

November 11, 2020

NNABA Applauds Efforts to Abandon Derogatory Native Imagery and Terms

November is Native American Heritage Month. Native American heritage is, inherently, American heritage. To be celebrated! Yet, in countless and fundamental ways, this country has erased Native heritage and buried it beneath an onslaught of derogatory language and terms.

Since the dawn of this country, and contemporaneous with the harmful federal policies aimed at dispossessing and assimilating Native peoples, inaccurate and harmful stereotypes have reimagined Natives as inferior, lawless, interchangeable ... savage. The dominant narratives regarding Native peoples are of course intentional, serving to justify those otherwise genocidal policies and to legitimize the great American taking. These narratives have morphed and reproduced over time, forming a formidable cultural phenomenon that includes mascots, hyper-sexualized caricatures, “tribal” décor and fashion, and socially permissible epithets.

Reducing the hundreds of diverse tribal nations and millions of Native people to cartoons is far from “honoring”. It is harmful. There is now ample evidence showing how Native caricatures and stereotypes contribute to a disregard for the humanity of Native peoples and cause serious psychological, social, and cultural consequences for Natives.**[1]** Natives are more likely than any other race to experience violence at the hands of someone of a different race.**[2]** Natives are also more likely than any other race to both attempt and complete suicide.**[3]**

However, the winds whisper change. As the National Congress of American Indians note, hundreds of tribal nations, national and regional tribal organizations, civil rights organizations, school boards, sports teams, sports and media

personalities, and individuals have all called for the end to harmful “Indian” mascots.[4] In 2019, the Cleveland Indians phased out their use of their cartoonishly red logo.[5] In April of this year, Land O’Lakes phased out the use of a suggestive illustration of a Native woman adorned in a feather and headband.[6] And in July, after *decades* of advocacy, the Washington NFL team decoupled from their hateful epithet name, red*****.

There is still much work to be done. Hundreds of American secondary schools still use Natives as their team mascots without tribal consent or input (mascot being a notably distinct designation from the name of the school or building).[7] Our current U.S. President felt sufficiently emboldened to use the 17th Century Tsenacommacah human trafficking victim Pocahontas, as racial epithet against U.S. Senator Warren during a nationally-televised presidential debate.[8]

This Native American Heritage Month, we call on our relatives to continue the fight to dismantle the harmful stereotypes of Natives. Our past seven generations have suffered immense harm from these generalizations, erasure, and hate. But we are immensely hopeful for the future seven generations.

[1] See e.g. Michael A. Friedman, Ph.D., [*The Harmful Psychological Effects of the Washington Football Mascot*](#) (Commissioned by Oneida Indian Nation, 2013).

[2] Lawrence A. Greenfeld and Steven K. Smith, [*American Indians and Crime*](#), U.S. Dep’t of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (NCJ 173386, 1999).

[3] Lenora M. Olson and Stephanie Wahab, [*American Indians and Suicide: A Neglected Area of Research*](#), 7(1) Trauma, Violence & Abuse 19-33 (2006).

[4] National Congress of American Indians, “Ending the Era of Harmful ‘Indian’ Mascots” at ncai.org/proudtobe.

[5] David Waldstein, "[Cleveland Indians Will Abandon Chief Wahoo Logo Next Year](#)" NY Times (Jan. 29, 2018).

[6] Angela R. Riley and Sonia K. Katyal, "[Aunt Jemima Is Gone. Can We Finally End All Racist Branding?](#)" NY Times (June 19, 2020).

[7] Hope Allchin, "[Hundreds of Schools Are Still Using Native Americans As Team Mascots](#)" FiveThirtyEight (Oct. 12, 2020).

[8] Christian Allaire, "[Yes, President Trump Really Dropped a Racial Slur on Live Television Tonight](#)", Vogue (Sept. 20, 2020).