

Renaming the Washington Redskins

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The Washington Redskins NFL football team has been criticized on and off for the past twenty years by some activists, supposedly representing Indian tribes, that the nickname "Redskins" is a racial slur. Among the cases that have been litigated are Harjo et al v. Football, Inc. [1] and Blackhorse vs. Pro Football, Inc. [2], both objecting to the name under the disparagement clause of the Trademark Law. Apparently most persons of actual Indian descent are not particularly offended by the name (if we believe some polls taken among Indians).

More recently, two federal politicians, Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Congressman Tom Cole (R-OK) have voiced their opinion. They wrote to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell on 10 Feb 2014, stating in part [3]:

"The terminology used by the Washington football team has been determined to be a racial slur. It is, in fact, an insult to Native Americans. We are calling on you and the National Football League to take a formal position on a name change."

Team owner Dan Snyder, citing statistics indicating that the public generally favors the current name, and reluctant to incur the costs associated with changing it, has stated that the name will never change. I believe that in the long run Mr. Snyder is wrong. Given the continuous string of accusations of racism from all the "aggrieved" interest groups (real and imagined) it is likely that he will eventually have to change the name.

If there is going to be a name change, there are two ways to go. The first type, under the category 'maybe the complainants should be careful what they wish for', is to rename the team to reflect what the natives actually stood for and what they were. Then we could choose from several viable alternatives:

- a. Stone Age Barbarians
- b. Enslavers of Women
- c. Demon Possessed Primitives
- d. Merciless Indian Savages (as mentioned by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence)

But there is no point in that; after all, the Indian Wars are long over and members of the Indian tribes have not offended anyone. They have in fact, suffered greatly from all the "help" given them by the government (not to mention the recurring violation of the treaties). Since the federal politicians have weighed in (apparently not having anything else to attend to), I favor a second type of name change, one that honors the city of Washington as the seat of the federal government. How about these for possibilities:

- a. Masters of Corruption
- b. Pathological Liars
- c. Bureaucratic Incompetents
- d. Marxist Crusaders
- e. D. C.'s (Destroyers of the Constitution) - my favorite

Since all of them are provably true, it is hard to see any objection on the grounds of disparagement.

References:

1. Suzan Harjo sought cancellation of the team's trademark in 1992 under the "disparaging terms" clause. She won the initial verdict in the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board in 1999, but that ruling was

overturned by the D. C. Court of Appeals in 2005, citing insufficient evidence and expiration of the statute of limitations.

2. This suit makes the same claim as Harjo, but with younger plaintiffs, supposedly not barred from a complaint. It was filed in 2013 and is still in process.

3. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-26127941>