

R*dskins: Insult and Brand

By C. Richard King. University of Nebraska Press, 2016, Lincoln, NE.

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C. Richard King has been *the* most prolific author writing on the topic of Native American sport nicknames/logos, which essentially consist of stereotypes of Native Americans created and maintained by white people. Working from what may be labeled a cultural studies perspective, King has previously investigated and brought critical analysis to bear on numerous cases of these nicknames/logos. In this new book, King focuses on the Washington DC National Football League (NFL) franchise, the R*dskins.

King has been consistently and thoroughly attentive to the wide array of media reports, past and present, related to the DC nickname controversy, as evidenced in the great detail he delivers—from what seems like every possible angle—on this controversy. He starts with origin stories, about both the term r*edskins and the team nickname, and then he takes us right up to almost present day. In fact, there are so many details in this book and so many quotations from media reports that at times I felt like I was reading a series of original media reports. King weaves in analysis as he presents the details. Most of this analysis is not new, but rather has appeared in King's prior publications, as well as those of other nickname/logo scholars, including myself.

I believe this particular book is especially valuable on two fronts. First, the DC NFL franchise is the most well-known case of Native nickname racism and thus has rightly been a primary focus for activists. So, a book on this case is definitely necessary and long overdue. Second, the book is written in a way that makes it accessible to not just scholars but also to the educated public. Thus, the book has the potential to educate people outside of the academy on many of the issues associated with Native sport nicknames/logos.

King covers numerous important topics in this book. He examines the creation, modification and maintenance of the nickname/logo brand. He describes Native American activism that has been focused on the DC franchise over the past half century. He discusses how white power and privilege enable control over popular culture portrayals of Native Americans, including the DC franchise, as well as how white power is utilized to ignore and erase Native criticisms of this portrayal. King's exploration of the DC franchise use of Native people—both dead and alive, and often illusory—to justify the continuance of the nickname is especially informative. And importantly, King situates all of his analysis in the context of historical and present day oppression experienced by Native Americans.

One especially significant topic covered in this book is the positive emotions fans associate with the nickname/logo/franchise. King rightly argues that these emotions are one barrier to rational understanding of the racism underlying the DC nickname/logo and other Native nicknames/logos. Relatedly, I appreciate King's emphasis on how most people in the United States are largely uninformed about historical and present day Native American realities, and that this ignorance is central to the context that enables the creation, maintenance, and support of Native sport nicknames/logos. King also discusses a general incapacity among whites in the U.S. to understand racism beyond hateful, intentional, individual discrimination (e.g., they lack an understanding of structural inequality), as well as the more general inability to engage in critical analysis, due to lack of prior socialization in this regard. Commenting on the limited capacity to understand problems associated with Native American sport nicknames/logos, King asserts:

Native American mascots and other stereotypes persist because most Americans remain thoughtless, lacking the resources, knowledge, and skills to think critically about them. Most Americans have not received adequate historical instruction nor had exposure to indigenous peoples and perspectives as living, vital, and valuable; they have not, moreover, cultivated toolkits that enable them to unpack the construction and circulation of images and texts. (p. 169)

King also emphasizes that this position of ignorance is enabled by privilege and is accompanied by an unwillingness to listen to and hear others, in this case Native activists.

The organization of this book is not among its strong points. If better organized, the material and analysis in the book would likely seem less repetitive, and readers would come away with greater understanding of each analytical theme. Also, the text would be enhanced by inclusion of a short and simple discussion of the methodology King used to collect and analyze the material discussed, as there is no discussion of methods in the book.

At the end of the book, King discusses his hopes and recommendations for the future, including elimination of the DC franchise nickname, which, regardless of its origins, is a "living slur" (p. 17) that "sport [has] kept... alive" (p. 20). Like King, I too am hopeful for continued progress in regard to eliminating Native sport nicknames/

logos. And like King, I worry that the DC franchise will eliminate the r*dskins slur and yet retain other stereotypes of Native Americans. Yet as King and some other scholars of these nicknames/logos are aware, when whites eliminate these nicknames/logos they do not usually do so because they have achieved greater understanding of Native American history and present day realities. Rather, they usually do so because those with more power tell them they need to do so, or because they do not want to offend others and do not want to be perceived as insensitive. Given the lack of power Native people have in U.S. society to control or have much impact on school and media content at the macro level, I do not anticipate much

enhanced understanding in the near future. Despite this, it is incredibly important to rid U.S. popular culture of stereotypes of Native people, because these stereotypes directly and indirectly have negative effects on contemporary Native lives. King would agree that eliminating these stereotypes is a start, but we also need to generate and support non-stereotypical and diverse portrayals of Native people in U.S. popular culture.

It is my recommendation that sport administrators, as well as sport fans and other citizens, read this book. Doing so will help them understand the multitude of problems associated with Native American sport nicknames and logos.