



ASSOCIATION ON AMERICAN INDIAN AFFAIRS

Protecting Sovereignty ◦ Preserving Culture
Educating Youth ◦ Building Capacity

NATIVE STEREOTYPES AND MASCOTS HARM ALL OF US

The Association on American Indian Affairs condemns the use of derogatory Native sports team names, mascots, symbols and gestures. Using these harmful stereotypes perpetuates a long history of uninformed depictions of Native Peoples and violence, as well as undermines the educational learning environment.

The evidence of this harm from mascots is demonstrated by the high disparities in rates of violence against Native Peoples, and the poor statistics about the health and welfare of Native Peoples, including the highest rates of suicide for Native youth.¹ In addition, studies about the affect of mascots on Native youth have specifically identified low self-esteem, low community worth, and increased negative feelings of stress and depression as negative psychological effects Native mascots wreak on the well-being of Native youth.²

Continuing these derogatory stereotypes within an educational setting like a primary or secondary school not only promotes ignorance about the very history of our United States and Native Nations place in it, but also endorses negative perceptions of Natives by non-Natives. Associating Native Peoples with stereotypes and caricatures fosters an environment that ignores critical thinking and learning and encourages continued discrimination and violence against Native Peoples. These social norms worsen the severe crises of police violence against Native youth and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples.

Some professional sports teams, such as the Washington Commanders and the Cleveland Guardians, have made moves in the right direction in recent years. Similarly, some sports associations, such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association, have banned racist Native-themed mascots. These national bans paved the way for many colleges to change their team names, including the University of North Dakota, Chowan College, and Newberry, among many others. The Association applauds these organizations and encourages all other schools, colleges and institutions to follow suit.

Despite these significant victories, Native-themed mascots remain ever present today in the United States. The data shows that there are still 1,901 schools and 966 school districts with Native-themed mascots.³ Unless institutions are willing to work in collaboration with Native Nations to develop appropriate insignias and education with those Nations' free, prior and informed consent, Native sports team names, mascots, symbols and gestures benefit only continued ignorance and violence, and line the

pockets of those that promote these symbols.

Viewing Native Peoples as caricatures and stereotypes directly contributes to violence and harm against them, and attributes to our country's ignorance about the diverse Native Nations that contribute the highest per capita numbers of military personnel, provide jobs and training in rural areas all over the U.S., and work to protect the sustainability of our lands and resources based on thousands of years of expertise.

Something so simple and easy as changing a mascot can result in tremendous healing and support kindness, tolerance and freedom for all of us. Therefore, the Association calls on every institution with Native-themed sports team names, mascots, symbols and gestures to immediately end their use and work to understand the importance of Native Nations and Peoples to our country and our country's future.

The Association on American Indian Affairs is the oldest non-profit serving Native Country protecting sovereignty, preserving culture, educating youth and building capacity. The Association was formed in 1922 to change the destructive path of federal policy from assimilation, termination and allotment, to sovereignty, self-determination and self-sufficiency. Throughout its more than 100-year history, the Association has provided national advocacy on watershed issues that support sovereignty and culture, while working on the ground at a grassroots level with Native Nations to support the implementation of programs that affect real lives on the ground.

The Association is governed by an all-Native Board of Directors from across Native country. As a membership organization, the Association speaks with unified voices from all over the country, both Native and non-Native together, to protect sovereignty, preserve culture, educate youth and build capacity.

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¹ Erik Stegman & Victoria A. Phillips, Missing the Point: The Real Impact of Native Mascots and Team Names on American Indian and Alaska Native Youth, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS (2014); see also Stephanie Fryberg, et al., Of Warrior Chiefs and Indian Princesses: The Psychological Consequences of American Indian Mascots, 30 Basic and Applied Social Psychology 3, 208-18 (2008), available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973530802375003>; see also Davis-Delano, Laurel R., et al., The Psychosocial Effects of Native American Mascots: A Comprehensive Review of Empirical Research Findings, 23 Race Ethnicity and Education 5, 613-33 (2020), available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1772221>; see also Burkley, Melissa, et al., Symbols of Pride or Prejudice? Examining the Impact of Native American Sports Mascots on Stereotype Application, 157 Journal of Social Psychology 2, 223-35 (2017), available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2016.1208142>; see also PEW, Suicide Is an Urgent Public Health Issue in America (May 20, 2023) available at https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/data-visualizations/2023/suicide-is-an-urgent-public-health-issue-in-america?utm_campaign=2023-09-11+Suicide+Prevention+Week&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Pew&subscriberkey=00Q7V00001o5PWNUA2.

² Race, Ethnicity and Education Journal published a study on June 8, 2020, by Laurel R. Davis-Delano, PhD, of Springfield College; Joseph P. Gone, Aaniiih-Gros Ventre, PhD, Harvard University; and Stephanie A. Fryberg, Tulalip, PhD, University of Michigan <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1772221>

³ See National Congress of American Indians, School Mascot Database (April 5, 2023) available at https://www.ncai.org/NCAI_School_Mascot_Tracking_Database_-_Overview_and_Numbers.pdf.

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