

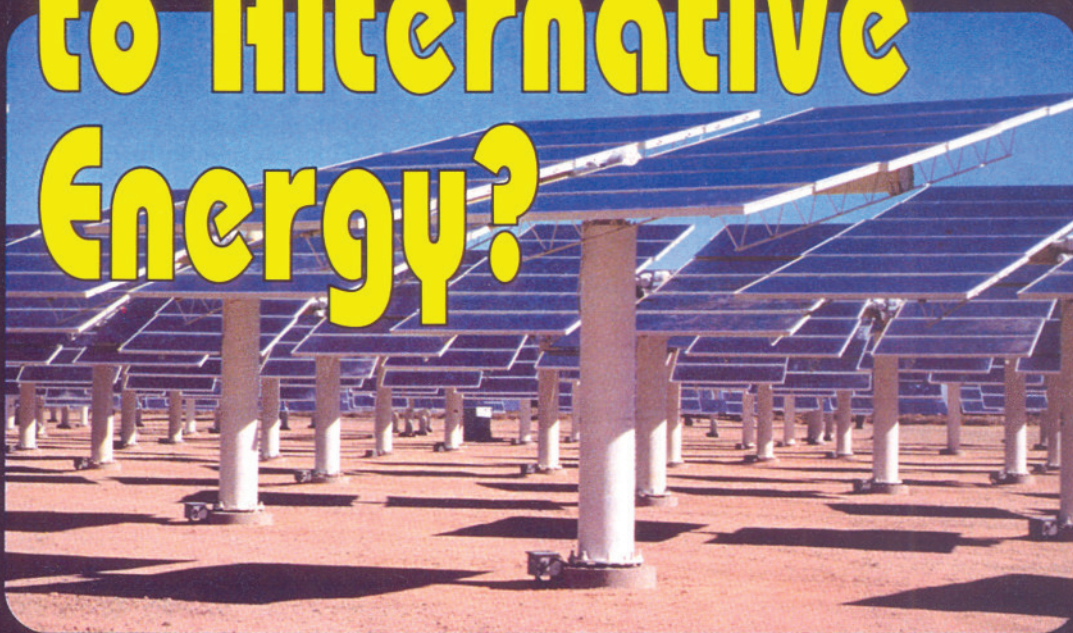
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Dolph L. Hatfield

The Stereotyping of Native Americans

Names, images, and mascots that symbolize native Americans are used extensively in the United States, particularly in sports and advertising. In sports there are the Washington Redskins football team, the Atlanta Braves and Cleveland Indians baseball teams, and the Chicago Blackhawks hockey team. Fans of the Atlanta Braves use the "tomahawk chop" accompanied by a chant to intimidate visiting teams, while the Cleveland Indians use the mascot Chief Wahoo and the University of Illinois uses the mascot Chief Illiniwek.

In advertising, Chief Crazy Horse appears on cans of malt liquor, a "red-man" lends his heritage to packs of chewing tobacco, and a native American princess sells cartons of butter. Even the Department of Agriculture's Soil and Water Conservation Society uses the image of a native American on its posters. This is by no means a complete list of such uses, but these examples serve to illustrate how freely this minority is symbolized in society.

As a non-native American who believes this kind of symbolization is a blatant form of discrimination, I have been asked by friends and colleagues, "Why focus on issues of stereotyping native Americans and not on the more life-threatening hardships this minority faces, such as unemployment, suicide, and alcoholism, which occur at rates higher than any other group or minority?" When the article "Violence Hits American Indians at Highest Rate Among Ethnic Groups" appeared in the local newspaper I was asked, "Would it not be more constructive to put your efforts into bringing attention to the violence that confronts native Americans instead of worrying about 'a little name calling'?"

In addition, I am often reminded that there are numerous native Americans, including tribal chiefs, who don't

feel that the use of native American images and names in sports and advertising is discriminatory, racial stereotyping. As a result I am asked, "Aren't you, a non-native American, trying to tell this minority how it should feel?"

These are tough questions. However, they must be answered in order to justify putting effort into trying to raise the level of awareness about acts of discrimination that affect this minority instead of issues that are more life-threatening.

It first must be established that the symbolization of native Americans in sports and advertising is discriminatory. Names such as Indians, Chiefs, Warriors, Blackhawks, Braves, Seminoles, Cherokee, Navajo, Apache, Winnebago, and Chief Crazy Horse are not, in and of themselves, offensive. How then does their use constitute racial stereotyping?

The easiest way to demonstrate this is to ask whether symbolizing any other minority in the same or in a similar manner would be acceptable. Certainly blacks, African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Mexican Americans, Jews, and Martin Luther King Jr. are comparable names, but Brownman Chewing Tobacco or Martin Luther King Jr. Malt Liquor would never be tolerated. Likewise, although Jeep Cherokee and the Apache helicopter are freely used in society, there would never be a Jeep African, Jeep Mexican, Oriental helicopter, or Jew helicopter.

In fact, society would be outraged by any attempt to replace current native American names, images, and mascots with equivalents referring to another minority. Looking at the symbolization of native Americans in this manner demonstrates racial bias.

Moreover, while some native Americans have been silent on issues of stereotyping, many others have expressed their disgust. And, historically,

the affected parties have been the ones to decide what constitutes acts of discrimination, as they are best qualified to know what is offensive.

So, since many native Americans are outraged about the symbolization of native Americans in sports and advertising, and since society would not tolerate equivalent symbols of other minorities, it is clear that native Americans are discriminated against—regardless of how others may feel about the matter—and that their civil rights are violated by such racial discrimination.


These are important reasons for eradicating the use of native American names in sports, advertising, and elsewhere. But do they justify placing less emphasis on other life-threatening issues? History has taught us that asking society to change its attitude is easier than asking for a financial commitment. However, once injustices are recognized, the United States is one of the leading countries in honoring the civil rights of minorities and other groups. Thus, drawing attention to racial discrimination of native Americans in sports and advertising is more likely to achieve results at this point in time than asking for the resources to eliminate poverty or unemployment in native American communities.

Prior to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, for example, African Americans faced a combination of hardships resulting from civil rights violations (such as unequal access to public facilities and unequal voters' rights) and social impasses (such as high poverty and high unemployment). Society had to recognize the inequity of the situation before it would feel compelled to correct it. It was the nonviolent demonstrations of African American leaders against civil rights violations that prompted Congress to enact Great Society solutions to ensure equal access

and equal employment opportunities.

One important consequence of the civil rights movement was the immensely enhanced dignity of African Americans. Similarly, the dignity and self-esteem of native Americans would most certainly be improved if the use of stereotyped names, images, and mascots ceased.

Suzan Shown Harjo, president of the Morning Star Institute, has said that "calling Indians 'redskins' is a self-esteem issue, which is exactly what is at stake in a community where the suicide and alcohol rates are so high." She directly links discrimination to higher incidences of alcoholism and suicide. Cornel Pewewardy, assistant professor of education at Kansas University has written extensively about the stereotyping of native Americans and the adverse impact this form of discrimination has on self-esteem, particularly for native American youth. Such evidence clearly shows that the many acts of stereotyping are major contributing factors to more life-threatening hardships.

Native Americans are one of the last minorities in the United States that are openly, safely, and freely stereotyped. We must act now to eradicate this type of racial discrimination. 

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HUMANIST LIVING

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■ Americans United for Separation of Church and State reports that Kansas Republicans went to the polls on August 1, 2000, and rejected two Board of Education members who voted last summer to remove evolution from the state science curriculum. According to AU officials, this sends "a clear and **stinging rebuke to the religious right**" and demonstrates that "Kansas voters . . . don't want a bunch of religious extremists monkeying around with the science curriculum."

■ On Monday, July 17, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly defeated an amendment that would have barred the Federal Drug Administration from testing, developing, or approving **RU-486**. Mifepristone, the abortion-producing pill, is now in the final stages of approval, and the American Humanist Association has joined the Feminist Majority Foundation and other organizations in urging the FDA to see that RU-486 is "expeditiously approved without unnecessarily limiting restrictions that interfere with women's health care, the practice of medicine, and life-saving scientific research."

■ **Anti-gay referenda** will be on the ballot in four states this November. In Oregon, voters face a proposal that would allow public schools to teach material that disparages people on the basis of their sexual orientation. In Michigan, four communities will vote on a referendum that would repeal or prohibit civil rights laws based on sexual orientation, while a fifth community faces an effort to repeal domestic partner benefits for gay public employees. In Nebraska, voters will consider a measure that would prohibit any recognition of same-sex partnerships, ranging from marriage to domestic partner benefits. And in Nevada, a proposed referendum would ban *all* same-sex marriages. (The state already bans same-sex marriages performed *within* the state.)

Only one state, Maine, has a **pro-gay measure** on the ballot. If passed, the state's civil rights would be extended to include sexual orientation.

■ June 10, 2000, was officially proclaimed **Jesus Day** in Texas thanks to a proclamation issued by Governor George W. Bush. In so doing, the presidential aspirant violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment.

■ The 2000 platform of the Texas Republican Party outlines some pretty scary proposals. **Dismantling church-state separation**, it requests the reinstatement of a chapel in the state capitol, encourages the state legislature to increase participation of faith-based institutions, and pledges to dispel "the myth" of church-state separation. **Promoting homophobia**, the party opposes the decriminalization of sodomy and the granting of special legal entitlements (domestic partner benefits, retirement benefits, custody of children, and marriage) to same-sex couples. **Affirming its pro-life stance**, the party endorses an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would extend Fourteenth Amendment protections to fetuses, urges the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, supports the appointment and election of pro-life judges, and opposes the use of public funds and facilities for abortion services. **Anti-humanist party rhetoric** argues that the "religion of secular Humanism" is being taught in public schools through the inclusion of evolution in science curriculum. Therefore the party calls for Bibles and other religious materials to be returned to schools and libraries and for "creation-science" to be taught. **Promoting U.S. isolationism**, the party supports House Resolution 1146 and argues that it's in the best interest of U.S. citizens to rescind U.S. membership in, and all financial and military support of, the United Nations. The party further demands that Congress ratify no treaty that compromises the sovereignty of U.S. policy or conflicts with the U.S. Constitution, opposes any payment of the U.S. debt to the UN, and urges the removal of the UN flag and emblem from all public and government facilities. 