



Change the Mascot!

Wednesday, May 28, 2014

Dear NFL Player

You have no doubt heard about the ongoing controversy regarding the Washington, DC professional football team's name. Just recently Richard Sherman of the Seattle Seahawks, one of the league's most high profile players, spoke out against the Washington, DC NFL team name. We are hopeful that other players in the league will follow his strong example and take a public stance against the Washington R*dskins.

The Washington, DC NFL team name was originally adopted by renowned segregationist George Preston Marshall, who was the last team owner to hire African American players. He only did so under threat of federal legal action. Every major English dictionary describes the term "r*dskins" as derogatory and the United States government has recently rejected patent applications for the term on the grounds that the word is a racial slur.

Despite team officials claiming the name "honors" Native Americans, the "R-word" does exactly the opposite. It was the word screamed at Native Americans as they were dragged at gunpoint off their lands, it is the word for the object needed to collect a bounty—literally "red skins"—ripped from dead Native American bodies and exchanged for money as proof of kill, and it is a term that still denigrates Native Americans today. The name does not honor people of color, instead it seeks to conceal a horrible segment of American history and the countless atrocities suffered by Native Americans.

When members of Congress from both parties recently asked the team to change its name, the team angrily responded by saying "Don't (lawmakers) have more important issues to worry about than a football team's name?" Over and over again, defenders of the name demand to know why advocates for changing the name do not spend time on any of the other critical issues facing Indian Country.

The fact is, this is a critical issue. According to psychologists and public health experts, the NFL's promotion of this term continues to do great psychological harm to Native Americans, and particularly Native American children. With the NFL spending billions of dollars a year promoting this slur on television and in merchandise across the globe, these children are being constantly told they are savages who should be primarily judged on the basis of their skin color.

In the past year, hundreds of people have spoken out – sportscasters, athletes, civil rights groups, religious leaders, city councils, school boards, members of Congress, and President Obama have said the time has come to stop using the R-word.

We ask that you add your powerful voice to the hundreds who are already speaking out. Because you are in the NFL, you command a level of respect and credibility when speaking out about the league’s behavior. Indeed, players are the most publicly identifiable representatives of the league, which means your support is critical to ending this injustice. Your NFL should not be a place where any person is expected to sit by in silence while their heritage is so casually disgraced and condemned by this racial slur.

Sincerely,

Akiak Native Community, Councilman Mike Williams
Alaska Inter-Tribal Council
American Indian College Fund, President & CEO Cheryl Crazy Bull
American Indian Higher Education Consortium, President & CEO Carrie Billy
Americans for Indian Opportunity
Anti-Defamation League
Asbury United Methodist Church, Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Ianther M. Mills, Associate Pastor Rev. Adam Briddell
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance
California Indian Museum and Cultural Center, Executive Director Nicole Lim
California Valley Miwok Tribe
Center for Native American Youth, Executive Director Erin Bailey
The Central Atlantic Conference United Church of Christ
Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Tribes of Alaska
Children and Youth Ministry, St. Paul’s United Church of Christ, Rev. Lucy Brady
Civil Rights Memorial Center
Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Chairman Michael Finley
Colorado River Indian Tribes, Councilman Dennis Welsh, Jr.
The Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement
Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Chairman & COO William B. Iyall
Eradicating Offensive Native Mascotry (EONM)
First Nations Development Institute, President Mike Roberts
First Peoples Fund, President Lori Pourier
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Tribal Chairman Al Pedwaydon
Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc., Executive Director Michael W. Allen, Sr.
The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development
Honoring Nations
Indian Land Tenure Foundation
Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe, Tribal Chairman & CEO W. Ron Allen
Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, Committeeman Steven Smith
Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware, Principal Chief Dennis J. Coker
Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians
Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes, Executive Director Scott Vele

NAACP

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

Narragansett Tribe, Councilman Randy Noka

National Congress of American Indians, Executive Director Jacqueline Pata

National Fair Housing Alliance

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

National Indian Child Welfare Association, Executive Director Terry Cross

National Indian Education Association, Executive Director Ahniwake Rose

National Indian Gaming Association, Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr.

National Indian Justice Center, Executive Director Joseph Myers

National Native American Bar Association

National Urban League

Native American Contractors Association, Executive Director Kevin Allis

Native Public Media, President & CEO Loris Taylor

Native American Rights Fund, Executive Director John Echohawk

Native Village of Buckland, President Percy Ballot

Native Voice Network

Nottoway Indian Tribe of Virginia, Chief Lynette Allston

Oneida Indian Nation of New York, Representative Ray Halbritter

Organized Village of Saxman, Saxman I.R.A. Council, President Lee Wallace

PFLAG National

Plymouth Congregational Church, Senior Pastor Rev. Graylan Scott Hagler

Pueblo de Cochiti, Governor Joseph Henry Suina

Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma, Chairman John Berrey

Quinault Indian Nation, President Fawn Sharp

Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Chairperson Rose Soulier

Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, Chairman Arlan Melendez

San Carlos Apache Tribe, Chairman Terry Rambler

Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Chairperson Aaron Payment

Self-Governance Communication & Education Tribal Consortium

Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation, Chairman Robert Shepherd

Sobobo Band of Mission Indians, Tribal Chairwoman Rosemary Morillo

Sojourners

Spirit Lake Tribe, Chairman Leander McDonald

Stevens Village Tribal Council, Chief Randy Mayo

Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, Chairman Brian Cladoosby

Tanana Chiefs Conference, President & Chairman Jerry Isaac

Tribal Law & Policy Institute, Executive Director Jerry Gardner

United Cherokee Ani-Yun-Wiya Nation, Charles Yow, Esq.

United South & Eastern Tribes

United Tribes of Michigan, Executive Director Frank Ettawageshik

Women Empowering Women for Indian Nations

CC:

NFL Team Owners

NFL Players Association