At Issue: Controversial Mascots

The National Congress of American Indians initiated a campaign in the 1960s to eliminate the negative portrayal of Native Americans in the media and in sports organizations. In 2001, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights called for an end to the use of Native American images and team names by non-native schools. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) initiated a policy in 2005 that disallows a member school with Native American nicknames, mascots, or imagery from hosting NCAA championships. Although many changes have been made at the high school and college level, there are still numerous elementary, middle- and high schools using Native American nicknames and mascots. In addition, several professional teams still use these mascots and nicknames, including the Washington Redskins, Kansas City Chiefs, Cleveland Indians, and the Atlanta Braves. Those who oppose the use of these mascots and nicknames say that they are demeaning and that they promote negative stereotypes. Supporters of these mascots argue that they are a symbol of pride and are meant to honor Native Americans.

Pro/Con and Essential Question

Should schools and sports organizations ban the use of controversial mascots and nicknames?

Yes. Some mascots are racially insensitive and offensive.

- Redskins’ Name Should Be Changed, Top U.S. Civil Rights Coalition Says
- California School’s Arab Mascot Draws Ire

No. These mascots are symbols meant to honor a culture or a tradition.

- Amid Rising Discord Over Indian Images, F.S.U. Has Harmony
- "We'll Never Change It. It's That Simple. Never."
Perspectives

"They are particularly inappropriate and insensitive in light of the long history of forced assimilation that American Indian people have endured in this country. The use of stereotypical images of Native Americans by educational institutions has the potential to create a racially hostile educational environment that may be intimidating to Indian students...[They] teach all students that stereotyping of minority groups is acceptable, a dangerous lesson in a diverse society. Schools have a responsibility to educate their students; they should not use their influence to perpetuate misrepresentations of any culture or people." - U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Mascot Sensitivity

"Defenders of Native American names, logos, and mascots argue that their use is a tribute to the indigenous peoples. Native Americans, the argument goes, are portrayed as brave, resourceful, and strong. Native American names were chosen for sports teams precisely because they represent these positive traits. Other defenders claim that their use is no different from those names and mascots that represent other ethnic groups such as the "Irish," "Vikings," or "Norse." Because members of these ethnic groups accept the use of their names, Native Americans should also be proud of this recognition of their heritage, they maintain." - D. Stanley Eitzen, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Colorado State University

Critical Thinking & Analysis

1. Do you think sports organizations should regulate what names and mascots their teams use? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think some Native Americans are offended by the use of Indian names, symbols and mascots by sports teams?
3. Would you be upset if your favorite team had to change its name or mascot? Explain.

Additional Resources

- Research Guide for the Critical Thinker
- Writing a Mini-Research Paper
- Creating a Powerpoint Presentation
- Debate Guide
- Academic Writing Help
- SIRS Citation Guidelines

Related Articles

- Topic Overview: Sports
- ProQuest LLC 2014; 10K, SIRS Issues Researcher

Summary:

This article provides an overview of Controversial Mascots. Perspectives and analysis questions are also provided.

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