

Race, Colonialism, and the Politics of Indian Sports Names and Mascots:
The Washington Football Team Case

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Introduction

In July 2014, the Center for American Progress released a study entitled “Missing the Point: The Real Impact of Mascots and Team Names on American Indian and Alaska Native Youth.”

Written by Erik Stegman and Victoria Phillips, this study further substantiated that the use of Indian team names and mascots has a clear negative social and psychological impact on Indigenous people, especially young people. (Stegman, 2014; Fryberg, 2008) To introduce and publicize the report, the Center invited guest speakers and a panel to address the topic. The keynote speaker was Congresswoman Betty McCallum (D-MN), who in discussing the controversy over the Washington football team’s name noted that if a derogatory word for people who are Jewish, African American, or Chinese was proposed as a sports team name, it “wouldn’t be allowed, no one would stand or it, but for some reason, the term ‘Redskin,’ gets a free pass.” (Center for American Progress, 2014) Rep. McCallum is firmly on the side of those seeking to end the use of these names and mascots for sports teams at the high school, college, and professional level in the United States. At the same time, her “for some reason” statement reveals an underlying confusion about why this is even an issue at all, and why there has not been comprehensive indignation and swift action to end this practice. McCallum is not alone in her confusion, as it is articulated often by those who oppose such names and mascots. The source of this confusion is the inability to grasp the manner in which settler colonialism is both ubiquitous and, for most people, relatively invisible in U.S. political and cultural life. The history and present of settler colonial violence toward and dispossession and appropriation of Indigenous people’s bodies, territory, and identity is everpresent in the sports names and mascots issue. However, what most political actors and observers see and discuss in this debate is not settler colonialism but rather race and racism. To deem as racist names such as the ‘Redskins’ is not so

much wrong as it is analytically incomplete and thus politically off the mark for grasping why these names and mascots get a 'free pass' – why they were created in the first place, persist, and are so vehemently defended today by those who seek to maintain the status quo.

The present debate and politics regarding Indian sports names and mascots, such as with the case of the Washington football team's name, provides an excellent opportunity to politicize and center settler colonialism as a historical and contemporary structuring force of the United States. The sports names and mascot issue is a persistent and public practice of U.S. settler colonial rule. It is a mnemonic device that disavows the dispossession of Indigenous territory and the violent and aggressive assimilatory practices against Indigenous peoples. Paying attention to the political functioning of memory matters here because understanding and intervening in this and other issues requires more than just getting the historical facts straight. Facts matter, but an awareness of facts will not do enough politically to generate change, and this is where we need to see and directly engage with collective memory, specifically settler memory. Settler memory refers to the mnemonics – that is, the functions, practices, and products of memory – of colonialist dispossession, violence, appropriation, and settlement that shape settler subjectivity and governmentality in liberal colonial contexts such as the United States. Settler mnemonics include not only places and teams named after Indigenous peoples, but also calendric commemorations such as Columbus Day and Thanksgiving, military nomenclature such as Apache helicopter, and many other examples. These mnemonics are so ubiquitous that they are, at once, present and absent in American collective memory. That is, in settler memory Indigenous people are both there and not there at the same time, before our eyes across American culture but also disavowed of active political meaning in and by the settler imaginary – ubiquity and invisibility as two sides

of the same settler colonial coin. This disavowal is not a forgetting of colonialism and settlement. The problem with American settler society's relationship with its past resides in the manner in which the nation and its component parts remembers and reproduces its past, as facts and myths, and the important role of this remembering in the re-legitimation of contemporary violence, dispossession, and appropriation. This is a cycle that replays and reproduces settlement on a mnemonic loop. Indian team names and mascots are a public example of this contemporary loop in the American settler memory and imaginary, whereby Indigenous people are both everywhere in symbolic appropriative form but relatively invisible as active, contemporary political subjects.

In this essay, I turn first to the history of the issue, seeing the emergence and development of these names and mascots as coterminous with and reflective of U.S. Indian policy and settler colonial practices of late 19th century and first half of the 20th century. Upon this basis, I then examine the role of race in the contemporary debate over this issue, revealing the prevalence of this discourse and its popularity in mainstream American political culture, especially to the degree that it relies upon and reproduces the presumptions of racial liberalism. The predominance of the discourse of race makes invisible the practices of colonialism, and leaves Indigenous people to be seen, if they are seen, as another minority group within the United States, rather than as Indigenous nations that have a history of a nation-to-nation treaty-based relationship with the U.S. federal government. The point of this critique is not to marginalize race for the sake of colonialism, but rather to approach our analyses with an appreciation of their distinctive dynamics and co-constitutive relationship. In that regard, what I see at work here in perpetuating the Indian sports name and mascot phenomenon are the dynamics of colonial racism, which racially categorizes and generates hierarchies in the name of preserving settler

colonial relations and white supremacy. After setting out a corrective that centers settler colonialism, I analyze and critique two popular claims made in defense of these team names and mascots; that it is a tradition of the team and an honoring of Indigenous people. While I focus on the example of the Washington team name, I see the dynamics at work in that case to be representative of the wider politics and discourse around this issue.

The Historical and Political Context: The Allotment Era

The history of the Washington football team's name points to how this naming practice is deeply tied to settler colonial governance. In 1933, George Preston Marshall re-named his Boston based National Football League (NFL) team the "Redskins;" the name had been the "Braves" in 1932, the team's inaugural season. As to the name itself, while the etymology of the term 'Redskins' can be traced back to the late 18th and early 19th centuries when, according to one historian, it was not a derogatory, negative term, by the late 19th century one could no longer make such a case. (Goddard, 2005:1) For example, in the wake of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 an ad in the September 24, 1863 edition of the *Winona Daily Republican* in Minnesota offered the following: "The State reward for dead Indians has been increased to \$200 for every red-skin sent to Purgatory. This sum is more than the dead bodies of all the Indians east of the Red River are worth." (*Winona Daily Republican*, and see Routel, 2013) The genocidal tone and aims for which 'red-skin' is utilized in this public forum shows that the word fit comfortably as part of settler colonial discourse and practices of the time. This colonialist racialization dehumanizes Indigenous bodies as objects of commodification through genocidal violence. This is colonial racism. Putting the team name in historical and political context also reveals that the naming of

the Washington team in 1933 marked the end, or close to the end, of a defining era in U.S. Indian policy.

In his comprehensive study of the history of the topic of Indian team names and mascots, J. Gordon Hylton discovered that “the practice of identifying professional teams by Indian names most likely began in 1886.” (Hylton, 2010: 895) Prior to that there were no such names for professional teams, but soon after they begin to proliferate and most of the team names with which we are now familiar emerged between 1886 and 1933. The baseball Boston Braves (eventually located to Milwaukee and then to Atlanta) got their name in 1912, Cleveland Indians in 1915, Chicago Blackhawks in 1926, and then the Washington football team in 1933. After 1933, one still sees intermittent cases of such naming – the Kansas City Chiefs in 1960 for example – but there is a clear decline and no new names of this sort after 1963. Hylton’s study, however, does not point out the relevance of this time period that starts with 1886 and ends, for the most part, in 1933. Infamously, 1887 marks the passage of the General Allotment (Dawes) Act, commencing the massive dispossession of Indigenous people’s territory through the allotment of collectively owned tribal property into individual parcels to adult male tribal members who were expected to earn U.S. citizenship over time and assimilate by becoming private property holders in a liberal capitalist polity. The surplus of land beyond that distributed to Indigenous adult males was then made available for sale as private property on the free market. This process reduced Indigenous territorial holdings from 138 million acres in 1887 down to 48 million acres in 1934. (Hoxie ed. 1996: 154; Hirschfelder and Kreipe de Montano eds. 1993: 20-22) Also, 1890 marks the low point in terms of the recorded population of Indigenous people in the U.S. context, at 248,000 people. (Thornton, 1987) These are just two

features of a time period that saw massive land dispossession and appropriation by and into liberal capitalism that went hand in hand with the genocidal practices and policies that involved not only direct killing of Indigenous people, but also the effort to remove Indigenous people from their nations and assimilate them into the American population. In this regard, consider President Theodore Roosevelt's words, from 1901: "In my judgment the time has arrived when we should definitely make up our minds to recognize the Indian as an individual and not as a member of a tribe. The General Allotment Act is a mighty pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass." (Roosevelt, 1901) Along with General Allotment Act, other settler colonial measures taken to "pulverize" tribes and forcibly assimilate Indigenous people included the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, which unilaterally made Indigenous people U.S. citizens, regardless of whether they consented or not. (Bruyneel, 2004) Also, as Jennifer Guiliano demonstrates in her studies of the gendered discourse of Indigenous sports naming and mascotry, the growth of college and professional sports during this historical period provided an important vehicle for the expression and production of the racial and gendered superiority of white middle class masculinity in the United States by means of white male participation in and support of an emergent, popular sports culture. (Guiliano, 2010 & Guiliano, 2015) In all, the U.S. Indian policies and related political developments from the 1880s through the 1930s shaped the context for the emergence and flourishing of the naming of professional sports teams after Indigenous people. The timing of these two developments is not a coincidence, as they mark the compatible relationship between the ubiquity and invisibility of settler colonial governance and of Indigenous people in the American settler imaginary.

Policies such as the General Allotment Act and the Indian Citizenship Act were components of a public, active, comprehensive effort to make Indigenous people disappear, either through death or forced assimilation, and to destroy tribal communities and landholdings. The increasing invisibility of Indigenous people as distinctly Indigenous in their territorialized, collective existence, both as a reality in some sense as a consequence of said policies and more actively as a component of the American settler vision of Indigenous people as a disappearing people, opened the space for and was also fostered by the active symbolic appropriation of Indigenous identity for the sake of the reproduction of American settler identity and belonging. As American state actors and American settlers forced Indigenous people more to the margins through policies and practices of displacement, violence, and assimilation, symbolic Indigeneity moved increasingly and necessarily to the center of the settler imaginary. This mutually constitutive dynamic reflects the relationship among the three pillars of settler colonialism; focusing on territory, people, and identity. The appropriation of territory and the violence toward and forced assimilation of Indigenous people are two key pillars of settler colonialism, and the third pillar is the appropriation of Indigenous identity and culture. The naming and mascot phenomenon is just such an appropriative settler practice, which requires the first two pillars to clear the way for and are also facilitated by the third. I refer to this as a settler practice because it helps to constitute and acculturate a sense of settler belonging on this land through the production of a settler tradition that both acknowledges the presence of Indigenous people as historical beings while disavowing their presence as contemporaneous beings. Thus, to the settler imaginary, Indigenous people and settler colonialism itself are both everywhere and nowhere, ubiquitous and invisible, a vibrant, generative if tragic part of America's past rendered absent in the American present. It

is this dynamic that shapes and constrains the politics over team names and mascots to this day, and this is because it is reproduced through settler memory.

To conclude this section, I return to the history of the Washington football team. George Preston Marshall's motivation for giving the team this name derived from his "long time fascination with Native Americans" and in honor of the identity of his coach William 'Lonestar' Dietz, who was "believed to be a Native American," from the Sioux Nation, although in all likelihood he was not. (Hylton, 2010: 888; Waggoner, 2013: 1) Dietz's previous positions included coaching at the Haskell Indian School, and he recruited six Indigenous men, a number from Haskell, to play for the 1933 Boston team. (Hylton, 2010: 888-9) As well as introducing the new name, that year Marshall also required Coach Dietz to "walk the sidelines wearing a Sioux headdress" and he had the players, white and Indigenous, "wear war paint when they took the field." (Hylton, 2010: 902). In this way, the white settler own imposed not only the name but an entire performance of stereotypical Indigeneity, one reflective not of actual Indigenous practices but of the owner's settler imaginary. This settler imaginary is also deeply shaped by anti-blackness, as Marshall's actions showed after he moved the team to Washington, D.C. in 1938.

By 1961, the Washington football team stood as the only the NFL team to have never had a Black player on its roster. Under the new John Kennedy administration and with the presence of an increasingly powerful Civil Rights Movement, Kennedy's Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall, pressured Marshall to sign a Black player so that the team residing in the nation's capital would no longer be, in Udall's words, "lily-white," or the "paleskins" as he called them. Marshall resisted, cementing his reputation as a notorious, open white supremacist, stating at one

point that “We’ll start signing Negroes when the Harlem Globetrotters start signing whites.”

Marshall had supporters in his effort to resist the Kennedy administration’s pressure to integrate the team. Notably, the American Nazi Party marched in support and one photo shows two distinct signs carried by the uniformed Nazis. The first is a banner stating “America Awake,” with a Swastika positioned between these two words. Next in line is a marcher holding a sign that says: “Mr. Marshall: Keep Redskins White!” (Park, 2013)

Udall eventually compelled Marshall to cede on this issue and integrate his team because the Secretary had important leverage over the owner. Marshall had recently signed a 30 year lease on the stadium in which his team would play, and that stadium – at the time called D.C. Stadium, and then RFK stadium – resided on federal lands. As such, Marshall’s landlord was the Department of Interior, and Udall threatened to deny use of these lands if the team persisted in its discriminatory practices. (Smith T., 2011) Here settler colonial invisibility and its modern functionality and material presence came in to play. These lands are part of the traditional territory of the Powhatan Confederacy, specifically the Nacotchank people. British colonizers and settlers seized this land in the late 17th and early 18th century. In the late 18th century, 10 square miles of the land was turned over to the federal government in order to locate and build the nation’s new capitol in Washington D.C. The complicated, mutually constitutive relationship between settler colonialism and white supremacy is evident in the history of Marshall’s ownership of the team, and it foreshadows the contemporary debate over the team’s name.

To start, take note of the American Nazi claim to “Keep Redskins White,” which echoed Marshall’s effort to keep Black players off of his team. Here, the preservation of whiteness is

maintained through direct anti-blackness, the core of U.S. white supremacy. It also premised upon a foundation of settler colonialism in which an overt claim to an identification with and appropriation of Indigeneity in the early 1930s does not upset the desire for racial purity, because in settler memory Indigenous people have been made functionally absent, a safe part of the past. This is the work of a white settler tradition that deploys settler colonial practices of appropriation and dispossession to generate settler belonging and also the work of white supremacist practices of anti-blackness that affirm white racial superiority. This particular story ends with the Kennedy Administration succeeding with regards to ending Marshall's practice of a particular form of anti-blackness, that being the exclusion of Black people from the marketplace – in this case that of professional athletics – due to racial discrimination. Marshall was violating a tenet of racial liberalism, in the nation's capital no less. The settler government's claim over this land proved the leverage needed for Marshall to eventually and very reluctantly allow for the inclusion of Black players on his team. This was a victory for racial liberalism won through the deployment of settler colonial governing power over land dispossessed from Indigenous people. The difficult relationship of settler colonialism to white supremacy and Indigeneity to race witnessed in this historical moment resonates in the contemporary debate, revealing both potential problems but also possibilities in how to understand, frame, and intervene in the public discussion occurring over this issue.

The Contemporary Debate: The Anti-Naming Claim of Racism

Just as in the early 1960s when the Washington football team stood at the center of a storm over a violation of racial liberalism and the owner's anti-blackness, in the contemporary era this same franchise in the most profitable professional sports league in the United States is under intense

scrutiny over the team's name. A wide range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous political actors have voiced their opposition to the name, demanding that present team owner Dan Snyder change it. They include Suzan Shawn Harjo, Cheyenne and Muscogee writer and activist who legally challenged the trademark status of the team name, the Oneida Nation under the leadership of Ray Halbritter, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the Leadership Council on Civil and Human Rights (a coalition that includes the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the American Civil Liberties Union, Human Rights Campaign, the National Council of La Raza, and American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee), and President Barack Obama, who stated that if he was the owner of a team with a name "that was offending a sizeable group of people, I'd think about changing it." (Vargas, 2013) Halbritter, while leading the Oneida Nation's public campaign against the name, also wrote a 2014 editorial critiquing what he saw to be hypocrisy in the NFL pondering a plan to penalize players for saying the word "nigger" on the field while the Redskins remained the name of one of its franchises. Comparing the N-word and the R-word, Halbritter argued that the latter is like the former in that it is a well-recognized racial slur. (Halbritter, 2014) And in the wake of the National Basketball Association banning Los Angeles Clippers' owner Donald Sterling in April, 2014 for making racist statements in the private realm, a number of public figures have used this moment as an opportunity to demand the NFL take action on the Washington team name, seeing the two situations as analogous. Football player Richard Sherman, when asked if the NFL would have taken the same stance on racist statements as did the NBA, stated: "No, I don't. Because we have an NFL team called the Redskins." Senator Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) implored the NFL to follow the NBA's lead, mocking those who defend the Washington team name as a matter of tradition, stating "what tradition, a tradition of racism." Representative Henry Waxman

(D-CA) has called for a Congressional hearing on the team's name stating that the Committee "could play a constructive role in challenging racism" by calling Goodell and Snyder to testify and defend the name. And on May 21, 2014, 50 U.S. Senators, all Democrats, signed on to a letter to Commissioner Goodell calling for a change to the Washington team's name. The letter also builds on the NBA example and includes the following claims and statements:

...that racism and bigotry have no place in professional sports;

What message does it send to punish slurs against African Americans while endorsing slurs against Native Americans?

This is a matter of tribal sovereignty – and Indian Country has spoken clearly on this issue.

At the heart of sovereignty for tribes is their identity. Tribes have worked for generations to preserve the right to speak their languages and perform their sacred ceremonies.... Yet every Sunday during football season, the Washington, D.C. football team mocks their culture.

The NFL can no longer ignore this and perpetuate the use of this name as anything but what it is: a racial slur. (U.S. Senators, 2014)

This issue may be getting close to a so-called tipping point, as an increasing number and range of individuals and organizations feel comfortable taking a clear public stance against the Washington football team's name. This emerging movement against the team name is a positive development in that it may mean the name will be changed in the not too distant future. On the other hand, one 2013 poll found that 79% of Americans think the Washington team should not have to change its name. (Steinberg, 2013) Thus, while the issue has gained momentum to the degree that mainstream political and public figures are comfortable speaking out against the name, a significant portion of the public does not see it as a serious problem. To makes sense of these twinned dynamics, we need to take a close look at the politics and discourse of race deployed here.

The predominant claim made by those opposing the Washington team name is that the name is racist, a slur upon Indigenous people. One can find this claim throughout the public realm, and

especially across social media as people call out and protest the use of the identities and imagery of Indigenous people for team names and mascots. The claim that this practice is racist, or a racist slur, is clearly defensible in that the Washington football team is a dictionary defined slur and a dehumanization of Indigenous people. The problem here is not the charge of racism itself, but that it has become hegemonic in the debate. In so doing, this discourse marginalizes to the point of making invisible the idea and claim that these team names and mascots are persistent practices of settler colonialism that exist in a constitutive relationship with white supremacy. The relative invisibility of settler colonialism in this debate is as much a product of disavowal than it is a consequence of a lack of knowledge or as a mere byproduct of the predominant focus on race. For example, the letter from the U.S. Senators asserts that the issue is a matter of tribal sovereignty, which thus conveys their knowledge of that fact Indigenous nations stand in a distinct relationship to the United States. This assertion might have opened a path to defining this naming practice as a settler colonial one – one of appropriation built upon genocidal and dispossessive practices against peoples who assert their status as sovereign nations. But the Senators' letter closes with the presumptive assertion that the team's name is "what it is, a racial slur." This is unsurprising, as U.S. Senators – specifically Democratic Senators – can comfortably stand against racism in this particular form while also standing, if implicitly, for the maintenance and reproduction of American settler colonialism in the form of liberal colonialism. By liberal colonialism I mean polities comprised of institutions, norms, and practices that reflect a compatible encounter between liberal-democracy and colonialism in the political development and contemporary formation of nations such as the United States. Within a liberal colonial context there is no tension between an open opposition to practices that explicitly violate racial

liberal principles and the simultaneous disavowal and reproduction of settler colonialism. They go hand in hand.

To be more precise on racial liberalism, the liberal discourse about race is one that marks out for attention and potential amendment those evident exclusions and discriminations that could forestall some form of standing as equal or with the potential to be equal in the U.S. polity, as defined by Civil Rights era norms of inclusion to an ideal of a racially egalitarian, even post-racial, American republic. With the Washington football team of the early 1960s we saw government intervention to stop then team owner Marshall from excluding Black players from eligibility to be employed by his team. Now, in the early 21st century, mainstream politicians and public actors and activists are seeking to get present owner Snyder to change the Washington team name based upon the notion that it is a form of racial discrimination that excludes Indigenous people from realizing the norm of treatment under racial liberalism. This emerging popular and mainstream movement against the Washington team name is built upon a very narrowly tailored sense of what counts as racism. To refer to the issue of the Washington team name as a matter of racial discrimination frames the problem and the solution within the assimilatory logic of racial liberalism, which does not allow room to productively mention, let alone debate and challenge, the role of historical and contemporary settler colonialism. Rather, as with the conflict over the Washington team's exclusion of Black players in the 1960s, the existence of settler colonial governance is presumed, both invisible and ubiquitous.

Political theorist Robert Nichols sheds light on the tensions that emerge when anti-racist politics and critiques that focus on closing the gap between the ideals of a racially egalitarian society and

the reality of a racially unjust society presume the persistence of settler colonialism and the settler state. He notes, “antiracist critique may inadvertently reproduce the official state narrative of the settler colony, in which the (colonial) state is the best approximation of the ideal social construct and indigeneity is understood as a derivation or deviation from this ideal, in need of additional normative justification.... In fact, it is often through the removal of so-called race-based barriers to integration and subsequent enclosure and incorporation of previously self-governing Indigenous polities that settler colonialism has operated.” (Nichols, 2014: 103) As a consequence: “Insofar as this form of antiracist critique enables settler colonial sovereignty to structure the terms of its own contestation, it is classically, hegemonic.” (Nichols, 2014: 113) It is this hegemony that is in play in the race-based critique of team names and mascots, one in which race-based discriminations and barriers become the primary focal point of the discourse such that not only is settler colonialism rendered invisible, but the resolution to this racial violation follows the logic of inclusion within and thus affirmation of settler colonial governance. The resolution to the exclusion of Black players from the Washington football team in the early 1960s came by means of settler state actors using as leverage against a white supremacist team owner the fact that said team owner sought to profit from long term access to lands dispossessed from Indigenous peoples. Racial inclusion was achieved and settler colonial governance was the means to achieving this aim, which thereby reaffirmed the settler state’s status and authority over territory dispossessed from Indigenous people. When settler colonial governance shapes the “terms of its own contestation” in this way, the deeper historical and political sources and meaning of the appropriation of Indigenous identity and imagery for team names and mascots get subsumed and disavowed. As a consequence, so does the distinction between various group experiences in relation to American liberal colonialism.

With this critical perspective in mind, I see in the example of the letter from the 50 U.S. Senators as well as other forms of opposition to the Washington team name and similar sports names a form of liberal colonial discourse at work. This discursive work can be seen in the popular rhetorical trope referenced by Representative McCallum, by which one posits a hypothetical in which there is an analogous appropriation of the identities and imagery of non-Indigenous racial and ethnic others to the white Christian norm. A visual example of this device can be seen in the image widely shared across social media that shows three baseball caps side by side, that of the New York Jews, the San Francisco Chinamen, and the Cleveland Indians, each with its own derogatory caricature of an individual from these respective groups.



This particular image is from a poster and social media campaign produced and disseminated by the *National Congress of American Indians* (NCAI). The image includes the following tag line:

“No race, creed or religion should endure the ridicule faced by the Native Americans today.

Please help us put an end to this mockery and racism by visiting www.ncai.org.” (Graham, 2013)

The point being made here is that if one finds unacceptable the hypothetical New York and San Francisco teams names and mascots, then one should by racial liberal analogy find the third, that being the actually existing Cleveland Indians and their grotesque logo/mascot Chief Wahoo, also unacceptable. In terms of short term political maneuvering it may make sense for activists to utilize this form of race-based discourse to generate public attention to the issue. However, this is likely less a calculated political move than an example of the hegemonic power of the discourse of race, and racial liberalism in particular. It is fair to question at a practical level whether this race-based approach does indeed work best in the short term in the effort to address and overcome the arguments made to defend such names/mascots and, connectedly, what this approach means in the long term effort to maintain and further generate an anti-colonial politics. The potential problems with a discursive move such as the example of the three baseball caps are that; first, it is premised upon the idea that the experiences and resolutions to the injustices perpetuated upon these groups are analogous; and secondly, in so doing it also undermines the effort to grasp why Indigenous sports names and mascots persist. This baseball cap analogy does not answer the question of why Indian team names and mascots get the ‘free pass,’ but instead unintentionally serves to further inscribe this pass. This is because the question that the hypothetical poses – how can we tolerate the Cleveland Indians when we would not tolerate the New York Jews or San Francisco Chinamen? – portends to be exposing the hypocrisy or inconsistency in the application of racial liberalism, but what it really does is mask the deeper, disavowed problem. The problem being that colonial relations define the production and persistence of names like the Redskins and mascots such as Chief Wahoo, which exist in a constitutive relationship to race, but cannot be collapsed as a matter of race, and race alone.

The creation and the persistence of these naming and mascot practices are deeply tied to the Allotment Era appropriations of land, and the violence and assimilative practices toward Indigenous peoples that remain structuring forces of U.S. liberal colonialism. Thus, deconstructing the baseball cap analogy for the settler dynamics at work here does not serve, first and foremost, to reveal that in contemporary life most people would not tolerate the New York Jews or San Francisco Chinamen as team names and mascots. Instead, it sheds light on the fact that in U.S. history there is no point in which the creation of such team names and mascots would have made sense in the first place. This is the critical historical and political point that is missed when settler colonialism is not placed at the center of this debate. Compared to settler appropriations of Indigenous identity, settler memory finds much less identificatory fuel in anti-Semitic or racist anti-Asian representations. This is not to say that Jewish and Asian people did and do not experience structural discrimination productive of American political identity and development, but rather that there is a more distinct, constitutive role for Indigenous identity and settler colonialism in relation to American settler identity and political development. Without such a shift of registers from racial liberalism to settler colonialism and its corollary colonial racism, the issue as presently and predominantly debated is more likely to reproduce than challenge and disrupt settler colonialism. I turn now to address a couple of the main arguments made in defense of Indian team names and mascots to reveal the theoretical and political benefit of directly upsetting the productivity of settler memory in the contemporary debate.

Two Defenses of Naming/Mascots, and Anti-colonial Responses

There are two prevalent contemporary arguments made to defend the practice of Indian team names and mascots: 1) For the team and its fans, the name or mascot is an important tradition worthy of respect and preservation, and 2) These names and mascots are meant to honor Indigenous people, culture, and traditions, and in that spirit they are utilized to reflect and enhance team pride. These two arguments are often articulated in the defense of the Washington football team's name, and they are important to analyze because of their constitutive relationship to white settler memory and identity. In particular, the argument that these names are meant as an honor to Indigenous people reveals settler practices that are tightly tied to white supremacist presumptions.

It's a Tradition

In an October 9, 2013 letter to the season ticket holders of the Washington football team, team owner Dan Snyder addressed the controversy over the team's name. While stating that "he respects the feelings of those who are offended by the team name," over the course of the letter Snyder invokes a number of common defenses of the name, in particular that of it being a tradition and an honoring. I start with the way he concludes the letter:

So when I consider the Washington Redskins name, I think of what it stands for. I think of the Washington Redskins traditions and pride I want to share with my three children, just as my father shared with me -- and just as you have shared with your family and friends.

I respect the opinions of those who disagree. I want them to know that I do hear them, and I will continue to listen and learn. But we cannot ignore our 81 year history, or the strong feelings of most of our fans as well as Native Americans throughout the country. After 81 years, the team name "Redskins" continues to hold the memories and meaning of where we came from, who we are, and who we want to be in the years to come.

We are Redskins Nation and we owe it to our fans and coaches and players, past and present, to preserve that heritage. (Snyder, 2013)

Dan Snyder's assertion that the team's name is a tradition that is meaningful to him and to the fans should be taken as a sincere, legitimate claim. He is right, it is a tradition; a settler colonial tradition. In no small part, a settler colonial tradition is one that supplants and replaces Indigenous people's history and presence with a settler history that seeks to establish a sense of settler belonging in the territory. Historian and Indigenous Studies scholar Jean O'Brien refers to this as a "replacement narrative" that effects a "stark break from the past, with non-Indians replacing Indians on the landscape." (O'Brien, 2010: xxii-xxiii) O'Brien's focus is on the production of the replacement narrative in 19th Century New England, and she finds "five locations" in which it can be read: "the erection of monuments to Indians and non-Indians, the celebration of historical commemorations of various sorts, the enterprise of excavating Indians sites, the selective retention of Indian place-names, and claims Non-Indians made to Indian homelands." (O'Brien, 2010: 57) I see Indian sports names and mascots as forms of a monument and historical commemoration that serve a similar purpose of establishing settler belonging at the expense of Indigenous presence, and Snyder's words explicitly concede the production of such a narrative.

In response to protests, Snyder counters with a claim premised upon the weight and meaning of the over 80 year history of the Washington team's name. It is his team's history, what he refers to as a nation, that he positions as under threat from those who seek to change the name. For Snyder, this 80 year historical span has generated a collective identification and belonging, explicitly avowed in his assertion that the name "continues to hold the memories and meaning of where we come from, who we are, and who we want to be in the years to come." These are settler memories built upon the appropriation, representation, and replacement of Indigenous

identity and presence by an emergent settler tradition and identity. Snyder constructs a 'we' comprised of non-Indigenous people, of settlers, who find in the Washington team a mnemonic bond that links together fans and players of the "past and present." Snyder's construction of the 'we' is demonstrated by the fact that he starts his mnemonic tale with the meaning the name has for his own family, extends that feeling out to "your family and friends," and finally to "most of our fans as well as Native Americans." The latter is a telling construction in that it splits off a settler fan base from Indigenous people. And even if Snyder included settlers and Indigenous people in his 'we' of the Redskins nation, the tradition he is defending is a settler tradition in its creation, development, and purposes. This a tradition built upon locating active Indigenous identity in the past that settlers then *honor* via appropriation in the present day. In this way, the Washington team name and the team name and mascot phenomenon in general are active components of a contemporary replacement narrative that constitutes and with each articulation reconstitutes the story of settler belonging as a tradition unto itself.

To take at face value the claim to tradition and then deconstruct and consider the meaning of such a claim is to engage in an anti-colonial critique by marking it as an appropriative practice that serves in the constitution of settler identity. This goes further politically and critically than the claim that the name is racist. This approach refuses to allow settler colonial governance to set the terms of this debate. It does so by putting the team name's into historical and mnemonic perspective as part of a persistent, deeply rooted settler colonial logic and set of practices traceable from the past to the present and thereby tying it to, rather than cleaving it off from, the history and present of settler colonial governance. Thus, when Dan Snyder makes the claim that names and mascots matter because they convey memories about "where we came from, who we

are and who we want to be in the years to come,” opponents of such names and mascots can concur with him and then take him up on the very historical arc invoked here, one which goes right back to the Allotment Era and all that it has wrought. As well, this critical approach places settler colonialism at the center of this debate such that it can facilitate the articulation of a racial critique that goes beyond the parameters of racial liberalism. I draw this relationship out in the next section, regarding the claim that these names and mascots honor Indigenous people.

It's an Honor

The claim that this naming practice is not a slur but is, to the contrary, an honoring of Indigenous peoples is closely bound up with the view that Indian team names and mascots are a tradition. Both the claim to tradition and to honoring articulate an implicit concern with defending settler identity, meaning, and memory. Here are three examples of its deployment in reference to the Washington team name. First, the following is an excerpt from NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell's June, 2013 letter to two Congressional representatives:

Neither in intent nor use was the name ever meant to denigrate Native Americans or offend any group. The Washington Redskins name has thus from its origin represented a positive meaning distinct from any disparagement that could be viewed in some other context. For the team's millions of fans and customers, who represent one of America's most ethnically and geographically diverse fan bases, the name is a unifying force that stands for strength, courage, pride and respect. (Goodell, 2013)

Second, in an August, 2014 interview with the television sports network ESPN, Dan Snyder offered the following in response to the question: What is a Redskin? “A Redskin is a football player. A Redskin is our fans. The Washington Redskin fan base represents honor, represents respect, represents pride. Hopefully winning. And it's a positive.” (Steinberg, 2014) Finally, the website Redskinsfacts.com, a team alumni website funded by Dan Snyder with the listed support of such former players as Joe Theismann, Billy Kilmer, Mark Moseley, and Clinton Portis,

makes the following claim: “**We believe the Redskins name deserves to say.** 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.” (redskinsfacts.com, emphasis original)

Just as original team owner Marshall saw the name as an honorific that would stand as a positive symbol for his team in 1933, the parties supporting the name in the early 21st century are likely being sincere when they say that the name speaks to the “noble qualities” they admire about Indigenous people. In the conclusion to his book, *Playing Indian*, Historian and Indigenous Studies scholar Philip Deloria spoke to the function that ‘playing Indian’ serves for Americans in the production and meaning of their national identity, stating: “The self-defining pairing of American truth with American freedom rests on the ability to wield power against Indians – social, military, economic, and political – while simultaneously drawing power from them. Indianness may have existed primarily as a cultural artifact in American society, but it has helped *create* these other forms of power, which have then been turned back on native people.”

(Deloria, 1998: 191) The key word here is power. The comments of Goodell, Snyder, and on the team alumni website articulate a vital, constitutive relationship between the honor that the name purports to convey to and about Indigenous people and the power that the team and its fans get from the name, as a “unifying force,” signifying “intangibles” they “expect from Washington’s gridiron heroes on game day. Honor. Loyalty. Unity. Respect. Courage.” The components and purpose of honoring as defined here by significant figures of the NFL and the Washington team expressly invokes a process of drawing power from Indigeneity as a cultural artifact for the sake of enhancing the power of the collective identity of the team and its fans. The purpose here is to

constitute settler identity, as the claim to honoring shows itself to be an appropriative practice for which the Washington team name is a metonym for the wider dynamic constitutive of American self-identity. This appropriative practice of honoring is also a form of replacement narrative, in which settler collective identity – the American nation, the Redskins nation – draws power from Indigeneity conceived as cultural artifact that in its noblest form is ubiquitous in the past and invisible in the present. The replacement narrative here implicitly asserts that noble Indigenous people have tragically disappeared and we, the settlers, honor them by taking up their name as our own in contemporary settler form.

In referring to honoring as a practice of appropriating Indigenous identity, I mean this as both building upon and occurring alongside the appropriations/dispossession of Indigenous territory and the effort to eliminate and undermine Indigenous people as a distinct people. Regarding this latter point, in their study of the psychological impact of American Indian Mascots, Psychologist Stephanie Fryberg et al., discovered that there are indeed negative impacts to such names and mascots, especially for Indigenous youth, and these “effects are not due to negative associations with mascots.” They found that even when Indigenous youth have, in Dan Snyder’s terms, “a positive” association with an Indian team name or mascot there was still a negative impact on the self-esteem of these young Indigenous people.” These researchers conclude:

Although pro-mascot advocates suggest that American Indian mascots are complimentary and honorific and should enhance well-being, the research presented runs contrary to this position. American Indian mascots do not have negative consequences because their content or meaning is inherently negative. Rather, American Indian mascots have negative consequences because, in the contexts in which they appear, there are relatively few alternate characterizations of American Indians. The current American Indian mascot representations function as inordinately powerful communicators, to natives and nonnatives alike, of how American Indians should look and behave. American Indian mascots thus remind American Indians of the limited ways in which others see them.

In sum, the appropriation here diminishes and confines the ways in which many young Indigenous people understand and enact their sense of identity. This is a deeply colonialist practice premised upon the enforced invisibility of Indigenous people as contemporary agents, and the ubiquity of limited representations of Indigenous people through such cultural forms as sports team names and mascots. And as a colonial practice it concomitantly serves to embolden settler identity, as supported by Fryberg et al., who reference two studies which “revealed that after exposure to various American Indian representations, European Americans reported higher self-esteem compared to the control condition and to a nonnative mascot, namely, the University of Notre Dame Fighting Irish.” (Fryberg, 2008: 216) As such, just as the colonialist appropriation of Indigenous territory reduces and limits the territory of Indigenous people in the process of enhancing the territorial claims of the settler population, so does the appropriation of Indigenous identity through team names and mascots undermine the self-esteem and sense of identity of many young Indigenous people while enhancing the self-esteem of settlers, of European Americans.

The relationship between appropriation of territory and of identity is indicative of the wider colonialist dynamics at work here. What I marked out as a mutually constitutive relationship during the Allotment Era continues to this day. As with the response to the tradition defense, an anti-colonial response to the honoring defense does not need to challenge the idea of it being a positive representation, an honor, or a sign of admiration. Whether an image is meant as an honor or to be derogatory is not the fundamental point, as the psychological studies themselves show. Rather, the point to be made is that these names and mascots are created by the colonizer to represent the identity and existence of the colonized, drawing power to the former from the

latter at a symbolic and cultural level that is tightly tied to the appropriations and violence which occur in the material and political sense. This anti-colonial response to the honoring defense refuses to allow this debate to be reduced to race alone while providing the opportunity to reveal the important constitutive relationship between colonialism and white supremacy.

While in U.S. Indian policy the period from the 1880s to the 1930s is known infamously as the Allotment Era, in the history of formalized white supremacy this time period represents a portion of the Jim Crow era that did not formally end until the mid-1960s. In a nation built upon the cheap labor garnered through the violent enslavement of Africans and their descendants and the cheap territory gained through violent dispossession of territory from Indigenous people, during the Allotment/Jim Crow Eras sports teams turned to Indigenous identity to draw power in order to generate their honorable, noble, and courageous team identities. However, they did not turn to African American identity for this same purpose. The production of white American settler identity did involve the appropriation and drawing of power from African American identity, but in different form and with distinct meaning. As Eric Lott shows in his book, *Love and Theft*, since well before the U.S. Civil War the wearing of “blackface” by white Americans was a product of their feelings of both admiration of and repulsion for African Americans, and these minstrel performances served in the production of, in particular, white American male working class identity that was negotiating and defining the parameters of racial designations, meanings, and hierarchies. (Lott, 1993) There are two important differences between these forms of appropriation that speak to why a debate over team names and mascots reduced to the terms of racial liberalism does not recognize the more fundamental and persistent role of anti-blackness at work here. First, blackface minstrelsy presumed and continues to presume the presence of

African Americans in an abject state at the bottom of the racial hierarchy of U.S. white supremacy, whereas Indian team names and mascots presumes the disappearance of the noble Indigenous people who are honored as a cultural artifact. Second, in the post-Civil Rights era Blackface minstrelsy has become culturally and politically taboo, almost universally accepted as offensive and inappropriate, whereas the presence of Indian team names and mascots remains acceptable to many. In white American settler memory, the abjected, everpresent Black American at the bottom of the hierarchy of U.S. white supremacy and the noble Indigenous person made tragically invisible by U.S. settler colonial practices signify two distinct and compatible, constitutive imaginaries. In the white settler imaginary the abjected presence of Blackness stabilizes white superiority in the U.S. racial hierarchy and noble, disappearing Indigeneity stabilizes the settler replacement narrative and claim of settler belonging. When looked at in this way one can safely posit that to white settlers in the early 20th century the idea of looking to draw power from Black American identity so as to create an honorable team name was, quite literally, unimaginable, whereas utilizing Indigenous identity was readily imaginable, ubiquitously so. In this regard, original Washington team owner Marshall's views exemplify the manner in which anti-Blackness and the claim to honoring while replacing Indigeneity go hand in hand.

While present-day fans of the team would certainly disavow previous owner Marshall's open white supremacy, as well as the assertion of the American Nazi Party to "Keep Redskins White," the team's very public history on this account is not a mere exception to the rule of settler memory and tradition, but rather speaks to a collaborative relationship between settler colonialism and white supremacy in the U.S. context. This collaborative dynamic matters a great

deal when attending politically to the likes of Goodell, Snyder and so many others who do not view the use of the N word and the R word as being analogous, because while they concede the N word is a slur they insist that the R word is an honor. That the likes of Goodell and others do not see the two words to be analogous was only further proven in 2014 when, as noted earlier, the NFL seriously considered instituting a new on-field penalty for the use of the N-word by one player towards another, a situation that occurred primarily amongst African American players. (Burke, 2014) To those opposed to the Washington team name, this further demonstrated that the R-word was a getting a free pass. (Moya-Smith, 2014) While this response is understandable, these two situations are analogous only if one sees them through the framework of racial liberalism. An anti-colonial perspective reads the banning of the N-word and the maintenance of the R-word as further evidence that the persistence of the latter is in no small part premised upon the view of Black Americans as abject, as the un-honorable who need white American protection from further dishonor so as not to violate the tenets of racial liberalism and upset the white American myth that we now exist in a post-racial society. One can see colonial racism at work here in the manner in which a profound anti-blackness is subtly woven into the honoring defense, especially in light of the potential N-word ban. In the context of the NFL proposed policy regarding the N-word, the claim that the Washington team name honors Indigenous people implies that one particular group, Indigenous people, is worth the honor of white settler admiration while another group, African Americans, is worthy of only white liberal paternalism from further symbolic denigrations that openly reference abjected presence. To draw upon Professor Andrea Smith's formulation, these moves in relation to the R-word and the N-word mutually reinscribe the binaries of Indigenous-settler and Black-white. The former binary presumes the disappearance/invisibility of Indigenous people. The latter binary presumes the

presence and abjection/exploitability of Black Americans. (Smith A., 2012) This pairing of the honoring/invisibility of Indigenous people and abjection/presence of Black people forms the core of a colonial racism. This tightly tied historical and political relationship is not a significant part of the debate over team names and mascots in the 21st century, and this absence undermines the effort to generate more radical political arguments, interrogations, and alliances.

An anti-colonial, and thus anti-colonial racist, approach in this debate would make clear that the disappearing, noble and honorable Indian that Dan Snyder and his supporters posit relies historically and logically upon the co-constitutive unhonorability, exploitability, and ever-presence of African Americans. In so doing, this more radical approach maintains the focus on settler colonialism and white supremacy as deeply inter-related structures. In this case, it does so by taking the honoring defense at face value and re-posing it as one that relies upon both Indigenous invisibility/honorability and Black American abjection/exploitability. This approach does not appeal to the inclusive, assimilatory framework of racial liberalism, but instead sees the team name as a component of a larger dispossessive, appropriative, exploitative, and violent set of colonial racist practices. In response to the honoring defense, an anti-colonialist argument does not say we would never tolerate a derogatory name like the New York “Negroes” so we should not have the Washington team name, but instead asks why would the former have never entered the white settler imaginary in the first place whereas the latter was ubiquitous in its formative period and persists to this day, and what is the relationship between these two dynamics today? This more radical political question speaks to the history and present of settler colonialism and white supremacy so as to push the way towards a more profound and disruptive response to the honoring defense. Such a response begins with not reducing the issue to a solely

racial discourse in which colonialism is rendered invisible, but instead traces and interrogates the role of colonialism and colonial racism in the politics of Indians team names and mascots.

Conclusion

The free pass enjoyed by the Washington football team persists to the degree that settler colonialism remains invisible in this political debate. In making this case, the purpose of this paper is not to discredit the efforts of those seeking to do the important work of bringing an end to these names and mascots, but rather to consider the implications of the arguments that are deployed and to suggest alternative, more historically attentive and politically radical, ways to intervene in the debate and politics of this issue. The political efforts to oppose names and mascots have a great opportunity to upset the mnemonic loop that reproduces settler colonial logic. They can do so through a direct focus historically on the Allotment Era in order to argue that this present practice of names and mascots is part of a connected chain of appropriations and dispossessions that continues right on up to our day. However, if these efforts to raise and engage Indigenous political issues remain within the logic and narrative of racial liberalism in a post-Civil Rights era paradigm that defines the mascot issue as a matter of offensiveness, exclusion, and discrimination rather than an anti-colonial focus on appropriation, dispossession, and violence, they are more likely to reproduce, even if unintentionally, settler memory as a practice that sustains liberal colonialism. The present politics of Indian team names and mascots can bring the politics of settler colonialism to the center of public debate, and this can be done not at the exclusion of questions of race but rather to push this discussion in an even more radical direction. In the least, it is imperative to engage in a politics that works to refuse the invisibility of settler colonialism and Indigenous people, and while this may complicate the argument a bit

more than it is at present the benefit would be to compel the widening of the discourse on this issue beyond the narrow parameters of racial liberalism.

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