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Shakley begins his argument with a personal anecdote. How does the use of personal experience help focus his argument? For more on using personal experience as evidence, see Chapter 17.

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Indian Mascots—You’re Out!

JACK SHAKLEY

Removing Native American names and mascots from college and professional teams is the right thing to do.

I got my first lesson in Indians portrayed as sports team mascots in the early 1950s when my father took me to a Cleveland Indians–New York Yankees game. Dad gave me money to buy a baseball cap, and I was conflicted. I loved the Yankees, primarily because fellow Oklahoman Mickey Mantle had just come up and was being touted as rookie of the year. But being mixed-blood Muscogee/Creek,¹ I felt a (misplaced) loyalty to the

Indians. So I bought the Cleveland cap with the famous Chief Wahoo logo on it.

When we got back to Oklahoma, my mother took one look at the cap with its leering, big-nosed, buck-toothed redskin caricature just above the brim, jerked it off my head and threw it in the trash. She had been fighting against Indian stereotypes all her life, and I had just worn one home. I was only 10 years old, but the look of betrayal in my Creek mother’s eyes is seared in my memory forever.

So maybe I shouldn’t have been surprised when half a century later, a *Los Angeles Times* editorial about legislators in North Dakota struggling

over whether the University of North Dakota should be forced to change its team name and mascot from the Fighting Sioux provoked such a strong reaction. It was an irritant, like a long-forgotten piece of shrapnel² working its way to the surface.

Most stories about sports teams and their ethnic mascots are treated like tempests in a teacup. The *Times*’ editorial writer, however, while noting that the solons³ probably had better things to do, understood the sensitivity and pain that can accompany such a seemingly trivial subject. It is a small matter, perhaps, but far from trivial.

Many of the fights over team names and mascots cover familiar territory. 5



Respect or racism?

Usually the team name in question has been around so long as to lose a good bit of its meaning. The University of Illinois' Fighting Illini, for example, refers to an Indian nation, but now that its Chief Illiniwek mascot has been abandoned, few people make the connection. Nor do they think twice about what the Atlanta Braves or Edmonton

Eskimos or Florida State Seminoles represent other than sports franchises. But that doesn't necessarily make the brands benign. And the irony that the football team in our nation's capital is called the Redskins is not lost on a single Native American.

The controversy over changing ethnocentric^o mascot names is not a simple matter of stodgy white alums holding onto college memories. Indians, too, are conflicted. In a 2002 study on the subject, *Sports Illustrated* reported that 84% of Native Americans polled had no problem with Indian team names or mascots. Although the methods used by the magazine to reach these figures were later criticized, that misses the point. If 16% of a population finds something offensive, that should be enough to signal deep concern. There are many things in this country that are subject to majority rule; dignity and respect are not among them.

And it is dignity and respect we are talking about. Since the creation of the National Coalition on Racism in



What does the word savages connote for you?

Sports and Media in 1991, that group of Native American organizations has been protesting negative portrayals of Indians, hammering away at what's behind our discomfort with Indian

Muscogee/Creek: a Native American tribe originally from the Southern part of the United States.

shrapnel: here, fragments from an exploding shell or grenade that penetrate a soldier's or civilian's skin and flesh during wartime. Shrapnel wounds are often fatal or severely debilitating. In cases where the wounded individual survives, the fragments sometimes cannot be surgically removed and remain inside the body.

solon: legislator; as used in the United States today, the word often carries at least some negative connotations. Historically, Solon was an ancient Athenian statesman and reformer whose work helped create the conditions that gave rise to democracy in Athens.

ethnocentric: assuming the superiority of a single ethnic group, generally one's own, and seeing the world from that perspective.

sports mascots. Many of these mascots—maybe most of them—act like fools or savage cutthroats.

When I went to an Atlanta Braves game in the 1970s, the Braves name wasn't the biggest problem. It was that cringe-worthy Chief Noc-A-Homa who came stomping and war-dancing his way out of a tepee in center field every time the Braves hit a home run that got to me. He was dressed in a Plains Indian chief's eagle bonnet and acted like a village idiot. To their credit, the Braves retired Chief Noc-A-Homa and his girlfriend Princess Win-A-Lot in 1983, amid assertions by the Braves' home office that the protesters were over-dramatizing the issue.

Few people complain about Florida State University calling itself the Seminoles. But its war-painted and lance-threatening mascot Chief Osceola is intended to be menacing, and that's the take-away many children will have. Such casual stereotyping can breed callousness. In the "only good Indian" category, in 1999 the *New York Post* entitled an editorial about the pending New York-Cleveland baseball playoffs, "Take the Tribe and Scalp 'Em."

It isn't easy or inexpensive to 10 remove ethnic and racial stereotypes from college and professional sports. When Stanford University changed from the Indians to the Cardinal in

1972, recriminations were bitter. Richard Lyman, a friend of mine, was president of Stanford at the time. He said the university lost millions of alumni dollars in the short run, but it was the right thing to do.

In 21st century America, to name a sports team after an African American, Asian or any other ethnic group is unthinkable. So why are Native Americans still fair game? As benign as monikers like Fighting Sioux and Redskins or mascots like Chief Osceola may seem, they should take their place with the Pekin, Ill., Chinks® and the Atlanta Black Crackers® in the dust bin of history. It is the right thing to do.

Pekin Chinks: name of the high school sports teams in Pekin, IL, from 1930 until 1980, when the teams became the Dragons. The school mascots were a male and female student dressed in traditional Chinese attire; the origin of the mascots was the similarity between the town's name and the name *Peking*, the earlier English spelling of Beijing, the capital of China. Chinese Americans had sought a name change as early as 1975, but the change occurred only in 1980 despite protests.

Atlanta Black Crackers: a professional African American baseball team that existed from 1919 until 1952, five years after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball.

RESPOND •

1. What argument is Shakley making about stereotypes in the media and popular culture? What sorts of claims does he make to support his position? What concessions does he make to those who might disagree with him? (See paragraphs 5, 6, and 11 in particular.) How does he use these concessions to strengthen his own position?
2. What kinds of evidence does Shakley use to support his argument? How effective are his historical examples? In other words, what response did you have when you read about the Braves' mascots of the 1970s, for example, or the two examples cited in the final paragraph? Why might Shakley have chosen these examples? How do they represent pathetic appeals? (See Chapter 2 for a discussion of pathos and pathetic appeals.)
3. The case of the Florida Seminoles is an interesting one because Florida State University (FSU) and the Seminole Tribe of Florida have reached an agreement, albeit a controversial one, that permits FSU to continue using their mascot, Chief Osceola, and the team name, the Seminoles. They were prompted to do so following a 2005 ruling by the National Collegiate Athletic Association outlawing "mascots, nicknames, or images deemed hostile or abusive in terms of race, ethnicity, or national origin." Investigate this specific case to find out about the details of the agreement and debates surrounding it. (One resource is "Bonding over a Mascot," by Joe Lapointe, which appeared in the *New York Times* in December 2006, <http://nyti.ms/Okvsow>. As you read that article, pay careful attention to the ways in which stereotypes are themselves part of the terms of the agreement.) Based on what you learn, be prepared to discuss how Shakley would likely critique the Seminole Tribe's agreement with FSU beyond what he says in this essay.
4. Shakley refers to the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and Media (NCRSM), an American Indian organization formed in 1991. Visit the organization's Web site, <http://bit.ly/7wrjxg>, to learn more about this organization and its efforts to fight what it sees as negative stereotyping. In what ways does NCRSM seek to fight the common argument by supporters of the status quo, that is, that Native American mascots, nicknames, and images are used to honor American Indians and their culture and should be taken as compliments rather than as insults?

5. In concluding his essay, Shakley asks, “So why are Native Americans still fair game?” (His choice of metaphors here is surely not accidental: he is arguing, of course, that American culture is treating Native Americans as prey much as the American government and white settlers did during the nineteenth century in particular.) **Write an essay** in which you seek to respond to Shakley’s question. As he notes, we cannot imagine naming a sports team after some other ethnic group or keeping such a name at this point in the history of American culture. Why should Native Americans be an exception? Depending on the way you approach this assignment, you may find yourself creating an argument that focuses largely on issues of definition or evaluation or a causal argument. (See Chapters 9, 10, and 11, respectively, for information on these three categories of argument.) Note that this assignment does not require that you state your own position with respect to this topic; however, you may wish to do so if doing so would be helpful to you.