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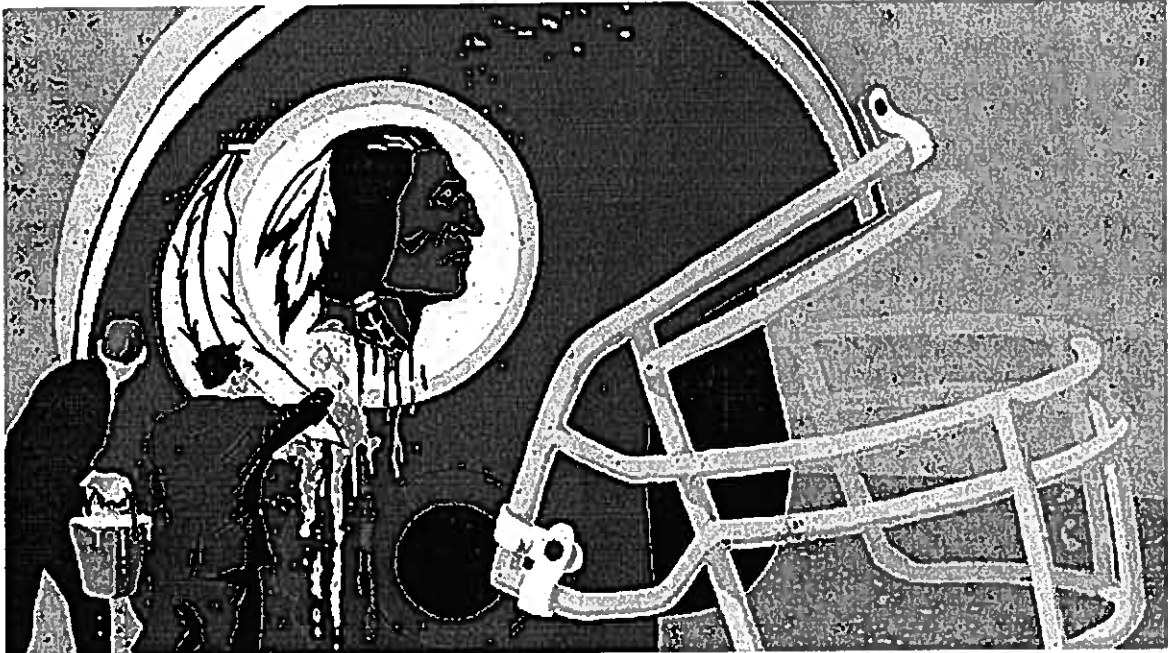
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Battle over nickname continues

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ESPN The Magazine

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Most agree that the name is offensive, yet Daniel Snyder refuses to act.

ALTHOUGH THIS COUNTRY was once wholly inhabited by Indians, the tribes ... have, one by one, been exterminated in their abortive attempts to stem the western march of civilization. ... It is presumed that humanity dictated the original policy of the removal and concentration of the Indians in the West to save them from threatened extinction. But today ... the Indian races are more seriously threatened with a speedy extermination than ever before in the history of the country. -- Donehogawa, the first Indian Commissioner of Indian Affairs, circa 1867.

Drive through New England. Or Oklahoma. Or New York. Don't think about the People, the Native American populations that first inhabited these places, because you know Donehogawa's prediction has come true. The People are largely gone. Replaced by statues.

Each June 19, African-Americans celebrate emancipation from slavery and the passage of the 14th Amendment in the enduring hope that full partnership in the American dream might still be possible. The People, however, have never celebrated the 14th Amendment. Native Americans were excluded from its language and its possibilities. Their history was one of war and justifications of war -- over land, for the sake of Western "progress," and to eradicate tribes despised and feared as savage.

This is the truth. This is the inescapable backdrop for a debate over the use of "Redskins" that continues to drag on, in the courts and in the court of public opinion, well beyond the point of reason or decency. Washington owner Daniel Snyder and NFL commissioner Roger Goodell continue to

ignore history when they say they are fighting the pressure to change the name "Redskins" because they honor the heritage of the Native people.

"The name was never a label," Snyder said in a letter to his team's fans in 2013. "It was, and continues to be, a badge of honor." Days before Super Bowl XLVIII, Goodell echoed the sentiment, saying the Redskins name is presented in a way that has "honored Native Americans."

There is no honor in the story, though. To this day, Native Americans are isolated, not honored. They were not granted U.S. citizenship until 1924, and the reservations remain a desolate landscape, woefully short on dignity and services. The United States Patent and Trademark Office recently abandoned protections of the name "Redskins" on the grounds that it is offensive. Yet Snyder fights. Linguist Geoffrey Nunberg testified in the trademark hearing that the name "Redskins" contains no honorable context. Yet Snyder holds on. Scores of remaining Native Americans say they are offended by the team name. And yet Snyder refuses to act.

Meanwhile, his unwillingness to change is implicitly sanctioned by Goodell's hesitancy to take a stand. Where the commissioner might take advantage of the naming issue to initiate new league policy and define new attitudes, he instead equivocates. And this parallels the inaction of a dulled, defeated contingent in the media that allows the conversation to center on the lie of honor without interrogating the premise. While some voices have begun to speak out against the name, too many are cowed by the power and influence of the NFL, and too many are comfortable in the prevalent attitude that Native Americans don't deserve a say.

Eliminate the People and replace them with statues. Through their obstinacy, Snyder and the NFL echo the spirit of the long-ago war and confirm that nothing has changed. In so many corners of the country, America attempts to undo the sins of its past. The use of epithets against African-Americans and the LGBT community is now routinely condemned. But the Native American, stuck on the side of a helmet, remains uninvited to this more just and accepting future.

In the same city, out of social responsibility, Abe Pollin changed the name of his basketball team from "Bullets" to "Wizards." Snyder feels no such impulse. Most galling is that he and, by extension, Goodell have not owned up to what they are actually saying: They believe the word "Redskins" belongs to them. It has tremendous financial value, and they -- and not the People who are labeled by it -- shall determine its meaning. Their claim is proof of what Donehogawa anticipated 150 years ago: All too often in America, the conquered are without rights.

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