANS

In addition to strategies of bribery, compromise, and sleight-of-hand, institutions and their supporters often defend mascots by incorporating Indians. It has become almost commonplace for institutions to solicit support from indigenous people. For example, Florida State University authorizes its performances and symbols based on the public statements of a handful of aboriginal leaders, particularly tribal chair James E. Billie. Administrators also point to the fact that a descendent of Osceola publicly champions the reinvented version of his ancestor who opens each home football game of the Seminoles (see also Wheat, 1993). The administration of the University of Illinois relies on televised statements by remnants of the Illini Confederacy—the modern-day Peoria—to endorse the antics of Chief Illiniwek. Miami University of

Ohio relied on the support of the Miami Tribe for its imagined Indian, but when the tribe changed its position, it forced the university to alter its mascot, now called the RedHawk.

Moreover, universities often defend their uses of Indianness through the creative work of indigenous artists and designers. In the late 1970s, Marquette University encouraged Native American students to reimagine its embattled mascot. The result was the First Warrior, an Indian student who would perform traditional and powwow dances during timeouts and at half-time. In the 1990s, the University of North Dakota enlisted Native American artist Bennett Brien to rework the Fighting Sioux icon, hoping that a more romantic rendition created by a Native American would deflect criticism. The defenders of Chief Illiniwek at the University of Illinois have devised an array of schemes to affiliate the mascot with real Indians, from a recent scholarship contest benefiting a social service agency in South Dakota to a long-standing celebration of the fact that indigenous craftspeople fashioned the regalia worn by the Chief.

Of course, some Native Americans do support and even champion mascots. There are a variety of reasons for such support: they find images of braves and warriors to be empowering; they learn that public endorsement brings with it political, economic, and symbolic rewards; they discern an opportunity to challenge more troubling stereotypes about Indians; and they do not or cannot grasp the history and significance of mascots (see King, 2001; Springwood, 2001). The often diametrically opposed views about mascots within the Native American community are a vivid testimony about the complexity of contemporary Indian life. Ideally, these multiple voices and contradictory visions could foster a deeper appreciation of Indianness and lead to a penetrating discussion about the material conditions and socio-historical foundations animating it within "Indian Country" and mainstream society. Unfortunately, this diverse range of views—as well as the resulting paradoxes—has not encouraged reflection or dialogue, but instead has enabled a divisive and cynical incorporation of Indians by institutions and their boosters for their own purposes. In effect, academic institutions are pleased to think that Native American mascots cannot be problematic because some Native Americans support such mascots, and they are just as ready to label those who complain as troublemakers and malcontents. To say the least, the dichotomy of the "good Indian" and "bad Indian" once again raises its ugly head. Moreover, the practice of affiliation and display—the act of presenting a select few of a group in defense of one's own viewpoint—has a disturbing relationship with treaty making, where European-Americans used segments of indigenous communities to legitimate imperial actions.

INVOKING TERROR

Taken together, the covert anti-Indian expressions and practices discussed above foster—and even nurture—acts of terror whose purpose is to secure, preserve, and defend Native American mascots. Supporters of Indian mascots have commonly harassed critics of the continued misuse of Indianness. At the University of North Dakota and the University of Illinois, they have paired specific threats of violence in anonymous phone calls and letters with more generic and public postings of graffiti and fliers designed to intimidate opponents. At the same time, fans, alumni, and students have frequently taunted and insulted Native American protestors outside sporting events. Defenders of mascots also invoke more subtle forms of terror. Anonymous supporters of mascots at the University of North Dakota have reminded critics that "we won the war" and have promised that Indian rights—not Indian symbols—will be terminated as a result of the ongoing struggles (see <http://www.und.nodak.edu/org/bridges/index.html>). At the University of Illinois, in the late 1990s, a flyer with a rendering of the cover of the *Orange and Blue Observer*, a local conservative periodical, featured the following image: a white gunslinger knowingly gazes at the viewer while pointing a drawn pistol at an Indian dancer in full regalia. The caption reads: "Manifest Destiny: Go! Fight! Win!" (<http://www.csulb.edu/~wwinnesh/orangeandblue.html>).

From one perspective, these images and assertions are reiterations of anti-Indian clichés central to the conquest of Native America. In North Dakota, there is a long-standing rivalry between the University of North Dakota Fighting Sioux and North Dakota State University Bison. Supporters of the latter institution typically wear T-shirts with the slogan "Sioux Suck!" Here, then, is a sublime example of how traditional institutional rivalry is encoded as a cross-cultural conflict replaying the conquest of Native America. In the end, even as institutions seek to dissociate themselves from it, terror is simultaneously the most extreme and the most representative tactic employed to defend Native American mascots precisely because it so clearly gives voice to the anti-Indian efforts to retain them.

CONCLUSIONS

The above examples suggest that educational institutions value imaginary Indians above indigenous peoples, their cultures, and their perspectives. Accordingly, they often employ anti-Indian rhetoric and practices to preserve their school spirits. For Native Americans, the strategies discussed above have

negative consequences, much like the symbols themselves. They contribute in fundamental ways to the continual construction of public spaces and social institutions as environments hostile to indigenous peoples. On the one hand, they prevent the full recognition of Native Americans, muting their perspectives and marginalizing their value. On the other hand, they discourage Native Americans from participating more fully in American culture. Moreover, they offer uncomfortable analogies between the past and present because they bear an uncanny resemblance to historic patterns of deceit, disrespect, annihilation, appropriation, and distrust. At the same time, efforts to defend mascots contradict the aspirations and values of liberal education. Bribery, deceit, intimidation, and cynicism replace the supposed ideals of dialogue, equality, respect, and reflection. In turn, as educational institutions seek to save "their Indians," they foster inequality and encourage acts of terror. In short, they constantly reinscribe American imperialism and reinforce racial privilege.

The techniques used to defend mascots are as important as the images and imperialism at the heart of playing Indian at halftimes of football games. This is because the institutional defense of mascots reinforces the anti-Indianism of the symbols. Although these arguments and initiatives are meant to give the impression of respect and responsiveness, of sensitivity and support, they work against indigenous peoples, their perspectives, and their presence in public life, revealing the institutional foundations and continuing vitality of anti-Indianism. So long as Indian mascots persist, Native Americans will not only suffer unequal educational opportunities but also will continue to occupy a marginal position in American society.

None of this is inevitable. Mascots are social constructions. Human effort and cultural practices have made Indian images meaningful in schools, sports, and communities. Consequently, Native American mascots and their insidious effects can be undone. They can be reinterpreted, challenged, and changed. Over the past three decades, school boards, professional and political organizations, government agencies, religious groups, and educational institutions have offered impressive rereadings of mascots, calling attention to the histories and ideologies informing such symbols and spectacles. Such reinterpretations have encouraged change and have much to teach about the ways in which students and citizens—no less than educators and administrators—can deconstruct mascots and counter anti-Indianism.

One example of such reinterpretation can serve as a representative case study and point the way toward a broad strategy of resistance. In early 1971, four students petitioned the Marquette University Student Senate to retire Willie Wompum, a caricatured Indian character brought to life at home sporting events by a European-American student wearing a buckskin outfit and a huge fiberglass head (Deady, 1971; Webster, Loudbear, Corn, & Vigue, 1971).

The mascot is definitely offensive to the American Indian. We as Native Americans have pride in our Indian heritage, and a mascot that portrays our forefathers' ancestral mode of dress for a laugh can be nothing but another form of racism. Having a non-Indian play the part is just as degrading to the Indian. From the past to contemporary times there is little the white man has not taken from the Indian. About the only thing left is our pride, and now Marquette University threatens to take that away from us by allowing such a display of racism. . . . We did not give our permission to be portrayed for a laugh, and we are sure no other minority group would condone such flagrant degradation of their heritage and pride. We ask that the mascot be discontinued completely. . . . We are sure the absence of the mascot would not take away any of the effectiveness of the Number 1 basketball team in the nation. (quoted in King, 2001, p. 290)

This petition offers an eloquent and successful model of how to read mascots—a reading that encourages audiences to critically rethink the tradition of playing Indian. In fact, the petition points to three sets of questions that should inform critical interpretations of Native American mascots and all mass-mediated images of race and difference.

First, one must confront the images and, following Pewewardy (1991), "unlearn the stereotypes" embedded within them (p. 19). What imagery is chosen? By whom? Why? Does it confine Indians within the past? Does it flatten the diversity of Native America? Does it exaggerate a cultural or physical feature? Why? How does it correspond to images of Indians in other media? How does it contrast with images of other ethnic groups? Would other ethnic groups be portrayed in that fashion? Why or why not?

Second, because images are meaningful only in context, it is crucial to situate Native American mascots in history. How has playing Indian at half-time been shaped by the conquest of North America? Why did European-Americans play Indian at all? What do mascots have to do with whiteness and whiteness? How has the appropriation of indigenous cultural elements and Indianness more generally corresponded to the broader pattern of taking land and lives from Native Americans? Beyond European-American imperialism and the sorts of relations it fostered between Native Americans and European-Americans, what were indigenous peoples like? How did they live and dress? What did they believe? What are the differences between Native nations? How do such answers complicate and invalidate mascots? And, finally, on a local level, why was a particular mascot created and under what circumstances? How have administrators, fans, students, and others talked about "their" Indians?

Third, it is not enough to know that mascots are false or to appreciate the broader historical relations between Native Americans and European-Americans. To counter the anti-Indian effects of such images and practices,

critics must engage Indians, listen to their perspectives, and affirm their cultures. What are indigenous people saying about such images and about their place in society? How do mascots impact the lives and life chances of Native Americans? What sorts of feelings do they evoke? Why? How does the persistence of mascots fit into the broader context of Native American and European-American relations?

The three-pronged act of questioning images, learning history, and affirming Indianness makes visible the interconnections of culture and power, race and history, and meaning and identity. Together, these reading strategies and critical questions not only challenge us to work through and against anti-Indianism in educational institutions and beyond but also offer the tools necessary to change it.

NOTE

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Putting the Moccasin on the Other Foot: A Media History of the "Fighting Whities"

Bruce E. Johansen

Stressing their right to dignity and self-definition of ethnic identity, Native Americans have been bringing increasing pressure on a number of sports teams, from the sandlots to the professionals, to retire stereotypical mascots. "The pace is really picking up," said Cyd Crue, president of the Illinois chapter of the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and the Media. "We're seeing more educators around the country, in middle schools and high schools and at universities, concerned about the racial climate in schools, dropping these symbols" (Johansen, 2001). Since the early 1970s, about 1,250 of the nation's 3,000 elementary schools, high schools, and colleges with American Indian nicknames and mascots have dropped them, said Suzan Shown Harjo, president of Washington, D.C.'s Morningstar Institute (Johansen, 2001). Harjo has successfully sued the Washington Redskins over their use of Indian imagery, and the initial judgment in her favor (*Harjo v. Pro-Football, Inc.*, 1999) has been affirmed in United States Trademark Court.

Native American sports mascots became an active political issue during the late 1960s, with the founding of the American Indian Movement (AIM) in Minneapolis. Because of AIM, some of the first Indian stereotypes fell in the Midwest. At the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), for example, a chapter of AIM spearheaded a change of mascot from "Indians" to "Mavericks," a beef animal with an attitude, in 1971. The change was popular on campus in part because the visual depiction of "Owumpie," the "Omaha Indian," was tacky—tacky enough to make the Cleveland Indians' Chief Wahoo look like a real gentleman. The student body of UNO eventually voted to give "Owumpie" the boot. Stanford University changed its Indian mascot to a cardinal at about the same time. During the late 1960s, the National Congress

of American Indians launched a campaign to bring an end to the use of Indian sports mascots and other media stereotypes.

In the meantime, Marquette University has replaced "Warriors" in favor of "Golden Eagles." Dartmouth changed its "Indians" to "Big Green," and Miami of Ohio changed "Redskins" to the "RedHawks." Manufacturers of Crayola Crayons have done away with the color "Indian Red" (Babwin, 2000). In October 1991, when the Atlanta Braves arrived in Minneapolis for the World Series, they found more than 200 protestors surrounding the stadium's gates, with placards reading, among other things, "500 Years of Oppression Is Enough." Minneapolis was AIM's hometown, and even the mayor had made a statement calling on the Braves to sack their Indian imagery. When the Twins management asked the police to move the demonstrators further from the Metrodome, they refused, citing principles of freedom of speech and assembly.

Scholars have also paid attention to the mascot issue, especially King and Springwood (2001) and Spindel (2000). In 1999, the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport initiated annual conferences practically in Chief Wahoo's shadow at the Marriott Hotel in downtown Cleveland, with sessions that included papers with titles such as "Escaping the Tyranny of the Majority: A Case Study of Mascot Change" and "Red, Black, and White: 'Playing Indian' and Racial Hierarchy at Florida State."

THE GENESIS OF THE "FIGHTING WHITES"

A singular moment in the history of the mascot controversy occurred during February 2002, when an intramural basketball team at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) composed of Native American, Latino, and European-American students collectively decided to change its name from "Native Pride" to the "Fighting Whites." The new name was a parody of North America's many Native American mascots, most notably nearby Eaton High School's "Fighting Reds." It was the first time in popular memory that a multi-ethnic sports team had decided to adopt a European-American stereotype as a mascot. The team printed a few T-shirts (their uniform of choice) on which were printed the team's new name, a be-suited, clean-cut white man with a bland smile on his face, and the slogan "Everythang's Gonna be All White." A wave of nearly instant, continent-wide publicity ensued—a wave that stood the long-standing debate over the decency of Native sports-team mascots on its head. The Fighting Whites set thousands of virtual tongues wagging. Everyone had an opinion, from AIM to affiliates of the Ku Klux

Klan (KKK). The reactions provide a flash-frozen ideoscape of racial humor in an age of political correctness.

Within weeks, the Fighting Whites (or, as they soon became known in many circles, the Fighting Whities) had become nearly as well known as established professional monikers such as the Washington Redskins and the Cleveland Indians. A Google search in March 2002 for the phrase "Fighting Whities" turned up 4,700 hits. The publicity helped to sell thousands of T-shirts and other items for a hastily endowed scholarship fund to aid Native American students. By the end of 2002, the team had raised \$100,000 in merchandise sales for Native American students.

As Ryan White, John Messner, and Charles Cuny explained on the official home page of the Fighting Whites:

We came up with the "Fighting Whites" logo and slogan to have a little satirical fun and to deliver a simple, sincere, message about ethnic stereotyping. Since March 6, when our campus newspaper first reported on the Fighting Whites, we have been launched into the national spotlight, propelled by a national debate over stereotyping American Indians in sports symbolism. (White, Messner, & Cuny, 2002)

The Fighting Whites' parody quickly sprang from the sports pages to the front pages. From the student newspaper, the story spread to the *Greeley Tribune*, then over the state, regional, and national Associated Press wire services. Some of the stories popped up as far away as the *Guardian* in the United Kingdom. The "Whities" also were contacted by Fox Sports Net and NBC News, among many other electronic media. Soon, the Fighting Whites had developed at least nine T-shirt designs for sale on an Internet site, with receipts fueled by publicity in many major daily newspapers, electronic news outlets, and such other large-audience venues as the *Jay Leno Show*. The effect on sales was downright salubrious. Soon the merchandise was available not only on T-shirts but also on sweatshirts, tank tops, baseball jerseys, several styles of caps, a coffee mug, boxer shorts, and mouse pads.

On the court, the Whities confessed that they were hardly championship caliber, but soon their prowess at basketball didn't matter. Their reputation soon had very little to do with dribbling, jumping, or shooting, and more to do with the incendiary nature of the ongoing debate regarding Native American names for sports teams. Brooks Wade, a member of the Fighting Whites who is a Choctaw and an employee at UNC Native American Student Services, told the *Rocky Mountain News*: "It's a huge media rush. It kind of snowballed out of control, really. We started it as more of a protest so we could change things in our little world, and suddenly it's worldwide" (BeDan, 2002, p. 12A).

The original protest had been aimed at Eaton (Colorado) High School's Indian mascot, the "Fightin' Reds," after the wife of one of the "Fighting Whites" resigned a job there in anger over the issue. The protest parody quickly cut a much wider swath. Solomon Little Owl, a Crow, whose wife resigned at Eaton, was director of Native American Student Services at UNC when he joined the team. Little Owl's wife, Kacy Little Owl (who is European-American), taught special education at the high school seven miles north of Greeley for two years before leaving at the end of the previous school year (Garner, 2002).

"The message is, let's do something that will let people see the other side of what it's like to be a mascot," said Little Owl (Fighting Whities, 2002). The Whities had reason to agree with a comment on the Wampum Chronicles message board, a Native American website: "They'll swamp the country with publicity which has everyone laughing at their opponents, all the while our boys will be laughing all the way to the bank. Way to go, Fighting Whities. Give 'em hell" (Wampum Chronicles, n.d.). Little Owl said that the couple, as parents of a son who is half-European American and half-Native, felt uncomfortable mingling with townspeople at school events, especially at ball games where Eaton High School's large-nosed Indian caricature was the prominent team symbol. "It was offensive in its own way," said Little Owl (Garner, 2002).

WHO WAS INSULTING WHOM?

The Eaton Fighting Reds found themselves unwillingly sucked into the tornado of publicity created by the Fighting Whites' parody. The defenders of the Fighting Reds did not take kindly to the notion of basking unwillingly in the reflected glory of the Fighting Whites. According to a report in the *New York Daily News*:

School officials have been unresponsive to the protests of local Native American activists. John Nuspl, the school district superintendent, has said the Indian logo is not offensive but that the Fighting Whities are insulting. Yesterday, a school official would only offer, "The Eaton school district has no comment, but thank you for your call." The inquiring sportswriter was then disconnected. (Bondy, 2002)

A reporter for the Associated Press was told by Nuspl that Eaton's logo is not derogatory. "There's no mockery of Native Americans with this," Nuspl said. As for the Fighting Whites, he said, "Their interpretations are an insult to our patrons and blatantly inaccurate" (Team Chooses, 2002).

The reaction of Eaton's school superintendent brought to light an unintended irony that dogged the Fighting Whites wherever their newly minted name went. Many people who had no problem with naming a sports team after a Native American image became profoundly offended when the same thing was done, tongue in cheek, with a European-American mascot. GOPUSA, a Colorado web page of "Republican resources," declared the naming of the "Whities" a case of "Political correctness gone mad!" (GOPUSA, 2002).

Aside from a small number of people in Eaton and one editorial writer in Omaha (described below), most "white" people harvested a belly laugh or two from the parody. Some commentators went out of their way to show that, as European-Americans, they could take a joke. The "Portal of Evil" website declared the Fighting Whities to be a "mascot for the rest of us." Another virtual commentator had a suggestion for Fighting Whities team colors: "Off-white and Velveeta Cheese yellow!" (Mr. Cranky, 2002). Rush Limbaugh, the popular radio commentator, used the controversy to demonstrate his appreciation of all stereotypes: "Now, I think that's great! The team chose a white man as its mascot to raise awareness of stereotypes that some cultures endure. I love this, and it doesn't offend me at all! I'd be proud to be on the team—which is the difference here. There isn't a white person around that's going to be offended by this" (Limbaugh, 2002).

Limbaugh, who called Native Americans "Injuns" in this commentary, aimed perhaps to show that he is as good at taking ethnic stereotypes as he has been at dishing them out. "That's great!" he said. "I had to laugh and laugh on the air" (Limbaugh, 2002). Limbaugh disagreed with Eaton's offended school superintendent: "Now, come on. This is not insulting, Whitie; it's funny" (Limbaugh, 2002). "If these Native Americans had wanted to offend," Limbaugh continued,

They could have come up with something a lot worse than the Fighting Whities. . . . What's going to happen is you're going to have a bunch of civil-rights groups led by Jesse Jackson saying, "You can't do that!" Still, it's just too good. The Fighting Whities? It just rolls off the tongue. Who wouldn't want to be on that team? (Limbaugh, 2002)

The Fighting Whities nearly sent Limbaugh into rhapsody:

In fact, let's rename the 101st Airborne Division the "Fighting Whities." I mean, can't you see that painted on some Air Force squadron, on the tail of a bunch of F-16s: the Fighting Whities—and paint the airplanes all white. Oh-ho! I'll guarantee you that this is not going to fly well with the NAACP crowd, folks, because it's good, the Fighting Whities. I really do wish that I had authored this. (Limbaugh, 2002)

Barry Benintende, executive editor of the *La Jolla Light* in California, loved the idea almost as much as Limbaugh. "In this day and age it's tough to come up with a nickname for an athletic department [or] team that won't offend at least some portion of the population," he wrote in the publication's March 2002 edition.

Short of naming every school or pro-sports team "the Vanillas," someone is going to have their knickers in a twist over a nickname. Well, speaking of vanilla, let me bring up the name of my favorite sports team of all time, edging out the Banana Slugs of UCSC [University of California at Santa Cruz]—"Fighting Whities." The slogan they adopted—"Everythang's gonna be all white!"—is pure genius. (Benintende, 2002)

Sadly, lamented Benintende, only the most self-conscious "whites" were offended by the turnabout. "What was intended to turn the tables on insensitivity and support for teams like the Redskins, et al., the reaction shocked the team founders: Caucasians not only loved the name but sent them congratulatory e-mails and requests to buy Fighting Whities jerseys" (Benintende, 2002). Benintende continued: "I'm a fan of the San Diego Padres, who could be seen as offensive to Catholics. Instead, many of us find the Swinging Friar a lovable guy with whom to identify, much like we would a briefcase-toting Middle-America dad type" (Benintende, 2002). Like many other commentators, Benintende used the Fighting Whities parody to take issue with an April 2001 United States Commission on Civil Rights opinion that said Indian-themed sports teams may violate antidiscrimination laws, and should be dropped. "Does this commission finding also apply to the Fighting Irish at Notre Dame? The Celtics of Boston? And why limit it to sports teams? Does the name Rabbinical School Dropouts offend Jewish people who do not listen to the Klezmer band?" (Benintende, 2002).

One virtual tongue wagged at "The Geekery: Biased and Unbalanced News":

See, this is what I'm talking about. Racial stereotypes got you down? Now you can reverse the stereotypes back on your oppressors and not receive ANY backlash whatsoever. God, I love this country. This is probably the best idea any minority has ever had. Next we just need a baseball team, maybe "the Atlanta Trailer Park Trash" or "the Nebraska Rednecks." Hell, let's not stop there. Let's branch off into rugby too and have "the Preppy White Boys From Upper-class Neighborhoods That Look Down Upon Every Color They Have Only Seen on TV." The possibilities are endless. (Geekery, 2002)

Clarence Page, an African-American syndicated columnist based at the *Chicago Tribune*, opined, tongue in cheek, that "Sometimes offense is the best

defense" (Page, 2002). Page remarked that network television, major newspapers, and radio talk shows had made the Fighting Whites the best-covered intramural squad in the nation. The *Greeley Tribune's* website crashed when demand for the story soared to 29,000 from the usual 200 hits a day for a high-interest local story (Page, 2002). Yet, quipped Page, "Caucasians have proved to be remarkably resistant to offense. Many agreed with an e-mailer who saw the new name as an 'honor' to white Americans, who apparently don't get enough credit for their many contributions to history" (Page, 2002). "Help me out here," asked one e-mail to the *Greeley Tribune*. "Why am I supposed to be offended?" (Page, 2002). In Page's opinion,

Whether their experiment turned out the way they expected to or not, the Fighting Whites deserve to go to the head of the class for giving us all at least one important lesson in cross-cultural differences: It's not what you slur that counts, it is who is slurring it—and how. . . . As an African-American who has heard more than my share of slurs, I can tell you: to be truly offensive, it helps for a slur to carry at least a hint of a threat. . . . Most Redskins fans undoubtedly mean no harm by their passivity about their team's name. If it reminds some Indians of the days when there were bounties on Indian scalps, that's just tough tomahawks, pal. (Page, 2002)

Page concluded, "I give the Fighting Whites credit for keeping their wit about them. Humor often opens doors that battering rams fail to budge. If nothing else, they've stumbled across an unusual way to raise scholarship money. It's like the old saying: If you can't beat 'em, make a few bucks off 'em" (Page, 2002).

The texture and potency of assumed insult soon became the main point of debate for many European-Americans. "Some people online were saying that the mascot should be . . . a fat guy with buckteeth kissing his sister," said Tom Crebbs of Oakland, Calif., who heard about the idea and started his own website selling spin-off shirts, hats, and mugs (Fighting Whities, n.d.). Michael Gonsalves wondered whether, "If you are fighting against a perceived injustice, is the proper recourse to go out and do the very same thing?" (Fighting Whities, n.d.). Dimitri Vassilaros, a columnist for the *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, asserted that no one would give a mascot name to a "business or pet" that carried negative connotations. George Junne, a professor in the University of Northern Colorado's Africana Studies Department, said that a mascot "is like a pet. People don't want to be pets" (Good, 2002).

Vassilaros, who is a Greek-American, wrote that is "just my luck" that "drunken college frat brothers [are called] 'Greeks.'" He asked: "Are there any white men who feel violated whenever they see fighting whities mascots such as the Schenley Spartans, Peabody Highlanders, Central Catholic

Vikings, North Catholic Trojans, Duquesne Dukes, or even the Quaker Valley Quakers?" In his court of public opinion, Vassilaros finds that "The perpetually offended are intellectually bankrupt" (Vassilaros, 2002). A radio station in Grand Rapids, Michigan, WOOD Newsradio 1300, conducted an on-air poll, asking: "Do you think a basketball team named the 'Fighting Whities' is racially insensitive?" The results: 84.19% "no," 15.81% "yes" (Newsradio, n.d.).

A number of commentators assumed that the members of the Fighting Whites had set out to offend non-Indians, even after a number of newspaper pieces quoted them as saying this was not the case. Usually, such allegations were aired as the commentator strove to display his or her open-mindedness. An example was provided by John Ledbetter:

Offended? I want one of his team's T-shirts. They feature a white dude with a coat and tie and slicked-back hair. He looks like an IRS agent on crack, which isn't a bad name for a team either. But really, if offending us honkies was Owl's criteria for success, he may want a job with the visa department in the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service]. It's just not that often that an angle on the Anglos is spun toward something fierce or feisty. Unless you're Scandinavians—Vikings—or from Ireland—Fightin' Irish—there's not a lot of scrappy Caucasians that end up on banners in an auditorium. Of course, if you're Irish you're fighting because you're drunk—and a happy St. Patrick's Day to you too. I'm also part Irish, allegedly, so kiss my blarney if you're offended. And I'm even a lawyer. Now, talk about a maligned group. The San Jose Sharks today rejected a plan to name their team the San Jose Barristers. Ha! (Ledbetter, 2002)

In the interests of parody, Ledbetter then raised the intellectual stakes of the argument in a way that the Fighting Whites never had intended: "Earth to [Spotted] Owl: Don't count on Osama bin Laden to give you the Plains States back, or let you worship the way you want" (Ledbetter, 2002).

An editorial in the Omaha *World-Herald* called the "Whities" parody an ineffective insult. In an editorial titled "'Whities' on the Court; Insult Doesn't Work if Name Doesn't Hurt," the newspaper said that "The lack of deep, personal insult in the term 'white' may reflect the inequality of racial relationships. Because the majority typically has more power—political, economic, social—than minorities, its members are not so likely to feel diminished by words of contempt" (Whities, 2002). The *World-Herald* argued that "The white population is in the majority and lacks the depth of race consciousness needed to make a group sensitive to name-calling. Break whites down into smaller ethnic groups, however—everyone is familiar with the disrespectful names for Jews, Irish, Italians, French-Canadians and so on—and the anger

can surface quickly" (Whities, 2002). By the *World-Herald's* reasoning, perhaps "The Fighting Knee-Knocking Norwegians" might have been more effective. The editorial continued: "'The Reds' is a generic-enough name that the Greeley high school could easily move from an Indian logo to something less potentially offensive. Neither the Cincinnati Reds nor Nebraska's Big Red refers to ethnicity" (Whities, 2002).

The *World-Herald's* editorial writer composed this piece without checking how the mascot was being depicted at Eaton High School. While "Big Red" is characterized visually by Herbie Husker, definitely a down-home farm boy, the Eaton mascot is a no-bones-about-it American Indian, which was described by Owen S. Good of the *Rocky Mountain News* as "a cross-armed, shovel-nosed, belligerent caricature" (Good, 2002). The *World-Herald* was too polite to let loose with the names it might use to address the "Fighting Whites." Another commentator was not as shy, providing a number of very specific team names meant to insult "white" people, including: "[The] White Slaveowners; Light-Skinned Nigger-Killers; Fighting Crackers; Blue-Eyed Devils; The Rhythm Lackers; The Small Penises; The Non-Dancers; The Big House Massas" (T. Rex Essay, 2002). The author commented: "I suggest that, if they really want to get their point across, and they really want to do the equivalent of names like 'Redskins.' I think names like these more accurately represent the negative stereotyping of names like 'Redskins' and the use of images of the 'savage' American Indian" (T. Rex Essay, 2002).

Some European-Americans were severely offended at the use of a "white" mascot, and became very eager to pay back the perceived insult. One militant "white" nationalist web page characterized the "Fighting Whities" parody this way:

Some redskins on an intramural basketball team up at the University of Northern Colorado got their feathers all in a bunch recently and decided to show white folks, and especially those at nearby Eaton High School, whose motto is "Fightin' Reds," and whose logo is a caricature of an Indian—how insulting it is to have their identity pre-empted this way. "Damn, didn't the Sambo's Restaurant chain get into heap big trouble with blackskins and have to change their name because black folks found it offensive to be portrayed as anything less than nuclear physicists? If the blackskins can back whiteskins down so easily, then certainly redskins can do the same thing." (Millard, 2002)

The same site offered links to another seeking orders for its own European-American icon: a T-shirt portraying knights of the Ku Klux Klan in white sheets burning a cross, above lettering reading "The Knight Time's the White Time" (Klan T-shirts, n.d.).

SERIOUS DEBATES NATIONALLY

Aside from a debate over who was offending whom, the “Fighting Whities” parody provoked a great deal of serious debate on the mascot issue nationally. Student editorialists at the University of Illinois *Daily Illini*, where a controversy has long raged regarding the school’s Chief Illini mascot, suggested that the Fighting Whities take its place.

When University Board of Trustees member Roger Plummer addressed the board about Chief Illiniwek, he said the board has two decisions. Alas, at this prestigious University, we must strive for excellence. That’s why Scout was disappointed to see Plummer did not suggest the University adopt The Fighting Whities, the symbol a group of students in Colorado used to make a point. The school could keep “Fighting” on all its merchandise. Just scratch out “Illini.” People couldn’t call it offensive because it’s actually just taking the idea of the Fighting Irish to the next level.” (Campus Scout, 2002)

“In sports,” the *Daily Illini* editorial concluded, “There’s nothing better than taking it to the next level. In life, there’s nothing better than poking a little fun at yourself. The students like ‘The Fighting Whities,’ too. Scout’s received numerous e-mails supporting the suggestion” (Campus Scout, 2002). Tanya Barrientos, a *Philadelphia Inquirer* columnist, took issue with a survey conducted by Harris Research in the March 4, 2002, edition of *Sports Illustrated*, which asserted that only 32% of Indians living on reservations believed Indian names and mascots used by professional sports teams contributed to discrimination against them. The same survey stated that the proportion of Native Americans not living on reservations who perceived no discrimination in Indian team names or mascots was 83%. Barrientos wrote: “Perhaps I should lighten up. But my gut tells me that Chief Wahoo is wrong. He smacks of a Sambo, a lawn jockey, or one of those Mexicans sleeping under a broad-brimmed sombrero. There has to be a good reason why 600 schools, minor-league teams, and other pro-sports franchises have dropped or changed their Indian names and mascots since 1969” (Barrientos, 2002). Bob DiBiasio, vice president for public relations for the Cleveland Indians, had told Barrientos that Chief Wahoo was never meant to be a racist logo and that “if there is no intent to demean, how can something demean?” “Tell that,” she concluded, “to the Fighting Whities” (Barrientos, 2002).

A DEMONSTRATION IN EATON

Eaton High School’s 450 students found themselves neighbors of a rally against its Fighting Reds mascot. The demonstration coincided with Eaton

High School’s graduation ceremony, which was held during the afternoon, after the rally had dispersed. The Eaton police rehearsed for weeks in anticipation of the event, and called in reinforcements from nearby Ault, as well as the Weld County Sheriff’s Office. “We are prepared to handle this event,” said Sgt. Arthur Mueller of the Eaton Police Department. “We don’t anticipate problems, but we do have several contingency plans in place” (Ochoa, 2002). The plans included mounted horse patrols, a K-9 unit, police teams patrolling the perimeter of the demonstration, and officers mingling through the crowd, as well as officers posted on nearby rooftop. “We will have zero tolerance when there is an issue of safety for the officers, participants or residents. . . . And we will have zero tolerance for the destruction of private property or public property” (Ochoa, 2002). Unarmed security guards trained by AIM also planned to provide added security to the rallying group. Dozens of local and county police, on foot and horseback, as well as private security guards, awaited the protesters. As the rally concluded, roughly 300 marchers promised to return next year and the year after that, until the mascot image was retired. Coloradans Against Ethnic Stereotyping in Colorado Schools wants nearly 40 public schools statewide to change American Indian mascots that it believes are hurtful and racist.

“This is our introduction to Eaton on how to live respectfully,” said Russell Means, a founder of AIM and a longtime national activist for Native American rights. “If Eaton wants to put up with this every year for their graduation, then so be it” (Nigoya, 2002). According to a report in the *Denver Post*, “Protesters marched through town—drums beating, chants rising—on their way to Eaton City Park. There were speeches of heritage and strife, racism and tolerance” (Nigoya, 2002). “They’re upset, saying we ruined their graduation,” Means said. “With this [mascot], they ruin every single day of our lives” (Nigoya, 2002).

Fred Gibbs, a 26-year-old fifth-generation Eaton High graduate, said he couldn’t understand why some people chose to be offended by a symbol that most in town considered a respectful honor to American Indians. The mascot was called “a tough little warrior that we’re very proud of” by Gibbs, who was watching from his front lawn. “None of us feels like it’s a negative portrayal” (Good, 2002). But Means, who is well known in Denver for demonstrating against the city’s Columbus Day parade, said there was nothing even remotely honorable about using American Indian images as sports mascots: “It [comes from] the day when only the fiercest animals were used as team mascots—Lions, Tigers. . . . That’s what Indians are to these teams, the fiercest of beasts” (Good, 2002). Means suggested that next year’s demonstration might confront the school’s graduation ceremony directly (Good, 2002).

EVALUATING THE "WHITIES" IN IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

On an Internet page devoted to anarchist causes, Bob Maxim wrote that "Acceptance of racial stereotypes of 'Indians' as they're commonly called is not only more widespread than any other race, but actually ingrained so steadfastly into the American culture that most people don't see what all the fuss is about" (Maxim, 2002). The proponents of Native American mascots often profess no malice—indeed, they loudly broadcast an admiration of their own stereotyped creations. Sometimes this sense of "respect" can be taken to absurd lengths, as when some European-Americans defend the use of the word "squaw" as a place name with full knowledge that it originated as a reference to Native women's vaginas. However, wrote Maxim, "The fact is . . . [that] disrespect . . . is disrespect in the eyes of the offended, not the offender."

The use of a prototypical European-American figure as a mascot for a sports team (even a minor, intramural one) ignited an explosion of debate illustrative of a touchstone issue that has inflamed tempers for years. Maxim proposed that the offensiveness of Native stereotypes be tested by using other ethnic caricatures in their places.

Take any name and caricature and change the stereotype and tell me if it seems offensive to your own sensibilities. For example, ask yourself if you would feel offended if they announced they were changing the Washington Redskins to the Washington "Blackskins," and put a flared-nostrilled caricature of Kunta Kinte on the helmets, or a crazed-eyed Zulu Warrior with a bone in his nose wielding a spear. Do you think folks would argue that they were honoring black people, and their noble fighting spirit? (Maxim, 2002)

The defense of Native American mascots by non-natives can be seen as enforcement of sense of conquest, of a reminder that European-Americans now set the perceptual rules. Maxim continued: "How about the Fighting Kikes, or Wops . . . or a Boston favorite, the Washington Micks? Imagine the Washington 'Whiteskins,' with a caricature of George W. [Bush] on the helmet" (Maxim, 2002). With a sense of gentle sarcasm, that was the message that the Fighting Whities chose to send. The noise with which the message was received is illustrative of the perceptual power of images.

CONCLUSION

It's been years since Step-n-Fetchit was sent packing to the racial-stereotype graveyard; it has likewise been a couple of decades since Frito-Lay discarded its Frito Bandito. Yet, at the beginning of the 21st century, we find ourselves

arguing over whether professional athletes should wear the likeness of Chief Wahoo, and whether fans who believe themselves to be decent people should regret doing the tomahawk chop. Tim Giago, editor of the *Lakota Journal*, comments: "Would you paint your face black, wear an afro wig, and prance around a football field trying to imitate your perceptions of black people? Of course not! That would be insulting to Blacks. So why is it OK to do it to Indians?" (Nevard, n.d.).

Why are sponsors of Native American mascots so possessive of their fantasy images? The struggle over sports mascots can evoke anger and even violence. In the otherwise peaceful Catskills town of West Hurley, New York, a mascot struggle sparked a struggle for control of a local school board. A ban on use of racial images was enacted in April 2000 by the board governing the 2,300-student Onteora school board. The mascot then became the lead issue in a campaign for control of the school board. During May, supporters of the Indian image won a majority of board seats. In June, the school district's Indian imagery was reinstated. During the fall of 2000, opponents of the Indian mascot found their cars vandalized, with nails and screws driven into tires and paint splattered on windshields, usually while the cars were parked at school board meetings.

Supporters of Onteora's Indian imagery (which included a tomahawk chop, totem poles in the school cafeteria, and various pseudo-Indian songs and dances) have been known to bristle at any suggestion that their images degrade Native Americans in any way. Joseph Doan, a member of the school board that voted to reinstate the Indian imagery, said that many white citizens see the Indian image as a symbol of honor and environmental protection. "Our Indian has nothing to do with degrading Indians. It's our symbol and we're proud of it," said Doan (Gormley, 2000).

More than two decades ago, Choctaw filmmaker Phil Lucas addressed the question on the pages of *Four Winds*, a short-lived glossy magazine devoted to Native American art, history, and culture, by asking how whites would react if a sports team was named the "Cleveland Caucasians." What would European-Americans think, Lucas asked, if Indians adopted racial names (such as the "Window Rock Negroes" or the "Tahlequah White Boys") for their sports teams (Lucas, 1980, p. 69). Native Americans have come to make this point with increasingly intense emphasis, asking sponsors of such mascots who insist they are "honoring" Native Americans to put the moccasin on the other foot.

The "Fighting Whites" (or "Whities") spawned intense controversy by doing just that, igniting controversy on a profoundly sensitive issue. Why is the issue so sensitive? In his foreword to *Team Spirits*, Vine Deloria Jr. identifies several reasons: residues of racism, a sense of the Indian as "other,"

and the fact that "Indians represent the American past, and Europeans and Americans have been fleeing from their own past since the days of discovery and settlement" (King & Springwood, 2001, pp. ix-x). These images are ideological artifacts reflecting attitudes toward "race, power, and culture" (King & Springwood, 2001, p. 1). For all of these reasons, a parody created by an intramural basketball team in a small Colorado college town set off a firestorm of debate.

NOTE

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