**Washington Football Team Drops Redskins Mascot? : Why? What Does this Mean? [[1]](#footnote-1)**

**By**

**Gary Arthur**

**ABSTRACT**

*The recent removal of the Redskins mascot from the NFL franchise located in Washington D.C. may have been long overdue, but this change is also reflective of current societal movements affecting all cultures in the U.S. There are strong voices on both sides of the Redskins issue and critical topics of discussion and debate have surfaced in connection with equity, diversity, and inclusion. The role of activism is highlighted during these times of change and topics that address identity, cultural appropriation, racism, and historical realities are of importance. Possible approaches to resolution that span cultural division may include communication strategies that foster education, acceptance, and understanding.*

**THE ISSUE**

Identity is an important factor in human existence. This is true for all of us, but in many ways, it is especially critical for Indigenous populations who have survived colonization and assimilation and are seeking to re-establish their identity. The recovery and re-establishment of culture, traditions, and ceremony is crucial to this quest. Recent activism challenging the use of Native mascots in the sports world underscores the recognition and revival of Native culture and history. The current controversy surrounding the use of Native mascots, especially in our nation’s capitol, gets at the issue of identity as names, symbols, and mimicked movements may compromise identity. The issue however is not so cut and dried. Voices from both sides of the mascot debate hold strong points of view, and many other issues are also at stake.

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WASHINGTON REDSKINS**

After more than eighty years of utilizing the Redskin mascot name, Dan Snyder, current owner of the Washington NFL franchise announced in July 2020 that the professional football team in our nation’s capital has decided to drop the Redskin mascot name. Snyder had vowed in the past that “We’ll never change the name. It’s that simple. NEVER – you can use caps.”(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6otaiq6iu4>) But events inspired by the “Black Lives Matter” (BLM) movement may have served as a catalyst for removing the name as major financial supporters threatened to pull resources from the professional football franchise unless the name was dropped.

Surprisingly, the connection between professional football and Native Americans has its historical roots with the original foundation of professional football in America. The first president of the American Professional Football League in the United States in 1920 was Jim Thorpe (Sac and Fox Nation), a great all-around athlete who played professional football and baseball. He was also an Olympic medal holder and standout athlete for the Carlisle Indian School in the early 1900’s. This ironic association of Native American identity and professional sports is rarely referenced but probably should be considered when discussing the use or misuse of Native mascots and the Redskins mascot specifically. It could be argued that recognizing and connecting Native American identity in this way may support appropriate mascot use for sports teams in some instances. (<https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/American_Professional_Football_Association>)

The NFL Redskins team was originally founded as the Boston Braves in 1932. The name was changed to the Redskins in 1933 so as not to be confused with the professional baseball team with the same mascot name (Braves) which eventually moved to Milwaukee and now Atlanta. In 1937, the Redskins franchise moved to Washington DC. It wasn’t until 35 years later in 1972 that the current imagery was created and attached to the mascot name – the image of a Native American warrior.



Twenty years later a court case was filed by Susan Harjo and six other Native American Leaders resulting in the cancellation of the federal registrations for the Redskins marks by the [Trademark Trial and Appeal Board](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trademark_Trial_and_Appeal_Board), but in 2005, the US District Court for the District of Columbia reversed the decision on the grounds of insufficient evidence of disparagement. (https://missoulian.com/jodirave/redskins-lawsuit-revived---tuesday-july-19-2005/article)

Now the Redskins mascot name has been dropped from the NFL Washington DC franchise. What were the motivations that caused this change? What did this mean? What other changes were happening at this time? These are all key questions surrounding this decision to drop this NFL franchise mascot name. There are strong voices on both sides of issues regarding this.

**VOICES IN FAVOR OF THE NAME CHANGE**

A prominent voice of American leadership, former President Obama weighed in on the mascot issue regarding the Washington DC NFL team by saying that the name needed to be changed. This was during his tenure as the US President when issues connected with the name were once again drawing media attention. A litany of other responses also favored dropping the name. ," Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer said in a statement: "July 13, 2020, is now a historic day for all Indigenous peoples around the world as the NFL Washington-based team officially announced the retirement of the racist and disparaging 'Redskins' team name and logo," **(NAVAJO NATION (3TV/CBS 5)**

Stephanie A. Fryberg, Tulalip, PhD, University of Michigan co-authored a study “Unpacking the Mascot Debate” Fryberg said the team’s research showed that “while Native Americans in our sample generally opposed Native mascots, especially the [Washington team’s], attitudes varied according to demographic characteristics (e.g., age, political orientation, education) and the strength of participants’ racial–ethnic identification.” This co-authored research states,

“Native people, tribes, and organizations (e.g., National Congress of American Indians, n.d.) point to psychological research demonstrating that Native mascots are stereotypical and undermine the wellbeing of Native Americans.” The study goes on to state a collection of polling data by Indian Country Today that states 67% to 87% of Native people find Native mascots and team names offensive.(Begaye, Indian Country Today, July ’20) (Unpacking the Mascot Debate: Native American Identification Predicts Opposition to Native Mascots, Stephanie A. Fryberg\*a, Arianne E. Eason\*b, Laura M. Brady\*a, Nadia Jessopa, Julisa J Lopeza, aUniversity of Michigan, bUniversity of California, Berkeley)

**Washington DC Mayor, Muriel Browser said,** “It is “past time” for her city’s NFL team to change its name and “deal with what offends so many people.” In response to this statement, National Congress of American Indians President Fawn Sharp said,

“In this historic moment for racial justice, Mayor Bowser’s declaration reflects the growing tide among our nation's leaders and all Americans to choose respect for Native people and all other people of color by ridding our country of the symbols of racism and intolerance that have long marginalized and dehumanized us.” (Estes, <https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/study-finds-only-harmful-effects-from-native-themed-mascots>, 6/15/20)

***Indian Country Today*, a prominent news publication in the U.S., quoted the following Native leaders regarding their thoughts on the retirement of the DC NFL franchise mascot name.**

* [**Crystal Echo Hawk**, IllumiNative executive director](https://www.facebook.com/indianzcom/photos/a.600307953364494/3427796410615620/?type=3&theater) said, “Today we celebrate the retirement of the Washington NFL football team name that has long perpetuated racism and harm against Native peoples. This is 30 years in the making, and we honor the leaders of this movement, Suzan Harjo and Amanda Blackhorse, and important contributors such as Dr. Stephanie Fryberg, First Peoples Worldwide and thousands of other Native organizations, people and tribal leaders who have fought for this.”
* **Rickey Armstrong Sr.,** president of the Seneca Nationsaid**,** "After decades of perpetuating and promoting an offensive and racist nickname, change has finally come to the football franchise in Washington. It is a change that is long overdue. The Seneca people and Indigenous people everywhere are appreciative of the fact that this change is finally being made. Yet, it is clear that the team’s ownership did not make this decision out of respect and decency toward Indigenous people, who have been calling for this change for many years. Ultimately, it was the financial pressure exerted by corporations and the possible hit on the team’s wallet that drove the decision.”
* **Ray Halbritter**, Oneida Nation representative and head of the Change the Mascot campaign said, **“**The NFL and Dan Snyder have finally made the right call, and Change the Mascot commends them for it. This is a good decision for the country – not just Native peoples – since it closes a painful chapter of denigration and disrespect toward Native Americans and other people of color. Future generations of Native youth will no longer be subjected to this offensive and harmful slur every Sunday during football season."
* **[Peggy Flanagan](https://twitter.com/peggyflanagan/status/1282670751083122688" \t "_blank)**[, White Earth Nation](https://twitter.com/peggyflanagan/status/1282670751083122688" \t "_blank) said,“This decision is the right one - and it took WAY too long to get here. I am thankful my young Anishinaabe daughter will not have to grow up seeing this racist image of our people plastered on TV, jerseys & merchandise. This is an important first step. We’ve got more work to do.”

Loyola University Maryland professor Kaye Wise Whitehead who grew up in Washington DC in a family of DC football fans said,

"Finally, this team, like so many other companies and organizations, (is) looking to be on the right side of history." She also added, "I get it. I also know that It is very hurtful. It is very painful, and it needs to be changed. It needs to be wiped clean and recognize that there is pain in that name," Wise Whitehead said. "It might be something that's financial to you. For other people, it's about the fact that you are using a slur. You're lifting that up and you're celebrating it." (**LANDOVER, Md. (WBAL TV & AP) —** Jul 13, 2020)

**VOICES AGAINST THE NAME CHANGE**

In 2016, the *Washington Post* published a poll stating that 90 percent of Native Americans responding to the poll did not find the Redskin mascot name offensive. A new study from the University of Michigan and UC Berkeley contradicts that situation. About half of the 1000 Native Americans that were polled in the latter scientific survey said that the name was not offensive. Mark ‘One Wolf’ Yancey, a Redskin fan and co-founder of a Redskins’ Fan Club, promotes the use of the mascot as supportive talking points for Native Youth and a catalyst for learning and preserving culture. Yancey identifies with Chiracaua Apache lineage.

One argument that supports the use of Indian mascots by Native Americans is that the names at least recognize the existence of Native peoples and provides a connection of ironic identity that has been lost through assimilation and colonization to an extremely marginalized population. (Arthur, “Should Indian Mascots Be Repealed?’)

A noteworthy voice against the removal of the DC Redskin mascot name, comes from Don Wetzel of the Blackfeet Nation in Montana. The imagery team logo connected to the Washington franchise was created by his father, Walter “Blackie” Wetzel, while he was president of the National Congress of American Indians. Wetzel maintains that the mascot and accompanying imagery was not offensive, and that the logo design “… represents the Red Nation in a positive way.” Wetzel said his father called on leaders from other tribes in collaboration with creating the imagery, and that it was done in the right way. (Scott Mansch; <https://www.greatfallstribune.com/story/news/2014/02/16/don-wetzel-dont-call-redskins-logo-offensive/5528647/>)

The Native American Guardian’s Association is an organization that advocates for increased education about Native Americans in school systems and a greater recognition of Native American Heritage through high profile venues such as professional athletics. A promotional post on their website says “Educate NOT Eradicate.”



There are you-tube videos posted on the site that supported the use of the Redskin name in particular and spoke against its removal from the NFL team. (<https://www.nagaeducation.org/>) A website identified as Redskinsfacts.com stated on its “facts” page, “We believe the Redskins name deserves to stay. It epitomizes all the noble qualities we admire about Native Americans — the same intangibles we expect from Washington’s gridiron heroes on game day. Honor. Loyalty. Unity. Respect. Courage. And more. On this page, you can read more about the storied history of the Redskins identity.”

A *Washington Post* fact checker though, Glenn Kessler, refutes three claims made by the website as far as their authenticity. 1.) The origin of the word was a term coined by Native Americans as an inclusive expression of solidarity. 2.) That prominent Native American leaders such as Sitting Bull and Tecumseh referred to themselves as ‘Red-men’ or ‘Red-skins.’ 3.) On the inaugural Redskins team in 1933 there were four Native Americans including the head coach.

(<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2014/07/31/fact-checking-the-new-web-site-redskinsfacts-com/>)

Some players who donned the Washington franchise football uniform and sported the mascot logo, and played under the roar of a boisterous and supportive fan base, have expressed attachment to the mascot. Former Redskins offensive lineman and member of the fabled “Hogs,” Jeff Bostic, shared mixed thoughts about the name change with WTOP.

“I think everybody was so proud of that name when I was fortunate enough to play and like I said, it’s just that our society has changed from when I started in 1980 to where it is right now,” Bostic told WTOP. (<https://wtop.com/washington-football/2020/07/reactions-to-washingtons-nfl-team-name-change/>) [Thomas Robertson](https://wtop.com/author/thomas-robertson/) and [Rob Woodfork](https://wtop.com/author/rob-woodfork/) WTOP News, July 14, 2020

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word fan can be defined as a derivative from the word fanatic. The level of enthusiasm for a sports fan in connection with his or her identification with their team can reach very high levels of support and attachment. Loyal Washington Redskin fans are among the most outspoken regarding the name change. The following quote from a fan very closely connected to the mascot name had this to say:

"This is always going to be my team. Redskins Nation. ("Hail To The Redskins") to the death of me. It's in my blood. When you get cut, it's burgundy," said a fan who identified himself as Road Warrior. "They changed the name, but that doesn't mean it's going to change me." (**LANDOVER, Md. (WBAL TV & AP) —** Jul 13, 2020)

Many fans though had mixed feelings about the change. While lamenting this alteration in some ways, they make attempts to accept and understand it. The following quote expresses this point of view:

"So it's going to mess around with the fan base, and it's not an easy thing for the fan base to do a name change like that," said Christopher Hawthorne, a season ticket holder. "It's mixed emotions here. I understand what they changed the name for because I can't be oblivious to racism. Because growing up here, as an African American person, (I) can understand what racial things are going on and discrimination in our current times." (**LANDOVER, Md. (WBAL TV & AP July 13 2020—** July

**CHOOSING THE NEW NAME**

Now that a significant move has been made in dropping the Redskin mascot, there are strong points of view regarding the choice of a new name. Rather than rush to make this choice, the franchise leadership has temporarily named the NFL team ‘The Washington Football Team.’ Many opinions continue to be offered about the choice of the new mascot name.

Ben West son of founding director of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., is co-director of a film entitled, “Imagining the Indian.” The trailer states that in the 100 years after Europeans arrived, the population of Native Americans was reduced by 90 percent. “This legacy of genocide and the attitudes that sit behind it are in every Native person's mind as he or she, even in the 21st century, looks at the names of sports teams and the denigration that is often reflected in the mascots associated with them,” said Richard West. (Estes, *Indian Country Today, June 15, 2020*)

The above quote may serve as a direction in not only choosing a new name for the Washington DC NFL franchise, but also in re-naming mascots for teams – professional, collegiate, and pre-college – nation wide as many are choosing to drop Native mascot names and rename them. Past examples of this dynamic are as follows: St. John’s Redmen was changed to the Red Storm; the Seattle University Chieftans was changed to the Redhawks; the Marquette Warriors was changed to the Golden Eagles, and the Stanford Indians are now the Stanford Cardinal. Stanford does not have an official mascot, but the team name refers to the color of team uniforms. (“Should Indian Mascots Be Repealed?” Arthur,2 012)

Another trend in re-naming mascots is the tendency to retain the ‘Red’ portion of the name which still may be problematic. Keeping red in the name can be motivated by minimizing the cost of replacemening equipment and uniforms.

Regarding the choice of a new name for the Washington NFL team, the following people of note had suggestions:

[Billy Mills, Olympic gold medalist and Running Strong for American Indian Youth national spokesperson](https://www.facebook.com/RunningStrongforAmericanIndianYouth/photos/a.10150763239034878/10158751836649878/?type=3) said**,**

"It’s never too late to do the right thing. Now I urge the Washington football team to truly turn the page, and pick a new name and logo with no exploitation of Native people. They are on the verge of righting a historic wrong. What they do next will define this team’s legacy.” (Indian Country Today, July 15, 2020)

Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.), vice chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs said,

“ I am glad that the Washington football team has finally reckoned with the hurtful truth about its name, and I urge the team to listen to and include Native voices as it considers a new name.” (<https://thehill.com/changing-america/respect/diversity-inclusion/507139-washington-nfl-football-team-to-change>, July 13, 2020)

John Two-Hawks, a curator at nativecircle.com told WTOP

“The R word itself is a racial slur, but everything that goes with that, the Native imagery, all of those things are offensive and stereotypical, and so the greatest hope is that the [team owner Dan Snyder] chooses a name that has nothing to do with ethnicity or racial groups at all,” John Two-Hawks, a curator at[nativecircle.com](http://www.nativecircle.com/), told WTOP. [Thomas Robertson](https://wtop.com/author/thomas-robertson/) and [Rob Woodfork](https://wtop.com/author/rob-woodfork/) (WTOP News, July 14, 2020)

Kevin Gover, director of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, first wrote a letter to the NFL team about its name in 1973. For him, the mascot announcement was welcome, but only a start. “The demand is not just to get rid of the name but to stop using Native Americans as mascots, and that applies not just to the Washington football team but to all of the professional, and even college and high school, teams that continue to use Native imagery in support of their teams,” Gover said. (<https://wtop.com/washington-football/2020/07/reactions-to-washingtons-nfl-team-name-change/> Robertson & Woodfork)

Kevin Blackistone, an ESPN Sports analyst and instructor of Journalism at the Phillip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland believes that the Washington team needs to make a clean break from Native American imagery and that some of the suggested replacements such as Red Tails, Red Wolves, or Warriors mimics what the team was pressured to get away from. He said that while a name such as the Red Tails is meant to honor WWII Tuskegee Airmen, it seems like a “bone that owners are throwing to Black fans to placate us and make us feel better.” He also said that “The idea of red and what that means to Native people is a reminder of what you were, and that’s not a clean enough break for me,” (WTOP)

The National Office for Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated told *Deadspin* that the organization would be “honored” to work with the NFL franchise in Washington D.C. if it were to change the name of the organization to the Washington Red Tails. The Red Tails were a nickname given to the heroic military aviation group called the [Tuskegee Airmen](https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.history.com/.amp/topics/world-war-ii/tuskegee-airmen) who were the first Black aviators in the U.S. Army Air Corps. The original group of Airmen is most known for their stellar battle record in World War II, which helped to desegregate the military. They were given the name the “Red Tails” because many in the group painted the tails of their aircrafts crimson. ([Donovan Dooley](https://deadspin.com/author/ddooley) [7/13/20 1:28PM](https://deadspin.com/tuskegee-airmen-would-be-honored-to-have-washington-t-1844365467) https://deadspin.com/tuskegee-airmen-would-be-honored-to-have-washington-t-1844365467)

**WHY THE CHANGE NOW?**

After nearly nine decades, the Washington Redskin mascot name was dropped begrudgingly by team ownership. 2020 was not the only year that concerns had been raised about the use of this mascot name though. So if these historic concerns about the name have been dismissed in the past, why now, especially not long after the ownership swore to never change the name? Over the years, advocates for changing the name have consistently made their point of view known to the franchise. Why in 2020 was the name dropped?

The events surrounding the NFL DC franchise’s mascot change have a long history, but more currently the significant appeal by a Native American leader to professional athletes for activism may have been the perceived threat facilitating change. The National Congress of American Indians president, Fawn Sharp (Quinault), made an appeal to these athletes to boycott participation in NFL games until the name was changed, She said.

“I am calling for members of the NFL franchise in Washington, DC, to rise to the occasion and become heroes. All I ask is that you state the unequivocal moral truth: just as you would never play for the Washington [insert any other racial slur], you will no longer play for any team branded with a racial slur against Native Americans.” (Andrew Beaujon, June 26, 2020, *Washingtonian*)

Sharp’s appeal was made following the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement’s rising activism in 2020 following George Floyd’s death at the hands of police. The Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) actually was initiated in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the shooting death of an African American teen, Trayvon Martin in 2012. Since African American Athletes make up a majority of participants in the NFL and are tied to monetary promotion of supporting venues such as Nike, this proposed movement would have had far-reaching effects. After Sharp’s appeal, Nike, Fed Ex, Target, and Pepsi threatened to pull support from the DC franchise unless the mascot name was dropped. (WTOP) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOqM4wOYBTA>

“In light of the Black Lives Matter movement that has focused the world’s attention on centuries of systemic racism, we are witnessing a fresh outpouring of opposition to the team name,” the firms said in the letter addressed to Nike. “Therefore, it is time for Nike to meet the magnitude of this moment, to make their opposition to the racist team name clear, and to take tangible and meaningful steps to exert pressure on the team to cease using it.” <https://www.foxbusiness.com/sports/nike-washington-redskins-apparel-team-name-change>

A professor of communication at Virginia Tech, Nneka Logan provided an added perspective regarding the pressure applied by the lucrative corporations who threatened to pull support. She specializes in corporate communication and social responsibility, and she maintains that the years of advocacy by Native Americans pushing for this change made a difference.

“I think without the activism of Native Americans and other groups pressuring the Redskins to change the name that has been going on for years and years and years, without that, I don’t think you’d see corporate America stepping up and then saying, ‘Hey, you need to make this change,'” Logan said. “You need the grassroots to get the big dollar corporations to make a change. They work together,” she said. (WTOP)

As Professor Logan points out, movements evolve over time. The historical context changed over time in the thirteen years since the Black Lives Matter movement began. Media coverage was substantial of critical events that frequently raised public consciousness about racism and police brutality.

The rationale for keeping the name centered mainly on the assertion that the name was not offensive but actually honored Native Americans. An obvious reason for holding onto the name may have been the fan base that supported the mascot, but also the marketing and financial promotions that were connected to it.

Including the history, traditions, and cultures of all groups of people in our education system would seem to be a practical and sustainable approach to recognition and acceptance. In May 2005 the Washington State Legislature passed House Bill 1495[[2]](#footnote-2) encouraging school districts to develop history and culture curriculum that would include information on the culture, history, and government of the American Indian people in required Washington State history and government courses. **(**Washington State House Bill 1495. April 2005). The primary Sponsor was Senator John McCoy. (Website: <http://www.washingtonvotes.org/2005-HB-1495>) In 2015 the Washington State Legislature made inclusion of tribal history and culture required. Presenting history in our school curriculum from the Native American perspective is an approach that embraces understanding and acceptance. This approach follows the “educate, don’t eradicate” theme while promoting stances of inclusion and equality. (“Whose History Should We Teach”, Constantino & Hurtadoi)

**OTHER SOCIETAL CHANGES**

The Washington Redskin name change takes place during a time when other professional sports teams are either changing their names or making modified changes to imagery and fan paraphernalia in respect for Native culture and traditions. Although the Pro Baseball Cleveland Indians are dropping their name, the NFL franchise Kansas City Chiefs and the Pro Baseball Atlanta Braves will not be dropping their mascot names, but have made modified changes after consulting with Native Tribes.

Many of these changes in the sports world seem to connect with effects from BLM. The Professional Baseball All-Star game was to be held in Georgia, but because of voter restriction laws that targeted people of color, the game was moved.

The Kansas City Chiefs NFL franchise, wishing to maintain its mascot name, has reached out to Native communities in efforts to be better educated about local Native cultures promoting awareness and celebration of Native culture.

“In 2014, we began a dialogue with a group of local leaders from diverse American Indian backgrounds and experiences. As an organization, our goal was to gain a better understanding of the issues facing American Indian communities in our region and explore opportunities to both raise awareness of American Indian cultures and celebrate the rich traditions of tribes with a historic connection to the Kansas City area.” *A Statement From The Kansas City Chiefs* Aug 20, 2020 at 03:00 PM (https://www.chiefs.com/news/a-statement-from-the-kansas-city-chiefs)

Although not changing their mascot name, the Atlanta Braves, will no longer sell or distribute the foam tomahawks used at games to make cheers in the form of the ‘chop’ motion that Native Americans identified as offensive. The Kansas City Chiefs will no longer allow fans to wear head dresses or war paint, but is not considering a name change. (

<https://www.kctv5.com 12/20/21)>

Whether these changes are enough remains to be seen. Some may be a compromise or appeasement in order to hold onto the mascot names by organizational management. While there are Native American voices supporting these names, there are also voices that want more sweeping changes.

The BLM has also inspired changes or removal of monuments. Most notably Civil War Generals from the South have come under scrutiny, and some of their imagery and monuments have been removed or destroyed. A monument change for greater inclusion in the U.S. Capitol has also recently taken place though as a Native American activist for treaty rights and protection of the environment, Billy Frank, will be honored as his statue was placed in Statuary Hall replacing the statue of the missionary Marcus Whitman. This change not only honors a great Native activist, it also recognizes issues around environment and climate change. (

<https://www.king5.com › article › news › local › olympia, Aug. 6, 2021)>

Other mascot name changes have become more prominent at the pre-college and college level of education. (“Should Indian Mascots Be Repealed?” Arthur,2012) Some state legislatures are passing laws prohibiting the use of Native themed mascots and imagery. The Washington State Board of Education has twice adopted resolutions encouraging school districts to re-examine their policies and discontinue the use of Native American mascots. Finally the Washington State legislature passed legislation in 2020 banning the inappropriate use of Native American names, symbols, or images as public school mascots, logos, or team names. (<https://housedemocrats.wa.gov/>) Washington also now requires teaching about Native history and culture in all public schools. They have developed a robust curriculum called “Since Time Immemorial” and provide training for teachers to learn how to implement it. (

<https://www.k12.wa.us )>

So after nearly nine decades, the Washington NFL franchise decided to drop the name in spite of its consistent alliance to it. This change along with many others at this particular time in history may be targeted as part of the “Cancel Culture’ movement as place names, imagery, monuments, and other item-ology perceived as detrimental or offensive to groups of people, are being dropped or changed. One may ask the question, “Do these changes address diversity, equity, and inclusion in a way that speaks to groups on both sides of these issue?”

How do we recognize whose history should be told, and what is included and left out? Are changes made over to actually re-make history or do they reflect genuine recent observing and accepting of differing historical viewpoints? How do changes in the politics, demography and larger society shape these issues?

This debate extends broadly to how we educate our children, follow the news, and put up and take down images. An issue that existed in our Nation’s capital not long ago involved the portrayal of mural artwork in the Environmental Protection Agency hallways that depicted questionable historical images of Native Americans. Through a negotiated process of discussion, a compromised decision to relocate, replace or insert more historical detail on the murals was reached. This process addressed the fact that the imagery in this artwork depcited a one-sided historical point of view, and that compromised groups of people within any culture also have their own version of what historically transpires. (“Whose History Should Be Told?” Smith)

**QUESTIONS THAT REMAIN**

While there are voices on both sides of the issue regarding the elimination of the Washington NFL Franchise mascot, it seems that the move transpired not so much out of what was the right-thing-to-do, but because corporate monetary pressure came to bear, and that this was the determining factor in its abolition. Regardless, during this time of tumult, significant other changes were and still are taking place.

With the changes that are being made such as dispensing with names, statues, and imagery identified as inappropriate or offensive to specific groups of people, the assertion has been made that these changes are purely political, and that erasing history amounts to a ‘cancel culture’ movement. An argument against this of course is that cultural appropriation by the use of these things doesen’t wash with this assertion.

The fact that perceived marginalization was not only tolerated but promoted finally reached a breaking point, and activism interceded to seek changes. Removal and relocation of statues and monuments that support systemic issues of marginalization can hopefully be done in a peaceful manner in the future, and as Nardini suggests, hopefully we can come together and keep an open dialogue on positive movements forward. Signage, new monuments like the Holocaost Museum, and education are other avenues of redress and truth telling about history.

Can peaceful approaches and open dialogue take place, or is the cultural divide even more in existence after the cavalcade of changes that have recently transpired in our society? One may point out that the existence of Native symbols, imagery, and mascots that were not offensive, may have been a needed bridge of understanding between cultures. “Educate don’t eradicate” might have been and might be a positive step forward in understanding and connecting cultures regarding cultural symbols and imagery. The act of cultural appropriation in connection with these symbols is looked upon as inappropriate, but genuine efforts by sports teams to reach out to tribal leadership and include their voices in decisions about mascot and symbol usage would seem to be a positive approach in spanning the divide.

The phrase “genuine efforts” resonates here especially with Native Americans who have endured the lies connected with broken treaties for over 200 years. Movements that are genuine build and support relationships that might be key to mutual understanding and positive association helping to avoid cultural divide. It is one thing to lay out a pathway or a formula to aid in the quest for mutual understanding, but it is another to actuate it. A key to achieving this might be to change perceptions on both sides while finding a common ground of understanding. Using these symbols and imagery with educated genuine respect for cultural concerns is the ultimate goal towards unity, but there are some inappropriate names, symbols, and imagery that need to be retired – the Redskins mascot may fall into this category. It is a dynamic that has yet to be fully realized, but with proper ‘genuine’ leadership, mutual understandings and appreciations of cultural concerns on both sides of the aisle may be realized.

The need for changes that address political correctness are apparent and needed, but how far will the pendulum swing in promotion of approaches that in themselves tend to subjugate and compromise? And regarding what has been termed as ‘cancel culture’, does revival of compromised cultures mean that traditions and ceremonies of centuries old cultural existence should now be dismissed? Where is the middle ground, and how does society achieve equitable solutions to change that recognizes diversity yet addresses inclusion of all concerned?

1. Copyright 2021 The Evergreen State College. Teaching ootes are available at https:nativecases.evergreen.edu. Gary Arthur is a member of the faculty at Grays Harbor College. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)