



Change the Mascot!

November 21, 2017

Dear [News Organization],

On Thanksgiving Day, the National Football League has scheduled a high-profile game between the New York Giants and Washington, D.C.'s professional football team. In advance of that event, we are asking that you honor the spirit of the holiday by pledging to refrain from using the Washington team's R-word name in your coverage of the game.

Thanksgiving is often the only major American holiday that brings Native people and their history into the national conversation. Using the holiday to promote the Washington team's derogatory name will further marginalize Native Americans who have already experienced a history of oppression and violence. Repeating the Washington football team's name on Thanksgiving Day encourages people across the country to perpetuate this painful racial slur.

While the Washington franchise's management has claimed the team name honors Native Americans, nothing could be further from the truth. The name is a dictionary-defined racial slur that was screamed at Native Americans as they were dragged at gunpoint off their lands. The owner who gave the team this dishonorable name was George Preston Marshall – an infamous segregationist who played a leading role in trying to stop the NFL from integrating.

Despite what some suggest, the use of this slur is not a victimless crime. Social science research has proven that the promotion of the R-word has significantly harmed Native Americans, especially Native youth.

In a [2013 report summarizing existing research](#), psychologist Michael Friedman noted 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 increases negative attitudes towards Native Americans among non-Native Americans. His report added that “the Washington mascot is uniquely destructive because it not only perpetuates the stereotypical and outdated caricature portrayed by many Native American mascots, but also promotes and justifies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.”

In recent years, a wide array of civil rights organizations, religious leaders, civic groups and Members of Congress from both parties have called for the Washington team to change its name. To date, the team has refused to make any changes – but that insensitive intransigence does not mean that media organizations covering the team must also continue to promote this racial slur and perpetuate the problems caused by its use.

To be clear, we are not asking that you stop covering the Washington team – we are simply asking that you respect Native Americans by not using the team name. Indeed, media organizations can do their jobs by reporting on the team, but also refrain from using the slur and denigrating Native people.

In light of all of the evidence of destruction caused by the R-word’s use, we are hopeful that you will pledge to honor this modest request. At a time when our political debate is so polarized, media organizations should be able to agree to not explicitly promote a racial slur.

Sincerely,

Advancement Project
Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Change the Mascot
Demos
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
National Congress of American Indians
National Urban League
Oneida Indian Nation
PICO National Network
Race Forward
UnidosUS