

= Washington Redskins name controversy =

The Washington Redskins name controversy involves the name and logo of the National Football League (NFL) franchise located in the Washington , D.C. , metropolitan area . Native American individuals , tribes and organizations have been questioning the use of the name and image for decades . Over 115 professional organizations representing civil rights , educational , athletic , and scientific experts have published resolutions or policies that state that the use of Native American names and / or symbols by non @-@ native sports teams is a harmful form of ethnic stereotyping that promotes misunderstanding and prejudice which contributes to other problems faced by Native Americans . The Washington , D.C. team is only one example of the larger controversy , but it receives the most public attention due to the name itself being defined as derogatory or insulting in modern dictionaries , and the prominence of the team representing the nation 's capital .

Native Americans officially demanding change include hundreds of tribal nations , national tribal organizations , civil rights organizations , school boards , sports teams , and individuals . The largest of these organizations , the National Congress of American Indians , count the total enrollment of its membership as 1 @.@ 2 million individuals . There is also a growing number of public officials , sports commentators and other journalists advocating a change . In addition to picketing and other forms of direct protest , opponents took legal action to cancel the trademarks held by the team . On June 18 , 2014 , the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board (TTAB) of the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) again voted to cancel the Redskins federal trademark registrations , considering them " disparaging to Native Americans " . On July 8 , 2015 the U.S. District Court in Alexandria , Virginia upheld the TTAB decision .

Support for continued use of the name has come from the team 's owners and a majority of fans , which include some Native Americans . Supporters say that the name honors the achievements and virtues of Native Americans , and that it is not intended in a negative manner . Some , such as team president Bruce Allen , also point to the use of Redskins by three high school teams , two on reservations , that have a majority of Native American students . Supporters have asserted that a majority of Native Americans are not offended by the name based upon a national poll done by Annenberg Public Policy Center in 2004 , In a commentary published soon after that poll , fifteen Native American scholars collaborated on a critique that stated that there were so many flaws in the Annenberg study that rather than being a measure of Native American opinion , it was an expression of white privilege and colonialism . In May , 2016 the Washington Post published a poll which duplicated the central question posed in 2004 , yielding an identical result . Critics immediately questioned the methodology , which addressed some but not all of the flaws they found in the Annenberg poll ; but also questioned reducing a complex civil rights issue to a matter of personal opinion . National public opinion polls consistently find that a majority of the general public support the team 's continued use of the name , ranging from 60 to 83 percent in recent years . However , three separate DC metropolitan area polls have found that a small majority of fans think the term " redskin " is offensive to Native Americans in some contexts .

= = History = =

In 1933 the football team that shared both the name and playing field with the Boston Braves baseball team moved to Fenway Park , already home to the Boston Red Sox . Co @-@ owner George Preston Marshall changed the name to the Redskins , more likely to avoid confusion while retaining the " Indian " imagery of the team than to honor coach William Henry " Lone Star " Dietz . The logo for the NFL Braves was similar to the current logo , a Native American head in profile with braids and trailing feathers . The current logo , proposed by Walter Wetzel , a former Blackfeet tribal chairman and president of the National Congress of American Indians , was introduced in 1972 and is modeled after the likeness on the Buffalo nickel . Members of the Blackfeet tribe today express a range of opinions , from support to indifference to strong opposition to the Redskins name based upon their personal experiences .

= = = Origin and meaning = = =

Much of the public debate is over the meaning of the word "redskin", with team supporters frequently citing a paper by Ives Goddard, a Smithsonian Institution senior linguist and curator emeritus, who asserts that the term was originally benign in meaning. However, in an interview Goddard admits that it is impossible to verify if the native words were accurately translated. But then "nigger" also began as a benign reference to skin color, only to become a racial slur through disparaging usage. Dr. Darren R. Reid, a history lecturer at Coventry University also states that Native American usage was generally attributed to them by European writers. Reid states that the team logo works together with the name to reinforce an unrealistic stereotype: "It is not up to non-Indian Americans to define an idealized image of what it is to be a Native American." The "positive" stereotypes allow fans and supporters to honestly state that they are honoring Native Americans, but this is "... forcing your idea of what it is to honour those people onto them and that, fundamentally, is disrespectful."

Advocates of changing the name emphasize current meanings in dictionaries of American English, which include "usually offensive", "disparaging", "insulting", and "taboo". Such meanings are consistent with the usage found in books in the period between 1875 and 1930, which is after that studied by Goddard. In the Washington Redskins trademark litigation, the linguistic expert for the petitioners, Dr. Geoffrey Nunberg, successfully argued that whatever its origins, "redskins" was a slur at the time of the trademarks, based upon the passages from books and newspapers and the movie clips in which the word is inevitably associated with contempt, derision, condescension, or sentimental paeans to the noble savage. John McWhorter, an associate professor of linguistics at Columbia University compares the name's becoming a slur to the other racial terms, such as "Oriental" which acquired implied meanings associated with contempt.

Some defenders of the name point to Native American use of the term, including three predominantly Native American high schools with the Redskins mascot. Native American writer and attorney Gyasi Ross compares Native American use of variations of the r- prefix word with African American use of variations of the n- prefix word. The use of these terms by some members of minority communities does not mean that these words may be used by outsiders. Ross also notes that while activism on the issue may be from a minority of Native Americans, this is due to most being concerned with more immediate issues, but also says "The presentation of the name 'Redskins' is problematic for many Native Americans because it identifies Natives in a way that the vast majority of Natives simply don't identify ourselves."

A controversial etymological claim is that the term emerged from the practice of paying a bounty for Indians, and that "redskin" refers to the bloody scalp of Native Americans. Although official documents do not use the word in this way, an historical association between the use of "redskin" and the paying of bounties can be made. In 1863, a Winona, MN newspaper, the Daily Republican, printed an announcement: "The state reward for dead Indians has been increased to \$ 200 for every red-Indian skin sent to Purgatory. This sum is more than the dead bodies of all the Indians east of the Red River are worth." A news story published by the Atchison Daily Champion in Atchison, Kansas on October 9, 1885, tells of the settlers' hunt for redskins, with a view of obtaining their scalps valued at \$ 250. This association can evoke strongly negative sentiments. In a 2014 interview after the Trademark decision, Amanda Blackhorse the lead petitioner expressed her opinion: "The name itself actually dates back [to] the time when the Native American population was being exterminated, and bounty hunters were hired to kill Native American people ... So, in order to show that they made their kill, they had to bring back a scalp or their skin."

= = Controversy = =

The issue is often discussed in the media in terms of offensiveness, which reduced it to feelings and opinions, and prevents full understanding of the history and context of the use of Native American names and images and why their use by sports teams should be eliminated. Social science research says that sports mascots and images, rather than being mere entertainment, are

important symbols with deeper psychological and social effects . Stereotyping may directly affect academic performance and self @-@ esteem of Native American youth , whose people face high rates of suicide , unemployment , and poverty . Euro @-@ Americans exposed to mascots may be more likely to believe not only that such stereotypes are true , but that Native Americans have no identity beyond these stereotypes . Research demonstrates the harm of stereotyping , with studies showing that exposure to any stereotypes increased the likelihood of stereotypical thinking among citizens with regard to other groups .

Advocates of changing the team 's name say that use of stereotypes of Native Americans must be understood in the context of a history that includes conquest , forced relocation , and organized efforts by federal and state governments to eradicate native cultures , such as the boarding schools of the late 19th and early 20th centuries . " Since the first Europeans made landfall in North America , native peoples have suffered under a weltering array of stereotypes , misconceptions and caricatures . Whether portrayed as noble savages , ignoble savages , teary @-@ eyed environmentalists or , most recently , simply as casino @-@ rich , native peoples find their efforts to be treated with a measure of respect and integrity undermined by images that flatten complex tribal , historical and personal experience into one @-@ dimensional representations that tells us more about the depictees than about the depicted . "

In addition to the names and images , Native Americans opposed to mascots point to the oversimplification of their culture by fans " playing Indian " with no understanding of the deeper meaning of feathers , face paint , chants , and dancing . Dr. Richard Lapchick , director emeritus of Northeastern University 's Center for the Study of Sport in Society , in an article : " Could you imagine people mocking African Americans in black face at a game ? Yet go to a game where there is a team with an Indian name and you will see fans with war paint on their faces . Is this not the equivalent to black face ? " The unofficial mascot of the Redskins team was Zema Williams (aka Chief Zee) , an African American man who attended games beginning in 1978 dressed in a red , faux " Indian " costume , complete with feathered war bonnet and tomahawk . Other fans often dress in similar costume for the games .

The Redskins controversy began receiving more attention in 2013 , starting with a symposium in February on the topic at the Smithsonian 's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington , D.C. Subsequently the Oneida Indian Nation of New York sponsored a series of radio ads in each city to coincide with games of the 2013 season , each featuring a targeted message . A broader range of persons spoke out in favor of change or open discussion , including local government leaders , members of Congress , and President Barack Obama . Statements in support of a name change by civil rights and religious organizations were added to those that Native American groups have been making for decades . Direct action in the form of rallies and marches have become more frequent , with a larger number of participants .

The owner and the NFL Commissioner , supporters of keeping the name and logo , say they believe that it refers positively to Native Americans , invoking qualities of strength and courage . The majority of scholars argue that the use of any stereotype , whether positive or negative , is a hindrance to the advancement of the targeted group . Scott B. Vickers wrote , " the use of any stereotype in the portrayal of Indians is considered ... to be contributory to their dehumanization and deracination . " The national organizations representing several academic disciplines , after reviewing the research done on the issue , have passed resolutions calling for the end of all Native American mascots and images in sports . These include the Society of Indian Psychologists (1999) , the American Counseling Association (2001) , the American Psychological Association (2005) , the American Sociological Association (2007) . and the American Anthropological Association (2015) . The executive board of the nation 's leading organization of scholars of U.S. history approved a resolution in April 2015 : " The Organization of American Historians hereby adds its voice to the growing demands by Native American organizations , our sister disciplines , and conscientious people of all ethnic backgrounds , to change the name and logo of the Washington " Redskins . "

In a report published by the Center for American Progress summarizing the research on " The Real Impact of Native Mascots and Team Names on American Indian and Alaska Native Youth " , a case

is made that the public debate misses the point , since individual opinions on either side do not matter given the measurable effects on the mental health of Native American young people exposed to such misrepresentations of their ethnic identity , and the often hostile or insulting behavior of non @-@ natives that occur when teams with such names and mascots play . Clinical Psychologist Michael Friedman writes that the use of Native imagery , in particular the use of a dictionary defined slur , is a form of bullying , the negative impact of which is magnified by its being officially sanctioned .

The controversy has crossed the Atlantic in response to the scheduling of a game between the Redskins and the Cincinnati Bengals at Wembley Stadium in London for October 30 , 2016 . In a letter to the NFL from two members of parliament , Ruth Smeeth and Ian Austin said that the Redskins name goes " directly " against the values of British citizens . In addition , the stadium and the BBC have policies that would not allow for the use of a racial slur . The solution would be either to change the name or send another team .

= = = Native American advocates of change = = =

In the 1940s the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) created a campaign to eliminate negative stereotyping of Native American people in the media . Over time , the campaign began to focus on Indian names and mascots in sports . The NCAI maintains that teams with mascots such as the Braves and the Redskins perpetuate negative stereotypes of Native American people , and demean their native traditions and rituals . The NCAI issued a new report in 2013 summarizing opposition to Indian mascots and team names generally , and the Washington Redskins in particular . In the trademark case , the TTAB placed significance on the NCAI opposition , estimating that the organization represented about 30 % of the Native American population at the time the trademarks were granted , which met their criteria for a " substantial composite " of Native Americans finding the name disparaging . In its amicus brief filed in the case , the NCAI states that the combined enrollment of its member tribes in 2013 as 1 @.@ 2 million individuals .

In addition , many tribal councils have passed resolutions or issued statements regarding their opposition to the name of the Washington Redskins , including the Cherokee and Comanche Nations of Oklahoma , the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona , the Inter @-@ Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes , the Oneida Indian Nation (New York) , the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe (North Dakota) and the United South and Eastern Tribes (USET) . In April 2014 , Navajo Nation Council voted in favor of a statement opposing the name of the Washington team , as well as other disparaging references to American Indians by other professional sports franchises .

Other Native American groups advocating change include : the American Indian College Fund , National Indian Child Welfare Association , National Indian Education Association , National Indian Youth Council , National Native American Law Student Association , Native American Journalists Association , and Native American Rights Fund (NARF) .

Individuals Native Americans who are or have been actively opposed to the Redskins ' name include author and recent Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Suzan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne / Hodulgee Muscogee) , Former U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (Northern Cheyenne) , director of The Smithsonian Institution 's National Museum of the American Indian Kevin Gover (Pawnee) , author Sherman Alexie (Spokane) , historian and author Vine Deloria , Jr . (Sioux) , co @-@ founder of the American Indian Movement Clyde Bellecourt (Ojibwe) , and activist / actor Russell Means (Oglala Lakota) .

= = = Civil rights and religious organizations = = =

At its annual conference the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (LCCHR) , which includes the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union as members , passed a unanimous resolution of the 85 representatives present that , while recognizing that a business has the First Amendment right to use any name that it chooses , others need not be complicit in the use of a pejorative and insulting name ; and calling upon all

Federal , state and local government entities " to end any preferential tax , zoning , or policy treatment that could be viewed as supporting the franchise as long as it retains its current team name " . The resolution also commended the " current and former government officials , media outlets , and other entities that have encouraged the Washington Redskins franchise to change its team name or that have refused to be complicit in promoting the current team name " . In response , the team released a brief statement reiterated their previous position , and quoting two individuals as being both Native American and Redskins fans who do not want the name to change . The LCCHR issued a press release in 2014 applauding the decision to cancel the trademark protection for the team 's name . The NAACP issued their own press release supporting the TTAB decision stating " The NAACP has called specifically for this name change since 1992 , and will continue to stand with the Native Indian community until the derogatory moniker has been changed . "

The Fritz Pollard Alliance , a non @-@ profit organization closely allied with the NFL on civil rights issues , has decided to announce its support of a name change after repeated attempts to discuss the issue with the team owner and representatives . An attorney for the Alliance , N. Jeremi Duru , an American University law professor , made a study of the controversy in which he concluded that Native Americans are justified in finding the name offensive .

In 1992 , the Central Conference of American Rabbis issued a resolution calling for the end of sports teams names that promote racism , in particular the Atlanta Braves and the Washington Redskins . The Anti @-@ Defamation League was one of the organizations signing a letter to broadcasters urging them to avoid using the name . The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism also advocates a name change .

In 2013 a group of sixty @-@ one religious leaders in Washington , D.C. sent a letter to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell and team owner Dan Snyder stating their moral obligation to join the Change the Mascot movement due to the offensive and inappropriate nature of the name which causes pain whether or not that is intended .

In June , 2015 the United Church of Christ General Synod passed a resolution calling for a stop to using images or mascots that could be demeaning to the Native American community .

In June , 2016 Sidwell Friends School , affiliated with the Quakers , amended its dress code to ban apparel with the Redskins name or logo as " offensive and antithetical to the values of the community " .

= = = Protests = = =

Although often assumed to be a debate of recent origins , the local Washington , DC newspapers have published news items on the controversy many times since at least 1971 , all in response to Native American individuals or organizations asking for the name to be changed . National protests began in 1988 , after the team 's Super Bowl XXII victory , prompting numerous Native Americans wrote letters to Redskins owner Jack Kent Cooke while others boycotted Redskins products and protested , but Cooke rejected the possibility of change . There was a protest of about 2 @, @ 000 people at the 1992 Super Bowl between the Redskins and the Buffalo Bills . The American Indian Movement 's (AIM) Vernon Bellecourt was one of the main organizers of the protest .

Since 2013 picketing at the stadiums has occurred occasionally when the Redskins have played , particularly in cities with a significant population of Native Americans ; such as Dallas , Denver and Minneapolis . The latter protest was supported by several Minnesota politicians . Picketing resumed for the 2014 season in Glendale , AZ when the team played the Arizona Cardinals , and again the largest rally was in Minneapolis. where estimates of the number of protestors was between 3 @, @ 500 and 5 @, @ 000 .

FedEx owns the naming rights to the team 's stadium , FedEx Field through 2026 , and has been the only corporate sponsor officially subject to boycotts by Native Americans : the Osage Nation , the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) and the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes , the largest tribe of Native Alaskan peoples .

= = Responses to the controversy = =

Following the February 2013 symposium "Racist Stereotypes and Cultural Appropriation in American Sports" at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, ten members of Congress sent a letter to the team owner and the NFL Commissioner requesting that the name be changed since it is offensive to Native Americans. In response, team owner Daniel Snyder famously told USA Today: "We'll never change the name. ... It's that simple. NEVER? you can use caps." Snyder sent an open letter to fans that was published in The Washington Post on October 9, 2013 in which he stated that the most important meaning of the name Redskins is the association that fans have to memories of their personal history with the team. Snyder also states that the name was chosen in 1933 to honor Native Americans in general and the coach and four players at that time who were Native American; and that in 1971 the then coach George Allen consulted with the Red Cloud Indian Fund on the Pine Ridge reservation when designing the logo. In 2013 the Red Cloud Athletic Fund sent a letter to the Washington Post stating that "As an organization, Red Cloud Indian School has never? and will never? endorse the use of the name 'Redskins.'" Like many Native American organizations across the country, members of our staff and extended community find the name offensive."

In June 2013 Roger Goodell defended the name by citing its origins, traditions and polls that support its popularity.

On their website the team states that the 2014 annual NFL poll showing 71 percent support for the name, "along with the poll taken among Native Americans by the Annenberg Institute, demonstrates continued, widespread and deep opposition to the Redskins changing our name ... We respect the point of view of the small number of people who seek a name change, but it is important to recognize very few people agree with the case they are making."

The team's president, Bruce Allen addressed a letter dated May 23, 2014 to Senator Reid repeating the position that the name was originated by Native Americans to refer to themselves, that the logo was also designed and approved by Native American leaders, that the vast majority of both Native Americans and the public do not find the name offensive.

Defense of the Redskins name has come mainly from conservatives, such as George Will, Pat Buchanan, W. James Antle III, Rich Lowry, Dennis Prager, Rush Limbaugh, and Glenn Beck.

== Native American support ==

In May 2013, the Redskins' website reported the opinions of a local fan, Stephen D. Dodson, who claimed to be a chief and "full @-@ blooded American Inuit originally from the Aleutian Tribes of Alaska." He said that not only was "Redskins" not offensive to him and his "whole family", but it was a "term of endearment" that Indians "on the reservation ... would call each other". NFL commissioner Roger Goodell wrote a letter to Congress, which in part pointed to "recent remarks from Chief Steven Dodson, an American Inuit chief" to indicate support for the nickname among Native Americans. Soon it was reported that the Redskins' "full @-@ blooded American Inuit chief" was "neither, and "Chief" was only a nickname, including being on a list of AKAs from court records related to "theft, paternity, and domestic violence matters." The executive director of the Inuit Circumpolar Council @-@ Alaska, said that neither "Chief" nor "Indian" are terms used by Alaska's native peoples.

A brother and sister in Oneida, New York, state they are both Native American (Mohawk) and ardent Redskins fans. Three Virginia Indian leaders say they are not offended by the name Redskins, but are more concerned about other issues such as the lack of Federal recognition for any Virginia tribe. Robert "Two Eagles" Green, retired chief of the Fredericksburg area Patowomeck Tribe, stated on a radio talk show he'd be offended if the team does change its name. In an article in The American Spectator, the current chief of the Patowomeck Tribe, John Lightner, states that while he is not offended by the current name, he would support changing the team to the Washington Potomacs.

On November 25, 2013 as part of the NFL's "Salute to Service" month and Native American Heritage month, the Washington Redskins recognized four members of the Navajo Code Talkers

Association briefly during a commercial break . One of them , Roy Hawthorne , has stated , " My opinion is that 's a name that not only the team should keep , but that 's a name that 's American . " This action was criticized by Amanda Blackhorse , also Navajo , and described as a publicity stunt . In April 2014 , Navajo Nation Council voted in favor of a statement opposing the name of the Washington team , as well as other disparaging references to American Indians by other professional sports franchises . Later that year , members of the Navajo and Zuni Tribes and students from the Red Mesa Redskins High School attended a game in support of the Redskins .

The Redskins released a two @-@ minute video on YouTube entitled " Redskins is a Powerful Name " in which a number of Native Americans express their support for the team . Of the fourteen individuals ; five are members of the Chippewa Cree tribe on the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation in Montana and are associated with the Team Redskins Rodeo club . Two are Mike Wetzel and Don Wetzel , Jr . (Blackfeet) , descendants of the logo designer , and the six others are members of various tribes and state that they are fans of the team and find nothing wrong with the name , or think it is positive . One of the individuals in the video is Mark One Wolf , who was reported as being born Mark E. Yancey in Washington , DC of African @-@ American and Japanese descent .

= = = Other teams that use the name Redskins = = =

Supporters note that three predominantly Native American high schools use the name Redskins for their sports teams , suggesting that it can be acceptable . However , the principal of one of these , Red Mesa High School in Teec Nos Pos , Arizona , said that use of the word outside American Indian communities should be avoided because it could perpetuate " the legacy of negativity that the term has created . " In 2014 , Wellpinit High School , located on the Spokane Indian Reservation voted to keep the Redskins name .

The number of high schools using the Redskins name has been in steady decline , forty percent having had local efforts to change the name . From 1988 until April 2013 , 28 high schools in 18 states had done so . Subsequently , 11 additional high schools changed , with two additional schools in California also required to do so by January 1 , 2017 .

= = = Name change as a business decision = = =

Two professors at the Goizueta Business School at Emory University summarized their research in a New York Times editorial . Studies of college teams that have changed their names and mascots indicate that doing so has a long @-@ term financial benefit . While vocal opponents of change often threatened withdrawal of support , these never materialized . There have been no name changes by professional teams ; however , a comparison of NFL teams shows the highest negative trend in brand equity being the Washington Redskins and the Kansas City Chiefs , calling into question the business logic of retaining Native American names or logos that are offensive to even a minority . In a commentary for Forbes , Tom Van Riper states that research specifically considering the fan loyalty and traditions of the team indicates that the value of the name as a brand is significant , and unlikely to change for business reasons . However , an alternative opinion is that the team would benefit from a re @-@ branding , but any new name would need to be carefully selected . 2014 sales of Redskins merchandise declined 35 % from the prior year . " People are having a second thoughts about wearing a T @-@ shirt with the logo or name that it has now been called racist , " said Matt Powell , senior analyst for SportsSourceOne . A team spokesman attributed the decline to dismal performance in the 2013 season , but other teams with bad records have not seen such a steep decline in sales . Corporate sponsors have either made no public response to media inquiries regarding the name or stated that they play no role in the decision , and defer to the team and the NFL . Despite the name controversy , the value of the team has risen \$ 700 million to \$ 2 @. @ 4 billion (40 %) , making them the third most valuable franchise in the NFL , based upon the valuations published by Forbes magazine in 2014 and 2015 .

= = Governmental and regulatory action = =

= = = Political opinion = = =

Although the majority of those advocating a name change are Democrats , there is no indication that the issue is of any real significance in electoral decisions given that Native Americans are such a small percentage of the electorate and are not likely to influence the outcome of any election . There are only eight states where Natives make up greater than 2 percent of the population : Alaska , Arizona , Montana , New Mexico , North Dakota , Oklahoma , South Dakota and Wyoming . However , polls show a definite political difference in the opinion of the general public , with only 58 % of Democrats opposing a name change versus 89 % of Republicans . Statements by political figures have generally been expressions of personal opinion rather than recommendations for government action . There have also been non @-@ binding resolutions advocating name change proposed in New Jersey and passed in Minneapolis , New York State and California .

The topic came up in a 2013 interview of President Barack Obama , who stated that if he were the owner of the Redskins , he would consider changing the name because it offends many Native Americans , but that he didn 't " have a stake " in the issue as he is not an owner of a professional sports team . However , in November , 2015 Obama , speaking at the White House Tribal Nations Conference , stated " Names and mascots of sports teams like the Washington Redskins perpetuate negative stereotypes of Native Americans " and praised Adidas for a new initiative to help schools change names and mascots by designing new logos and paying for part of the cost of new uniforms . On May 22 , 2014 , fifty U.S. Senators , forty @-@ eight Democrats and two Independents , sent a letter to NFL Commissioner Goodell asking the league , referencing the Donald Sterling case , " send the same clear message as the NBA did : that racism and bigotry have no place in professional sports . " Five Democratic Senators declined to sign the letter , and Republicans were not invited to do so . No Senators have publicly supported the name , but rather have either declined to give an opinion or stated their opposition to Senate involvement in the issue .

= = = = DC Metro area jurisdictions = = = =

Much of the local political discussion has been about building a stadium , beginning in the 1990s when a Maryland location was chosen for the what is now FedEx Field . With the possibility of building a new stadium in the near future , both the previous and current mayors of the District of Columbia have stated that a name change must be part of the discussion , however the team rejects that possibiltiy . Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe has met with the owner to discuss the building of a new stadium in Virginia . For many years , beginning with the departure of the Baltimore Colts , the Redskins were the only NFL team in a large area from Maryland into the southern states . This is slowly changing as Maryland NFL fans move to the Baltimore Ravens . Several Maryland politicians have stated that the name should change , but the current governor opposes any change , also citing the desire to keep the stadium in Maryland . Virginia fans are now the more numerous and dedicated supporters of the Redskins , and the state and local governments have used economic incentives to encourage the team 's relocation of its facilities there , and maintain that the name is entirely a business decision for the team to make . An agency of the commonwealth , the Virginia Lottery , is a sponsor of the team , and says it has never had any complaints .

= = = Trademark cases = = =

In 1992 , Suzan Shown Harjo , with six other prominent Native Americans petitioned the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) to cancel the trademark registrations owned by Pro @-@ Football , Inc . In 1999 the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board (TTAB) judges canceled the federal registration of the mark REDSKINS . In 2005 the United States District Court for the District of Columbia reversed the TTAB 's decision on the grounds of insufficient evidence of disparagement . Subsequent appeals were rejected on the basis of laches , that the Native Americans had pursued

their rights in an untimely manner , in other words they were too old . A second case was filed with younger plaintiffs led by Amanda Blackhorse . On June 18 , 2014 , the TTAB again voted to cancel the six trademarks held by the team in a two to one decision that held that the term " redskins " is disparaging to a " substantial composite of Native Americans " , and this is demonstrated " by the near complete drop @-@ off in usage of ' redskins ' as a reference to Native Americans beginning in the 1960s . " The TTAB majority held that the NCAI represented about 30 percent of Native Americans during the time in question , which the Board found satisfied the substantial composite test . The TTAB also found that the term " redskin " refers to Native Americans (rather than having an " independent meaning " as the team sometimes claims) as shown by the costumes worn by both the cheerleaders and marching band from the 1960s until the 1980s , and the native imagery used on the press guides for many years .

Evidence of disparagement include the frequent references to " scalping " made by sportswriters for sixty years when reporting the Redskins loss of a game , and passages from movies made from the 1940s to the 1960s using " redskin " to refer to Native Americans as a savage enemy . A linguistics expert for the team unsuccessfully argued that the name is merely a descriptive term no different than other uses of color to differentiate people by race .

Reaction to the TTAB decision has often characterized it as government interference in a private business , or as an improper limitation on freedom of expression , but in fact withdraws the government from the responsibility to regulate the use of the name by anyone . The team retains other rights under common law , but must enforce them without Federal government assistance .

On July 8 , 2015 , District Court Judge Lee affirmed the decision of the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board , denying the team 's summary judgment motions challenging the constitutionality of the Lanham Act and granted the Blackhorse Defendants ' summary judgment motions , finding that " the evidence before the Court supports the legal conclusion that ... the Redskin Marks consisted of matter that ' may disparage ' a substantial composite of Native Americans . " The decision does not bar the team from using the marks and taking other steps to protect other rights to their brand . On October 30 , 2015 Pro @-@ Football , Inc. filed its appeal with the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit . In addition to maintaining the validity of all the arguments rejected by both the TTAB and the first appeal , the team has added a list of names they claim are offensive and racist that have been given trademarks , thus making the cancellation of their marks unequal treatment .

In December 2015 , the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals struck down the prohibition of " disparaging " trademarks in a separate case involving a similar denial of trademark registration to the Asian @-@ American band The Slants . The majority opinion stated , in part , that " [w] hatever our personal feelings about the mark at issue here , or other disparaging marks , the First Amendment forbids government regulators to deny registration because they find speech likely to offend others . " In April 2016 the USPTO asked the U. S. Supreme Court to review the case .

= = Public opinion polls = =

While varying somewhat , national opinion polls consistently indicate that a majority of the general public do not advocate a name change : 79 percent (April 2013) , 60 percent (June 2014) , and 71 percent (September 2014) . While yielding overall results similar to national polls , with a majority supporting the team keeping the name , local surveys often ask additional questions . In three polls , although they supported the team name , 59 percent , 56 percent , and 53 percent of DC , Maryland , and Virginia fans also said that the word " redskin " is offensive to Native Americans in at least some contexts . The September 2014 national poll found that 68 percent think the name is not disrespectful of Native Americans , 19 percent say it shows " some " disrespect , and 9 percent say it is " a lot " disrespectful . The 2016 annual NFL poll found significant difference of opinion based upon age and race . Older respondents are opposed to a name change , but those between 18 and 29 are strongly (70 %) in favor of a change . While 77 % of all white fans believe the name should not be changed , only 38 % of African @-@ American and 33 % of Latino fans agree , which is a change since the 2014 poll in which there was little difference between white and non @-@ white opinion .

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However , there are those that question the appropriateness of submitting minority rights to a majority decision . Louis Gray , president of the Tulsa Indian Coalition Against Racism and an Osage Indian : " You wouldn 't [take a poll] with any other race . You wouldn 't have African @-@ Americans vote to decide whether or not any sort of racial epithet would be offensive . "

The survey most frequently cited by opponents of change as definitive of Native American opinion was performed in 2004 as part of the National Annenberg Election Survey . Among other questions regarding election year issues , respondents who identified themselves as being Native American were asked : " The professional football team in Washington calls itself the Washington Redskins . As a Native American , do you find that name offensive or doesn 't it bother you ? " In response , ninety percent replied that the name did not bother them , while nine percent said that it was offensive , and one percent would not answer . The methods used in this survey and the conclusions that can be drawn from it has been criticized by social scientists , Native American scholars and legal experts for years . In August , 2015 , a memo written by senior researchers at the organization responsible for collecting the data for the survey which made it clear that it should not be taken as an accurate reflection of Native American attitudes at the time .

An alternative method to standard opinion polls was used by the Center for Indigenous Peoples Studies at California State University , San Bernardino . A survey was conducted of 400 individuals , with 98 individuals positively identified as Native Americans , finding that 67 % agreed with the statement that " Redskins " is offensive and racist . The response from non @-@ natives was almost the opposite , with 68 % responding that the name is not offensive .

= = = Washington Post 2016 poll = = =

In May 2016 , the Washington Post (WaPo) released a poll of self @-@ identified Native Americans that produced the same results as the 2004 Annenberg poll , that 90 % of the 504 respondents were " not bothered " by the team 's name .

= = = Differences between the Annenberg and WaPo poll = = =

The Annenberg poll was criticized for only using land lines at a time when they were rare on reservations , so 60 % of the respondents in the new poll were contacted on cell phones , based upon other surveys indicating that 95 % of Native Americans have at least one cell phone per household . When a land @-@ line was answered , there was a request that the youngest adult present respond to the questions ; for cell phones the individual answering the phone completed the survey .

The new survey included Alaska and Hawaii , which have large populations of indigenous people ; while the 2004 survey only included the contiguous 48 states .

Sample selection : The new survey was part of the routine WaPo opinion survey , in which all are asked ? Do you consider yourself white , black or African American , Asian , Native American , Pacific Islander , mixed race or some other race ? ? Only those that responded that they are 100 % Native American / Alaskan Native were then asked the questions about the Redskins . (However , 16 % of the sample identified themselves as Hispanic .) They were also asked if they are enrolled members of a tribe , and if so which one ; 44 % of the respondents said they were tribal members . In addition , zip codes containing a high proportion of tribal or reservation land was targeted . Due to the low percentage of Native Americans in the general population , responses were collected over a five month period , December 16 , 2015 to April 12 , 2016 .

New questions included :

Participants were asked if they had heard about the debate ; 56 % responded that they had heard "

not to much " or " not at all " . 78 % said the debate was either " not too " or " not at all " important .

80 % responded that they would not be personally offended if a Non @-@ Native American called them as a " Redskin " .

A smaller sample of 340 respondents was asked if the term " redskin " is disrespectful to Native Americans , with 73 % responding " No " .

51 % said they are pro football fans , while 48 % were not , a split similar to national polls of all adults .

= = = Methodology = = =

Due to variations between the characteristics of the sample and the population of Native Americans based upon Census data from 2010 , the reported results were based upon statistical weighting of the raw data . The respondents were older (274 of the 504 being over 50) , more highly educated (at least some college) , and more likely to live in the Northeast and North Central regions , compared to Native Americans in the Census . Criticism of the wording of the question " As a Native American , do you find that name offensive or doesn 't it bother you ? " as being confusing was addressed by asking the question again to 43 respondents to check that the same answer was given , which it was by 41 of the 43 . However , the problem critics have with the question is that it is unclear what is being asked given that " do you find the name offensive " is distinct from " or doesn 't it bother you " , the later also being awkwardly worded . Reports of the results by others , such as the Associated Press say Native Americans are " not offended " rather than " not bothered " .

= = = Response to WaPo poll = = =

Dr. Adrienne Keene responded that the poll uses faulty data and methods , such as the continuing problem of self @-@ identification , and the reporting of the results misses the point regarding objections to the name established by social science research and the authentic voices of Native Americans as being about real harms , not individual feelings . The Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) issued a statement calling the publication of the poll , and the reporting of its significance , as not only inaccurate and misleading but unethical . " The reporters and editors behind this story must have known that it would be used as justification for the continued use of these harmful , racist mascots . They were either willfully malicious or dangerously naïve in the process and reporting used in this story , and neither is acceptable from any journalistic institution . " While not addressing the NAJA criticism , the WaPo editorial board continues to maintained its prior position that the name is a slur and that they will avoid its use as much as possible . However , one WaPo editor and advocate for change , Robert McCartney , has decide to drop any further protest in light of the poll results . A Los Angeles Times editorial cites the evidence that the name is offensive to many , which the poll does not change given its questionable representation of Native American opinion .