



Indian Sports Mascots and Politics

The recent decision by the Oklahoma City school board to require Capitol Hill High School to drop its “Redskins” mascot name after over 80 years is just the latest salvo in liberal political correctness directed at American Indian mascots.

A common method used by the Left when advancing a progressive agenda is stealth. The school board acted with virtually no input from either the student body or the alumni of the school. For example, student Juanita Freeman, a full-blood American Indian (of Black Foot and Cherokee heritage) was quite upset at the decision. “I am very proud to be a Redskin,” Freeman declared, saying she owns about 30 shirts proudly displaying the Redskins mascot of the school.

Yet, neither her opinion nor those of the vast majority of the students and alumni were even considered by those who pushed through the change.

A poll of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, which revealed that about 90 percent of the self-identified American Indians are “not offended” by the use of the Redskins name by the Washington NFL franchise, would seem to indicate that most persons of Native American ancestry have no problem with the term.

So, if the Oklahoma City school board did not ask for the input of the students, past and present, just whom *did* they listen to?

The person who appears to have caught the ear of the school board is Star Yellowfish, the district’s administrator for American Indian student services. Yellowfish and a group of American Indian students from another school (Oklahoma Centennial Mid-High School) and their advisor urged the board to drop the nickname as offensive and harmful. They addressed concerns raised as part of an Obama White House “initiative” on American Indian and Alaska Native education.

Of course, changing Capitol Hill High School’s mascot will require the use of money that could be better used in the educational mission of the school — a fact that did not seem to concern the Oklahoma City school board. As is increasingly common, academic subjects are now secondary to liberal political causes.

So, what does this “Redskins” term actually mean? Is it a racial slur? Did Capitol Hill High School, and other Oklahoma schools such as Rush Springs High School, Tulsa Union High School, and the pro football Washington Redskins all adopt a name intended to insult American Indians?

Despite many myths pushed by the politically correct crowd as to the origin of the term “Redskins,” it appears that the term likely originated with the Indians themselves. Chief Mosquito of the Piankeshaw





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tribe addressed an English officer in 1769, using the phrase, “if any red skins do you harm.” In 1812, Osage Chief No Ears made this statement: “I know the manners of the whites and the red skins.”

Adrian Jawort, in his November 13, 2012 article in *Indian Country Today* entitled “Redskins Not So Black and White,” said that it was simply “revisionist history” to assert that the term “redskins” came from the practice of paying a bounty for Indians (using a “red skin” in reference to a bloody, red scalp of a Native American). Other such origin stories are also as concocted out of thin air, such as those false claims that Chief Seattle was a 19th-century Al Gore environmentalist. It is all just liberal myth.

On June 18, 2014, the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office cancelled six trademarks held by the Washington NFL Redskins, in a 2-1 vote, declaring the term “Redskins” is disparaging to a “substantial composite of Native Americans.”

Congressman Tom Cole, an Oklahoma Republican, has joined in this effort, dismissing the “Redskins” moniker as a racial slur. He joined with a Democrat, Senator Maria Cantwell of Washington State, in sending a letter to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell demanding a name change. Cole told Goodell that the NFL is “on the wrong side of history,” and it is inappropriate for the Redskins to “profit from the continued degradation of tribes and Indian people.”

Observers have noted that a U.S. congressman determining the mascots of professional football teams is hardly an example of limited government conservatism.

It is logical to presume that nicknames and mascots are chosen for sports teams — whether at the high school, college, or professional level — because the teams are *proud* of the names. It is illogical that anyone would pick a mascot with the intention to ridicule any group. One can safely presume that the Minnesota Vikings are not desirous of insulting those of Norwegian ancestry, and that the Texas A&M Aggies have not chosen to poke fun at farmers. Does anyone really think that Notre Dame hates the “Fighting Irish”? Did the New Orleans NFL franchise choose the term “Saints” intending to insult Christians? When the Oklahoma Seminole tribe demanded that the Florida State Seminoles change their mascot name, the Seminole Tribe of Florida told the Oklahoma Seminoles to mind their own business.

The Oklahoma Sooners were named for those who slipped into the Unassigned Lands of the Indian Territory *sooner* than they were supposed to, to beat the April 22, 1889 “land run.” The team used an Indian mascot, “Little Red,” for several years until he fell victim to political correctness. The original Little Red was Phil Waller, who dressed in full Kiowa Indian clothing and danced whenever the OU Sooners scored (which was often). Waller, a Kiowa Indian, was a linebacker under the legendary Coach Bud Wilkinson, and then decided to help the team as a mascot instead. He did his part to work up the crowds from 1957-1960. Other Indian students played the part of Little Red over the next several years (it was considered an honor), and Waller returned to the sidelines in 1970.

But, then a tiny minority of Indian students complained to liberal OU President Herbert Holliman, who quickly caved and banned the mascot. When other Indian students persisted in urging the reinstatement of Little Red, they were met with death threats. Despite several Indian chiefs signing a petition asking for the resurrection of Little Red, the will of the politically correct minority prevailed.

In 1984, Waller attempted an unauthorized comeback for Little Red, rushing the field in his costume during the OU-Texas game, to the delight of the fans. But the OU administration quickly snuffed out any hope of return of the popular mascot. Stephanie Wickliff, who was then the president of the OU American Indian Student Association, was appalled at Waller’s efforts to bring back the mascot. “It’s



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really embarrassing to see someone represent our people as a mascot on the field. I think (Waller) is exploiting his tradition. He shows disrespect to this costume and his culture,” Wickliffe said. This is, of course, a variation of the tactic used by the Left upon conservative Black Americans who refuse to toe the liberal line. They, too, are branded as disloyal to their race, called vicious names, and often bullied into silence.

In a 2008 Internet website, Newspaper Rock, “where Native America meets popular culture,” the liberal writer discussed the Little Red case, dismissing the student mascots who proudly wore the Little Red uniform as nothing more than “garishly clad white boys.” This is an example of the misinformation one often sees in this type of debate. Waller was a Kiowa Indian, and every one of the other Little Red mascots were American Indians, not “white boys.”

But, this is the Left and this is their tactics. One wonders what will happen when all the American Indian mascots are discarded. Will Pistol Pete at Oklahoma State be next? After all, isn’t it insulting to the American cowboy to be depicted with an enormous head? How can we allow the trashing of the Greeks by Michigan State (the Spartans), the Hispanics at Texas Tech (the Red Raiders), or the simple folk of the Appalachians (the Mountaineers of West Virginia)?

Well, at least TCU’s mascot is probably safe for now. After all, who cares if someone insults a Horned Frog?



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