

**Redskins: Insult and Brand.** By C. Richard King. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. 226 pages. \$24.95 cloth and electronic.

C. Richard King, the nation's preeminent scholarly expert on the American Indian mascot controversy, has produced in *Redskins: Insult and Brand* the absolute high-water mark study of the contours surrounding the logics of contemporary mascotting. Continuing his work from the past two decades, King takes the next productive step toward demystifying the controversy by mapping the colonial terrain of mascotting practices in the service of suggesting new rhetorically inventive ways that public activists and interventionist scholars might decolonize the mascot milieu in their work on the ground and on the page, respectively. In this way, *Redskins: Insult and Brand* presents both a review of mascot contexts and an updated critical analysis of the Washington R-dskins case, as well as a primer for continuing the mascot conversation in our communities.

King's volume contains a number of highlights, but the *sine qua non* that punctuates the study lies in the way he frames the R-dskins controversy in terms of cultural depth. That is, while many of us in our past work have tracked the eristic, back-and-forth rhetoric of pro-mascotters and anti-mascotters, King scaffolds his analysis of the R-dskins moniker and the deleterious word *redskin* itself with the suggestion that we ought to do more. The issue, he argues, "is about dignity and respect, combatting anti-Indian racism while furthering self-determination and decolonization" (4). Therefore, King does not *merely* advocate for changing the name: stopping at that step, he intimates, smacks of a fleeting post-racialism. And as the subfield of decolonial American Indian studies has contended for quite some time, surface-level, singular changes in aspects like a mascot's name, visibility, and ritual does not solve centuries-old difficulties precipitated by colonialism.

Rather, for the cultural work to "be of lasting and meaningful importance," writes King, "it must be paired with deeper transformations, including education, coming to terms with the past, and expressing honor for indigenous people by honoring treaties made with native nations" (4-5). To that end, *Redskins: Insult and Brand* locates the mascot controversy in more foundational spaces of colonization, neocolonization, and decolonization—a move made by King that means and matters beyond the issue's positioning in a simple popular culture debate. King insists that, given the colonial contexts of mascotting in general and in the Washington R-dskins case particularly, we must make wholesale changes to the way that Native people are seen, understood, and respected in United States cultural politics. The Native mascot is a synecdoche of the need for such transformations; the Washington R-dskins' ethos is a specific emblem for it.

To get to that argument, King organizes *Redskins: Insult and Brand* around themes, all marked by powerful nouns like "Origins," "Use," "Erasure," "Sentiment," "Ownership," "Simulation," "Opinion," "Change," and "Ends." The book begins with origin stories of

the practice of mascotting, tracing the custom from the end of the Indian Wars and the *fin de siècle* alleviation of white fear of the Native to the revived obsession of “playing Indian” in the white imaginary for the purposes of balancing the so-called staidness of “civilized life” with the savage. The book then recalls the Washington Redskins story from its generative days as a fledgling franchise to its ascendancy as a multiple-time winner of the Super Bowl championship. Woven through the team’s history is a contextual thread of typical neocolonial mechanisms such as white possession and commodification of Native symbols and corporeality, as well as the way paternalism functions as a logic of control. Next, King narrativizes how Native identities have been impacted by Washington’s mascot culture, especially through anti-Indian racism and justificatory attitudes on the part of (mostly) white folks when it comes to retrenching their positions as pro-mascotters. Attention then turns to the decolonial, as King tells the stories of early anti-mascot pathfinders like Suzan Shown Harjo and those in the American Indian Movement and the National Congress of American Indians. This portion culminates with an acclamatory account of contemporary efforts to challenge the Washington Redskins’ use of the textual, visual, and performative by Blackhorse, et al. and Change the Mascot. The entire book recounts a gripping story, one underscored by smartly crafted context, an engaging writing style that is at once sophisticated and readable, and a clear passion on the part of the author.

King’s sound claims against the mascot ought to be lauded here; his use of rhetorical analysis is a tremendous highlight. While a number of mascot studies argue from scant textual evidence, King has painstakingly gathered primary discourse from pro-mascotters and anti-mascotters, Natives and non-Natives, franchise leadership and sports media activists. For those interested in lived experience, King’s account more than satiates the need to see real peoples’ agency enacted. These smart claims paired with solid discursive proof make *Redskins: Insult and Brand* not just comprehensive in its use of on-the-ground evidence, but rigorous in its commitment to accentuating voice. Indeed, the book is impressive in the way it gently tells a story of the Native mascot and the *redskin* name, while also interspersing King’s own argument against the mascot. His interventionism comes across as rhetorically sensible and culturally sensitive. His approach and tone represent the best of what the critical humanities can be: evenhanded, while equally critical in a transparent way.

Interestingly, King does not just deconstruct mascotting logics but also reconstructs them by posing solutions to writing back and talking back. To the question of “what now?” King answers by offering prescriptives for decolonizing the mascot controversy. He asks us to animate reflexivity to see past the mascot debate’s *argumentum ex concensis* tenor and to read deeper into colonial structures and anti-Indian racism. He suggests ways that we could honor Native people by alternate means and proposes ways for our public educational system to pluralistically merge Native narratives into classrooms. And he presents strategies for keeping the mascot conversation alive in our “everyday talk.”

King is to be applauded for a volume that reenergizes commitments to antiracist projects involving the mascot controversy. Scholars of American Indian studies, history, rhetorical and communication studies, political science, and sociology will find utility and inspiration in these pages. But the larger public would also fare well by accessing *Redskins: Insult and Brand*, including those in educational reform, public policy, and law. Pro-mascotters should examine King's arguments for a responsible case against the mascot, while those "on the fence" too might need to experience the discursive evidence in order to confirm their suspicions of the Native mascot in general, and the *redskins* metonym in particular. Finally, for those activists in the streets, at the ballparks and stadiums, and gathered in circles of solidarity, King's book is a veritable playbook—though we know that the mascot and its milieu are more than just a "game."

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