



# Native American Mascots Dishonor and Demean: The Psychological and Sociological Impacts of Racial Slurs as Mascots

Rebrand Washington Football, December 2019



The face was added in 1973



## Introduction

Daniel Snyder, owner of the Washington professional football team, emphatically declares that Native American mascots honor Native Americans. If this were the case, Native Americans in the Washington metropolitan area would be exalted and thriving. The red carpet would be rolled out: they would be esteemed professionally, enjoy wonderful social interactions with neighbors, and their children would thrive in school as their peers would look up to them as determined warriors on and off the gridiron. After all, the helmet of the professional football team features a handsome looking and determined Native American bust; the team has a battle cry and song featuring brave acts of Native Americans in battle; and the team's exploits are widely viewed on electronic and print media. Fawning non-Natives would revere Native Americans and put them on a pedestal.

Contrary to Mr. Snyder's assertions, the positive benefits of Native American mascots have failed to materialize. A substantial body of research has demonstrated the exact opposite: Native American mascots dehumanize, demean, and stereotype. They harm the educational experiences of Native American and non-Native American children. They demoralize and depress the self-esteem of Native American children. They reinforce negative stereotypes for non-Native American children. They facilitate non Native-American children bullying of Native American children. While no studies of a longitudinal nature document how attitudes of both non-Native American and Native American children evolve as they become adults, it is unlikely that exposure to Native American stereotypes in childhood somehow metamorphose from negative to positive impacts as children become adults.

Mr. Snyder's rose colored vision of Native American mascots cannot be realized because of the historical and social context of stereotypical mascots. In United States history, a dominant culture employed stereotypical logos and mascots to tease and oppress racial and ethnic minorities. Blackface and minstrel performances poked fun at the supposed inferiority of African-Americans and made whites feel comfortable with their oppression and justified their segregated society. Similarly, redface and Native American mascots were a demonstration of white settler conquest of Native American peoples. Dominant culture used Native American mascots to appropriate Native American culture and to perpetuate unhealthy stereotypes of Native Americans as brutes and savages.

The term R-skin was used to refer to scalps of Native Americans that were turned in as rewards to the local authorities. When making the documentary, *More than a Word*, the film makers John and Kenn Little also made a shirt that has an advertisement from the Winona Daily Republican newspaper from 1863. This ad states, "The State Reward for Dead Indians has been increased to \$200 for every R-DSKIN sent to purgatory."

As a parent testifying at a listening session held by the Department of Education put it, "When will the truth be admitted that the 'r-dskins' term was historically used as a reference for the



outright genocide of our people by the offering of monetary rewards for the bloody scalps of our men, women, and children?”<sup>1</sup>

When Edward Bennet Williams became the second owner of the team in 1972, the National Congress of American Indians wrote him a letter stating that:

Born at a time in our history when the national policy was to seize Indian land and resources, and hunt down Indian people who stood in the way, the term ‘R-dskin’ has been perpetuated through such media as western movies and television. Most often, the term is coupled with other derogatory adjectives, as ‘dirty R-dskin’ or ‘pesky R-dskin’ which is used interchangeably with the word ‘savage’ to portray a misleading and denigrating image of the Native American.<sup>2</sup>

Such a history cannot be turned around by Mr. Snyder merely snapping his fingers and asserting that Native American mascots and the word R-skin now honor Native Americans. The negative stereotypes have seeped into our collective consciousness over the generations. Whenever a major institution such as a sports team repeats them loudly, negative associations are triggered in our brains, even if we try to resist such associations. Furthermore, the small numbers of Native Americans in the United States population (of 2 percent or less in major metropolitan areas such as the District of Columbia) means that most non-Native Americans do not have contact with Native Americans and thus easily accept the negative or over-simplified stereotypes of Native American mascots and logos.

Recent surveys conducted by the Washington Post and a private consulting firm purport to show that the great majority of Native Americans are not offended by mascots. However, these surveys are administered in a biased manner with flagrant disregard of social science methodology. For starters, the surveys were not careful to only survey officially enrolled members of Native American tribes. Most of the respondents self-identified as Native Americans. Given the confused and bigoted history towards Native Americans in this country, non-Natives have a fascination with Native Americans and a number of them seek to identify as Native American. Perhaps, an ancestor several generations ago may have been Native American. However, this in no way equips these faux Native Americans to respond to surveys with an understanding of the intricacies of Native American culture let alone the basic fundamentals of cultural values and Native American institutions or history. They simply cannot understand the impacts that Native American mascots have on Native American self-esteem.

Even if survey respondents may not be “offended” by Native American mascots, the mascots can still nevertheless have harmful impacts by constraining how Native Americans view themselves

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Adams-Cornell (Choctaw), Parent Oklahoma City Listening Session, in U.S. Department of Education, *White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education: School Environment Listening Sessions*, Final Report, October 2015, pp. 43-44.

<sup>2</sup> Erik Stegman and Victoria Phillips, *Missing the Point: The Real Impact of Native Mascots and Team Names on American Indian and Alaska Native Youth*, Center for American Progress, p. 9, July 2014.



as discussed more fully below. Lastly, the survey respondents were adults, not Native American children in schools with Native American mascots or in cities with teams with Native American names and logos. Surveys of Native American children provide an opposing view to the faux survey of the Washington Post.

Medicine has as its fundamental maxim the Hippocratic Oath which means “do no harm.” In light of the psychological and sociological harm discussed in this report, Mr. Snyder ought to adhere to the Oath. Even if he thinks that his mascot and logo may honor, he should retire them immediately in order to protect against the possibility that they harm.

### **Psychological Studies Show that Mascots Harm Native American Youth**

In *Of Warrior Chiefs and Indian Princesses: The Psychological Consequences of American Indian Mascots*, Stephanie Fryberg and colleagues conduct four surveys of Native American high school and college youth, showing them mascots and stereotypes ranging from Chief Wahoo of the Cleveland Indians major league baseball team and the movie character Pocahontas. The surveys found that even when the mascots and stereotypes had positive associations with a trait such as bravery, they depressed the individual self-esteem of the youth and lowered their regard for Native American communities. For the college youth, the mascots and images lowered their self-worth and future expectations of finding jobs or achieving good grades.<sup>3</sup>



Fryberg explains the seeming inconsistency between positive associations and lowered self-esteem by saying that positive associations reduce the range of possibilities. For example, a warrior image may suggest to youth that their ethnic or racial group may be good athletes but will not excel in white collar professions. In another example, the depiction of Asians as excelling in math may lead to Asian students choking on tests.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Stephanie A. Fryberg, Hazel Rose Markus, Daphna Oyserman, Joseph M. Stone, *Of Warrior Chiefs and Indian Princesses: The Psychological Consequences of American Indian Mascots*, *Race and Applied Social Psychology*, 2008, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01973530802375003>, pp. 213-215.

<sup>4</sup> Fryberg, pp. 209-211.



Fryberg's study was mixed regarding whether Native American youth experienced positive or negative associations with mascots. However, before we conclude from Fryberg's study that Native Americans experience mostly positive associations with Native American mascots, Friedman reports that another study found that Native American students were more likely to report negative associations with a Fighting Sioux slide image than non-Native American students.<sup>5</sup> In other words, when compared with non-Native survey respondents, Native Americans were more likely to experience negative impacts of Native American mascots.

### **Psychological Studies Show that Mascots Harm Non Native-American Youth**

In *Do American Indian mascots = American Indian people? Examining implicit bias towards American Indian people and American Indian mascots*, John Chaney and colleagues use the methodology of Implicit Association Test (IAT) to assess how non-Native American college students view Native American mascots and people. Chaney selected six Native American mascots to test: Chiefs, R-dskins, Indians, Warriors, Braves, and Fighting Sioux. Six Caucasian mascots were tested: Celtics, Mountaineers, Pirates, Vikings, Rebels, and Fighting Irish. The IAT test paired positive and negative adjectives with each mascot. The non-Native American students choose the negative adjectives for the Native American mascots.<sup>6</sup>



In further testing, the IAT methodology found that the non-Native American students likewise associated the negative adjectives with Native American people. In other words, for the non-Native American students, the negative associations with Native American mascots carried over

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<sup>5</sup> *The Harmful Psychological Effects of the Washington Football Mascot - A research report compiled by Michael A. Friedman, Ph.D., on behalf of Oneida Indian Nation*, <http://www.changethemascot.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/DrFriedmanReport.pdf>, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> John Chaney, Phd Amanda Burke, Phd and Edward Burkley, Phd., *Do American Indian mascots = American Indian people? Examining implicit bias towards American Indian people and American Indian mascots*. American Indian and Alaskan Native Mental Health Research, 2011, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3fe2/984385d77eaff3438d28298bd14c02ba4e59.pdf>, pp. 44-49.



to Native American people.<sup>7</sup> In addition, those students who harbored negative impressions of Native Americans also adopted stereotypical attitudes of their Native American peers such as thinking they would enjoy cultural activities more than academic pursuits.<sup>8</sup> By their omnipresence, Native American mascots of professional sports teams threaten to perpetuate unhealthy and stereotypical thinking. Chaney and colleagues conclude, “Given this strong negative bias that non-Native American people have towards both Native American mascots and people, it is difficult to defend the use of Native American mascot images as truly positive, honorable representations of Native American people.”<sup>9</sup>

Scott Freng and Cynthia Willis-Esqueda conduct a study similar to Chaney’s. They chose three mascots and logos: Chief Wahoo and the logos for the Yankees and Pirates. They pair each logo with positive and negative adjectives. The participants were 112 college students; most were white and none were Native American.<sup>10</sup> The tests showed that students associated Chief Wahoo with negative associations instead of positive adjectives.<sup>11</sup> They conclude that, “Therefore, our results supported the claims leveled by opponents to American Indian mascots but challenged the notion that these mascots honor Indigenous Peoples.”<sup>12</sup>

In *Dog Whistle Mascots: Native American Mascots as Normative Expressions of Prejudice*, Michael W. Krausa and colleagues found that a college campus with Native American logos created an atmosphere that increased racial separation and divisiveness. Krausa and colleagues found that white students were more likely to approve of the logos than students of color. White students also had more of a feeling of belonging on campus than students of color.<sup>13</sup> The alienation felt by students of color spilled over to their donation behavior; they were less likely to donate than white former students. Overall, the survey found that donations decreased 5 percent for this college because of the Native American image.<sup>14</sup>

### **Ethnological Research into the Harms of Mascots**

In addition to psychological studies, ethnological research featuring interviews, roundtables, and focus groups reveal the harm of mascots. This research reinforces the findings of the American Psychological Association (APA) that Native American mascots create hostile learning

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<sup>7</sup> Chaney, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> Chaney, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> Chaney, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> Scott Freng and Cynthia Willis Esqueda, *A Question of Honor: Chief Wahoo and American Indian Stereotype Activation Among a University Based Sample*, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 2011, 151(5), 577–591, pp. 583–584.

<sup>11</sup> Freng and Willis Esqueda, p. 586.

<sup>12</sup> Freng and Willis Esqueda, p. 586

<sup>13</sup> Michael Krausa, Xanni Browna, Hannah Swobodab, *Dog whistle mascots: Native American mascots as normative expressions of prejudice*, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, September 2019, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022103118304311>, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Krausa, p. 10.



environments for Native American students.<sup>15</sup> The mascots are a desecration of Native American culture and harm the ability of Native Americans to portray and perpetuate their culture and traditions.<sup>16</sup> Racial stereotypes make the victims ashamed, create inferiority complexes, and make the victims disinclined to continue with their traditions.

Reviewing the use of R-skin mascots for the Oneida Indian Nation, Dr. Michael Friedman concludes “The continued use of the “R-word,” when being used to describe the Washington team or Native Americans, increases the likelihood of creating racially hostile environments both in workplaces and schools, and the continued use of the term above objections of Native Americans risks ongoing harassment and bullying of Native Americans.”<sup>17</sup>

The Department of Education undertook a national listening tour which involved sessions around the country with Native American youth, teachers, advocates, and other stakeholders.<sup>18</sup> The sessions revealed clearly and powerfully the harms associated with Native American mascots.

Amanda Anderson (Choctaw), a former high school student from Oklahoma in the listening sessions described the impact of an R-skins mascot this way:

In high school, my mascot was the ‘R-dskins’ and I had to watch my classmates make posters saying we are going to ‘skin’ our sports opponents. The other teams would make posters that said they are going to send us home on a ‘trail of tears.’

I’m now in college, and I recently had to write a peer-review paper, and I wrote on the mascot issue. I had a classmate say that Natives don’t exist anymore, so no one should be upset by the mascot issue. I asked, ‘Well, am I real?’ He said, ‘You don’t live in a teepee, so no.’ It’s still a slap in the face every time. I thought I had moved on, but it still hurts every time.<sup>19</sup>

A bold straight line of cause and effect is drawn between Native American mascots and bullying as shown by the testimony of the following witnesses in the listening sessions:

I’ve been in many schools with Native mascots. The kids I work with around that subject come and talk about how hurtful that is. It’s hard for them to go into school rallies because of all the war cries and whooping. - Michael Folsom (Choctaw), School Psychiatrist, Los Angeles Listening Session<sup>20</sup>

[My grandsons] have long hair, and last spring, I got a call from my youngest grandson, and he said, ‘I want to come home. Some of the kids are teasing me because we are

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<sup>15</sup> Stegman and Phillips, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Stegman and Phillips, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Friedman, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Education, *White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education: School Environment Listening Sessions*, Final Report, October 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Education Listening Sessions, p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Department of Education Listening Sessions, p. 42.





‘braves,’ and they say I’m the mascot.’ They are the only Native kids there, and so they are alone. That’s exactly why I have been an advocate for change all these years because of kids [who] have to endure this type of discrimination. Seemingly harmless kidding can have a lasting impact. - Jacob Tsotigh (Kiowa), Grandfather Oklahoma City Listening Session<sup>21</sup>

In addition to bullying, the use of racial stereotypes can deepen divisiveness in society and create dangerous situations for minorities. This parent compares the use of Native American mascots to Nazi stereotypes of Jews. She asserts that multiple difficulties afflicting Native Americans stem from racial stereotyping. When a dominant culture fundamentally does not respect racial and ethnic minorities, various forms of discrimination and violence occur.

Some people say that we have more important issues to worry about. I believe that the *dehumanization caused by the use of derogatory mascots is a major contributing factor* as to why we have more important issues to worry about.

It is a dehumanization tactic, born of institutional racism, similar to the derogatory terms and imagery ... used by Hitler to usher in the Jewish holocaust. ... The use of derogatory and stereotypical caricatures used to falsely depict Native Americans ... hold an eerie resemblance to the caricature-like pictures of people with exaggerated facial features ... used in old Nazi propaganda newspapers, ... which were used to influence and incite negative public opinion, and thus the dehumanization of Jewish people. ... It seems to me that we allow those who profit from its offensiveness to lead the discussion. It’s dangerous because it ignores atrocities. ... We are not just offended. We are scared. - Alecia Onzahwah (Kickapoo), Cofounder, Indigenize, Inc. Oklahoma City Listening Session<sup>22</sup>

### **But the Washington Post Poll Says Most Native Americans are not Offended**

In May of 2016, the Washington Post reported that it had conducted a poll of 504 Native American people residing in every state and Washington D.C. The poll purported to report the astounding findings that 70 percent of respondents indicated that the name was not disrespectful and that 90 percent did not find the name offensive.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> John Woodrow Cox, Scott Clement and, Theresa Vargas, *New poll finds 9 in 10 Native Americans aren’t offended by Redskins name*, May 19, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/new-poll-finds-9-in-10-native-americans-arent-offended-by-redskins-name/2016/05/18/3ea11cfa-161a-11e6-924d-838753295f9a\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/new-poll-finds-9-in-10-native-americans-arent-offended-by-redskins-name/2016/05/18/3ea11cfa-161a-11e6-924d-838753295f9a_story.html)





Some stakeholders including the owner of the team proclaimed that the debate was over since Native Americans were clearly not offended. A respected local columnist declared he would no longer oppose the name.<sup>24</sup>

Not so fast. A deep methodological flaw with the poll is that only 44 percent of the respondents were officially enrolled in tribes. The other 56 percent self-identified as Native American.<sup>25</sup> The Post ran into a flaw common in social sciences when polling Native Americans. Self-identification can include several respondents who are calling themselves Native Americans but are not authentically Native American or might be tangentially Native American as one of their ancestors several generations ago may have been Native American. Someone who is tangentially Native American is unlikely to be deeply involved in Native American life or preserving Native American institutions. They are unlikely to understand how a stereotype erodes authentic Native American culture. An analogy would be a religious stereotype used by a sports team that undermines real Jewish or Christian practice.

Also, as discussed above, even if a mascot does not offend does not absolve a mascot from potential damage. Positive associations with a mascot can still damage Native American youth or adults by confining how they think about their careers or personal aspirations. Also, an underdeveloped sense of self-pride in the face of widespread racial or ethnic stereotyping can contribute to self-destructive behavior.

In this context, consider the following paragraphs from the article reporting on the Washington Post poll.

Anita Whitworth, 62...is a mother of five who worked for years as a chemical-dependency counselor, she hates the name.

She views it much the same way that many activists do. They argue that the central problems ravaging native communities — poverty, violence and addiction — can only be fixed if young people take pride in who they are.

Her youngest, Whitworth said, is a dark-skinned 13-year-old who attends an almost entirely non-native school in a region long plagued by racial tension.

When she looks at him, Whitworth thinks back to the years of disparagement she's endured.

She has seen store employees follow her because they suspect she will steal something. She has heard derogatory comments in restaurants.

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<sup>24</sup> Robert McCartney, *I am dropping my protest of the Washington football's team name*, Washington Post, May 20, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/im-dropping-my-protest-of-washingtons-football-team-name/2016/05/19/b09e8e7e-1cfe-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/im-dropping-my-protest-of-washingtons-football-team-name/2016/05/19/b09e8e7e-1cfe-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7_story.html)

<sup>25</sup> See detailed data from the poll: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/new-poll-finds-9-in-10-native-americans-arent-offended-by-redskins-name/2016/05/18/3ea11cfa-161a-11e6-924d-838753295f9a\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/new-poll-finds-9-in-10-native-americans-arent-offended-by-redskins-name/2016/05/18/3ea11cfa-161a-11e6-924d-838753295f9a_story.html)



She has also been called a “R-dskin.”<sup>26</sup>

It is unclear what motivated the Washington Post to conduct a survey concerning the name of the football team in 2016. The Post notes that several public officials in the Washington DC area had expressed concerns about the name, but that “news that such a large percentage of Native Americans do not care about the name could provide the necessary political cover for District leaders to welcome Snyder’s club to return to the site of RFK Stadium . . .” The Post also remarks that at the time of the poll, the U.S. Supreme Court was in the midst of deciding a trademark case involving the use of racially offensive names. The Post states that various attorneys declined to discuss the poll’s potential impact on the trademark case, but that “Some experts say the survey’s results could help the team, but others argue that the data cannot be admitted as evidence because the case is no longer at the trial level.” The Post’s article was clearly aware of potential influence of the poll on a number of issues important to the football team. Indeed, the Post declared that Native Americans’ responses to the poll were “unambiguous: Few objected to the name, and some voiced admiration.”<sup>27</sup> The small sample size and the self-identification of the respondents were downplayed by the reporting about the survey.

In August of this year, a new survey by the market research company Wolverine was released suggesting that most Native Americans are not offended by Native American mascots.<sup>28</sup> Examining the survey results shows enough contradictions that honest defenders of Native American mascots would not want to use the results to bolster their cause. While the survey said that most Native Americans were not offended by the mascots, the survey also found that similar percentages of Native Americans were annoyed or frustrated by mascots as were supportive of them (37 percent were proud and 34 percent were annoyed). Moreover younger Native Americans were more likely to be opposed to mascots than older generations.

Again, the fatal flaw with the survey is that respondents were self-identified as Native Americans instead of officially enrolled in tribes. Self-identification can include people who are not Native Americans so survey results can be tainted. The Native American Journalists Association demanded a retraction of all commentary and reporting associated with this survey.<sup>29</sup> Further, Native American writer and advocate Rebecca Nagle points out that fake surveys find fake Native Americans and produce fake results.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cox, Clement, and Vargas, *New Poll finds 9 in 10 Native Americans aren’t offended by Redskins name*.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ryan Baum, *Skin in the Name*, <https://www.wolvereye.com/skin-in-the-name>

<sup>29</sup> NAJA demands The Washington Post retract unreliable data sets and all associated reporting, August 2019, <https://najanewsroom.com/2019/08/12/naja-demands-the-washington-post-retract-unreliable-data-sets-and-all-associated-reporting/>

<sup>30</sup> Rebecca Nagle, Washington’s NFL team has always used pretendians to excuse the team’s racist mascot, Indian Country Today, September 3, 2019, <https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/opinion/washington-s-nfl-team-has-always-used-pretendians-to-excuse-the-team-s-racist-mascot-6RoNSVa-bkqeXwKqvzPvWA/>



When scholars and Native American organizations carefully design unbiased surveys, the results are completely opposite to the Washington Post and Wolverineeye surveys. The Center for Native American Youth (CNAY), a national advocacy organization based at the Aspen Institute and founded by former Senator Byron Dorgan, has conducted national surveys of young Native Americans. In 2016, the survey had responses from 700 Native American youth under the age of 25. The survey found that 64 percent of Native youth wanted to improve school climate and safety by removing racist mascots.<sup>31</sup>

Dr. James V. Fenelon of the Center for Indigenous Peoples Studies at California State University conducted a survey of 400 respondents that were verified to be either Native American (officially enrolled in a tribe) or other race or ethnicity. Two-thirds of Native Americans thought that R-skins is a racist symbol and word.<sup>32</sup> Even one-third of whites agreed. On a second question about whether the name was disrespectful of Native Americans, 68 percent of Native Americans agreed.

### **Recent Mascot Confrontations**

During the Major League Baseball (MLB) playoffs this fall, Cardinal relief pitcher Ryan Helsley of the Cherokee Nation asked the Atlanta baseball team to discontinue the “Tomahawk” chop during home games. Mr. Helsley stated:

Just depicts them in this kind of caveman-type people way who aren’t intellectual. They are a lot of more than that. It’s not me being offended by the whole mascot thing. It’s not. It’s about the misconception of us, the Native Americans, and how we’re perceived in that way, or used as mascots. The R-dskins and stuff like that.<sup>33</sup>

Subsequently, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) extended an invitation to meet with the Atlanta baseball team to discuss the Tomahawk chop.<sup>34</sup>

In late October, Native Americans generated a large protest of the R-skins game against the Vikings. Minnesota’s Lieutenant Governor, Peggy Flanagan--who is Native American--, writes

Dating back to American colonialism, there are different origin stories for the term “Redsk\*n.” They are *all* deeply painful for Native people. At best, the term was a

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<sup>31</sup> *Drawing Strength from Our Cultures, State of Native Youth Report*, the Aspen Institute, December 2016, p. 33, <https://cnayblog.wordpress.com/2016/11/30/native-american-youth-drawing-strength-from-our-cultures/>

<sup>32</sup> Press Release Submitted by James Fenelon, *Survey on Redskins team name found most American Indians believe it to be offensive and racist*, November 2016, <http://anyflip.com/tsak/priv/basic>

<sup>33</sup> Jake Russell and Jacob Bogage, *Cardinals pitcher calls Braves’ tomahawk chop ‘disappointing’ and ‘disrespectful*, Washington Post, October 5, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/10/05/cardinals-pitcher-calls-braves-tomahawk-chop-disappointing-disrespectful/>

<sup>34</sup> Press Release: NCAI Welcomes Overture of Major League Baseball’s Atlanta Franchise to Initiate Dialogue with Indian Country on Mascot Issue, October 2, 2019.



reference to the reddish tone of Native peoples' skin and was commonly used to dehumanize them. At worst, it refers to the bloody scalp of a Native American.

She cites the psychological studies that conclude that racist mascots harm Native American self-esteem and she worries about her six-year-old daughter who told her, "Mommy, that's not okay. We're people, not mascots."<sup>35</sup>



Picture from Les Carpenter and Des Bieler, Protesters Rally Against R-dskins Name before Vikings Game in Minneapolis, October 24, 2019, Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/10/24/protesters-plan-rally-against-redskins-name-before-vikings-game/>

In early October, the Katonah-Lewisboro School Board dropped a Native American mascot used for its middle-school. The superintendent explained:

In 2019, maintaining the mascot is at odds with our educational mission. If we are to teach our students the importance of truly listening when someone or some group tells us

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<sup>35</sup> Peggy Flanagan, It's Far Past Time For Washington's Football Team To Dump Its Racist Mascot, Huffpost, October 24, 2019, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/washington-football-racist-mascot\\_n\\_5db0b1eae4b0d5b7894545d3?ncid=engmodushpmg00000004](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/washington-football-racist-mascot_n_5db0b1eae4b0d5b7894545d3?ncid=engmodushpmg00000004)





that our behavior or our words are harmful or unwelcome, then we as a district should serve as a model.<sup>36</sup>

Mr. Snyder, we hope you listen to the wise words of this Superintendent.

The history of Native American activism makes it clear that Native Americans and their civic and religious institutions roundly condemn mascots. A recent case in Idaho illustrates this. In Idaho, a school district recently retired the name R-skins from its high school name.<sup>37</sup> The high school responded to the local Shoshone-Bannock tribe, which said that the continued use of the name would only honor genocide. A tribal position paper says, “We do not have a name for r-dskin in our language. The origin of the name r-dskin refers to the name colonists made up. These names clearly delineated Indian people as a separate race of people who had no civil rights under the U.S. Constitution.”<sup>38</sup>

Maine recently banned Native American mascots at public schools at all levels. In explaining the need for the change, Maulian Dana, the tribal ambassador for the Penobscot Nation in Maine states, “It is part of a big picture of historical oppression of Indigenous people. When you see people as less than people, you treat them accordingly. That actually points to the very core of it, is that they make us invisible and turn us into stereotypes.”<sup>39</sup> Over 2,000 high schools have shed racist mascots and 28 of them have shed the name R-skins over the last 25 years. Native American tribal representatives are invariably either leading these efforts or are involved.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

The pseudo-science of poorly designed and flawed surveys could persuade observers that Native American mascots do not bother Native Americans. In contrast, the real science of carefully crafted psychological research and ethnographic field work is rather clear that Native American mascots have widespread harm to both Native Americans and non-Native Americans alike. The mascots perpetuate stereotypes and even “positive” mascots constrain the thinking of both Native Americans and non-Native Americans according to the research.

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<sup>36</sup> Zak Failla, *Katonah-Lewisboro School Board Agrees To Replace Indians Mascot*, Lewisboro Daily Voice, <https://dailyvoice.com/new-york/lewisboro/schools/katonah-lewisboro-school-board-agrees-to-replace-indians-mascot/778954/>

<sup>37</sup> The Oregonian, *Idaho high school drops mascot name that is disrespectful of Native Americans*, July 17, 2019, <https://www.oregonlive.com/nation/2019/07/idaho-high-school-drops-mascot-name-that-is-disrespectful-of-native-americans.html>

<sup>38</sup> Michael Lycklama, *Savages, Indians or Braves: Idaho tribe asks state government to ban all Indian mascots*, Idaho Statesman, July 25, 2019, <https://www.idahostatesman.com/sports/high-school/article233137341.html#storylink=cpy>

<sup>39</sup> Christine Hauser, *Maine Just Banned Native American Mascots. It’s a Movement That’s Inching Forward*, New York Times, May 22, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/22/us/native-american-sports-logos.html>

<sup>40</sup> National Congress of American Indians, *Ending the Legacy of Racism in Sports and the Era of Harmful Indian Sports Mascots*, October 2013, [http://www.ncai.org/resources/ncai-publications/Ending\\_the\\_Legacy\\_of\\_Racism.pdf](http://www.ncai.org/resources/ncai-publications/Ending_the_Legacy_of_Racism.pdf), p. 8



The carefully crafted surveys conducted by Native American researchers conclude that Native Americans do not want mainstream society to use Native American mascots. It also makes intuitive sense that Native American children in schools with Native American mascots or Native Americans living in urban settings with Native American mascots will take more offense than survey respondents who “identify” as Native American but are not officially enrolled in tribes or participate regularly in Native American culture and religion.

Surveys cannot be used to settle civil rights issues. If they were, the Supreme Court would have ruled differently in *Brown v. Board of Education* because mainstream society in the 1950s would have responded overwhelmingly negatively in a survey probing about the need to integrate schools. Likewise, surveying victims of racial and ethnic mascots is inappropriate. Surveys tend to sensationalize, inflame, and confuse sensitive and troubling issues, especially those that revolve around America’s original sins of genocide and slavery and where the dominant and minority cultures have not overcome the psychological damage of centuries of oppression.

The psychological and sociological studies instead of being buried in academic journals should have received the press and publicity of the faux surveys in recent years. Alas, academics and Native American advocates lack the loud bullhorns or power utilized by the mainstream press or sports franchises. However, in a country in which freedom of speech and expression still rule, though tenuously, RWF’s hope is that these careful studies and reasoned voices are listened to and action taken to “immediately retire” racial mascots as urged by the American Psychological Association.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> APA Resolution Recommending the Immediate Retirement of American Indian Mascots, Symbols, Images, and Personalities by Schools, Colleges, Universities, Athletic Teams, and Organizations, <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/mascots.pdf>