



October 22, 2014

Dear School Administrator,

As you know, October is National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month. It is also the heart of the National Football League season. These two facts may seem unrelated, but they relate to your work in the nation's school system because of the Washington football team's continued promotion of a dictionary defined racial slur - one that social science research tells us is a clear instrument of bullying against Native Americans.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Michael Friedman has presented a review of this research in a scientific report entitled "The Harmful Psychological Effects of the Washington Football Mascot," which can be found at [www.changethemascot.org](http://www.changethemascot.org). In a recent article in *Psychology Today*, Dr. Friedman summarized the horrifying examples and empirical data about the R-word's use as a tool of bullying and concluded:

When kids wear (Washington team) jerseys and jackets, use the R-word when referring to the Washington team and display the Washington team logo in their schools, Native American kids are being exposed to racist acts. And when schools follow the Washington team's behavior by allowing the use and display of the "R-word" in schools, they are forcing Native American children to tolerate racism, creating a "racially hostile environment" and engaging in the very same behavior that schools are proposing to fight in their campaigns against bullying.

Dr. Friedman's conclusions are consistent with previous resolutions by the National Education Association, American Psychological Association, American Sociological Association, and American Counseling Association, all of which have declared that the use of Native American team names and logos is a form of discrimination and is harmful to children. Further, every major Native American organization such as the National Congress of American Indians and National Indian Gaming Association as well as every major civil and human rights organization such as the NAACP, Anti-Defamation League and Leadership Conference of Human and Civil Rights has spoken out against the particular harm of the Washington football team name "R-word" which refers to the bloody scalp of Native Americans used as bounty.

In light of this, we are asking that during National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month, you consider addressing Washington team iconography in the policies and curriculum you adopt to combat bullying.

As evidenced by many other school systems' actions, there are many steps you can take to stop this dictionary defined racial slur from intensifying the effects of bullying. These include:

- Restricting students from wearing clothing with dictionary-defined racial slurs on them - including the Washington team name.
- Restricting school publications - including student newspapers - from promoting dictionary defined racial slurs.
- Facilitating in-classroom discussions about the meaning of the team name, and its known effects on people of color.
- Incorporating into history curriculum a lesson about the etymology of the team name - specifically, highlighting its origination as a term screamed at Native Americans as they were dragged at gunpoint off their lands, and its use as a team name by renowned segregationist George Preston Marshall.

These are only some of the many ways you can help stop one of the most insidious - yet widely permitted - forms of bullying in our schools.

If you would like to consult with Dr. Friedman or other experts about this, please feel free to contact us at 315-829-8311.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ray Halbritter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ray Halbritter  
Oneida Indian Nation Representative

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Cladoosby". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Brian Cladoosby  
President, National Congress of American Indians

# The Harmful Psychological Effects of the Washington Football Mascot

*A research report compiled by Michael A. Friedman, Ph.D.*

## **Executive Summary**

This report presents the scientific rationale for the position that the Washington football team's "R-word" mascot is harmful to the Native American population and should therefore be changed. The simplest way to try to dismiss this issue is by insisting that the team's use of this slur is a victimless crime, or merely an issue of political correctness about which people can have differing views. However, the ongoing use of a dictionary-defined racial slur above the repeated objections of the Native American community poses serious risk for negative mental health consequences to Native Americans.

Native Americans are the only group in the United States subjected to having a racial slur as the mascot of a prominent professional sports team. The Washington football team, whether it intends to do so or not, is contributing to prejudice and discrimination against Native Americans by persisting in using the "R-word." With the help of the National Football League's \$9-billion-a-year global marketing machine, this behavior not only repeatedly exposes Native Americans to a harmful stereotype, but also implicitly condones the use of this term by non-Native Americans, which if performed on an interpersonal level would possibly constitute harassment or bullying.

Experimental laboratory studies demonstrate the causal effect and specific mechanisms by which Native American mascots influence Native American well-being. Tests have shown that the presence of Native American mascots results directly in lower self-esteem and lower mood among both Native American adolescents and young adults, as well as increased negative attitudes towards Native Americans among non-Native Americans. Importantly, these effects occur regardless of whether the Native American mascot is considered "offensive."

The Washington mascot is uniquely destructive because it not only perpetuates the stereotypical and outdated caricature portrayed by many Native American mascots, but also promotes and justifies the use of a dictionary-defined racial slur, thus increasing risk for discriminatory experiences against Native Americans. Further studies have shown that discrimination in the form of racial slurs, racial harassment and bullying is associated with poor mental health among Native American children and adults. This has manifested itself in the form of elevated levels of depression, substance abuse, suicidality, increased physical pain and maladaptive health behaviors among Native American children and adults in the United States.

In part because of the stress experienced in the form of ongoing discrimination, Native American people exhibit the highest level of psychological distress of any other group in the nation, including among the highest levels of depression, substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder. The Native American suicide rate is among the highest in the country and has risen by an alarming 65% in the last decade alone.

When considering the dire consequences associated with such mental health conditions, anything that causes additional stress and increased suffering, loss of productivity, loss of functioning or further loss of life among Native Americans, and is preventable, must be considered a public health priority.

This report draws upon a body of scientific study that provides support to the assertion that the Washington organization's continued use of its mascot represents a serious stressor to the Native American population. These findings provide validity to the claims of not only over 100 Native American organizations and various religious and civil rights organizations, but also of such professional organizations as the American Psychological Association, the American Sociological Association, and the American Counseling Association, that there are harmful effects associated with the ongoing usage of Native American mascots for sports teams.

Given the significant challenges already faced by the Native American community related to their mental and physical health, the Washington team should cease using the “R-word,” which constitutes a racial slur, and change the name of their mascot.

Link to full document - [The Harmful Psychological Effects of the Washington Football Mascot](#)