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*Redskins: Insult and Brand* by C. Richard King University of Nebraska, 2016



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IN MAY 2016, the *Washington Post* published the results of a poll in which 90 percent of "Native Americans" surveyed were not offended by "Redskins," the name of the Washington, D.C., professional football team. Self-identification as a Native person—not as a confirmed citizen of a particular Indigenous nation—was all the *Post* required of respondents to validate identity. Defenders of the name, the vast majority of whom are white people (including the team owner, Dan Snyder), welcomed these results as confirming their view that the name was of concern only to politically correct white liberals, not Indigenous people. The poll and response to it reflects a deeper dynamic in the history of the Washington team name, for as C. Richard King states in his excellent book *Redskins: Insult and Brand*, "Too often, Native American opinion matters only because of how whites use it. It cannot be heard in its original voice, terms, or context" (142). As with the team name, the *Post* poll is a form of white appropriation and construction of Indigeneity produced for the consumption of, primarily, white Americans, with little to no regard for Indigenous people's "voice, terms, or context." This is U.S. settler-colonialism in practice, in which Americans "absorb indigeneity, laying claim to indigenous people's rightful inheritance while lamenting nostalgically their passing" (24). To underscore the deeper imperative here, King builds on Patrick Wolfe's concept of "the logic of elimination," according to which "indigenous people must be disappeared" for Americans to establish and justify their claim to and sense of belonging on dispossessed Indigenous territory (51).

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The appropriation of Indigenous land, absorption of identity, and efforts to make Indigenous people disappear are intertwined elements of settler-colonialism. This is why the political struggle over the Washington football team matters, and why King's book is a must-read for anyone interested in this issue and how settler-colonialism functions in relationship to it. After the introduction, King covers much of what one must know about this topic. He begins with the "Origins" and "Uses" (chapters 2 and 3) of the name, then turns to the "Erasure" of Indigenous voices (chapter 4), the "Sentiment" settlers invest in the name (chapter 5), the importance of the "Black/White" racial dynamic (chapter 6), the role of "Ownership" in many forms (chapter 7), the "Simulation" of Indigenous support for the name, and the problematic function of "Opinion" (chapters 8 and 9). King closes by considering what **[End Page 114]** "Change" might look like in this case and the "Ends" that could be served by such change (chapters 10 and 11).

The book's most impressive element is the well-sourced historical narrative and the emphasis on detailing the multiple actors and institutions implicated in the Washington team name and the political struggle over it, with a strong account of the different forms of Indigenous resistance going back decades. As well, King provides worthy theoretical insights, as exemplified in the "Sentiment" chapter in which he argues that the "affective attachment" people have in the team name as a "mnemonic device" dissociates fans from their relationship to racism and colonialism in our time (66–67), and in the chapter on "Ownership" where he persuasively asserts the importance of understanding how "empire and exploitation, capital and conquest form the unspoken and unexamined foundations of racialized entitlement" (96). King thus deftly accounts for the fact that the psychic-libidinal and political economies of racism and settler-colonialism are simultaneously at work in the Washington team name case. At times, King does turn to more liberal, rather than radical, political approaches for addressing this

issue, such as recommending greater "critical literacy" education to counter the incapacity of white Americans to think about or remember the history of erasure, violence, and appropriation against Indigenous people (54–57). These recommendations run into slight conflict with the fact that King's study shows that education and remembering can only go so far, as the power of white settler disavowal—to have knowledge but not acknowledge its political implications—often overwhelms the best efforts of educators. More knowledge does not necessarily liberate, but it can provide important resources for political efforts and argument. In this regard, King's book offers a basis for an anticolonial politics that confronts white settler psychic and economic investments in disappearing and dispossessed Indigeneity, as reflected and reproduced in the Washington team name. For this and many other reasons, *Redskins: Insult and Brand* is a vital work that will make a significant impact on our grasp of and debate over this issue. **[End Page 115]**

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