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Redskins: Insult and Brand

C. Richard King

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The Washington Redskins franchise remains one of the most valuable in professional sports, in part because of its easily recognizable, popular, and profitable brand.

And yet “redskins” is a derogatory name for American Indians.

The number of grassroots campaigns to change the name has risen in recent years despite the current team owner’s assertion that the team will *never* do so. Franchise owners counter criticism by arguing that the team name is positive and a term of respect and honor that many American Indians embrace. The NFL, for its part, actively defends the name and supports it in court.

Prominent journalists, politicians, and former players have publicly spoken out against the use of “Redskins” as the name of the team. Sportscaster Bob Costas denounced the name as a racial slur during a halftime show in 2013. U.S. Representative Betty McCollum marched outside the stadium with other protesters—among them former Minnesota Vikings player Joey Browner—urging that the name be changed.

Redskins: Insult and Brand examines how the ongoing struggle over the team name raises important questions about how white Americans perceive American Indians, about the cultural power of consumer brands, and about continuing obstacles to inclusion and equality. C. Richard King examines the history of the team’s name, the evolution of the term “redskin,” and the various ways in which people both support and oppose its use today. King’s hard-hitting approach to the team’s logo and mascot exposes the disturbing history of a moniker’s association with the NFL—a multibillion-dollar entity that accepts public funds—as well as popular attitudes toward Native Americans today.

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