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"Indians," "Braves," and "Redskins":  
A Performative Struggle for Control of an Image

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Abstract

Native American groups across the country have been protesting the use of their symbols and heritage in sports arenas for over a decade. Yet, particularly in the realm of professional sports, these protests have not generated significant changes in attitudes and practices. This critical essay examines several Native American protest events to reveal the factors contributing to the failure of the reform movement and to suggest some strategies for rhetorically reformulating the campaign.

Suggested keywords: Native American, performance, protest and reform rhetoric, sports culture, dialectic.

Fans who attended games at the 1995 World Series of baseball in Atlanta were confronted with a striking image on a billboard across from Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium. Macon Morehouse explains that this billboard depicted "a peace pipe broken in half by a 3-dimensional tomahawk" accompanied by a slogan reading "THERE WILL BE NO PEACE-PIPE SMOKING IN ATLANTA. INDIANS BEWARE" ("Indian"). Fans by the thousands marched by this billboard daily, on their way into the ballpark to watch their "Braves" take on the visiting Cleveland "Indians." For the fans, the billboard was nothing more than a comment on the competitive spirit of their hometown team. For the groups of Native American protesters who gathered outside the stadium during each game, however, the billboard served as a poignant reminder of how readily mainstream American culture appropriates and romanticizes their heritage and symbols.<sup>i</sup> While the "Indians beware" message on the billboard was purportedly directed at the baseball team from Cleveland, it just as easily could have been directed at the Native American protesters. The sports industry in the United States has been both unresponsive to the objections raised by Native Americans and hostile toward their allegations of racism.

Over the past several years, with the successes of teams like the "Braves" and "Indians" in professional baseball, as well as the "Chiefs" and the "Redskins" in professional football, Native American protests have increased in frequency and intensity. The objections raised by Native Americans have been taken to heart by some collegiate teams, but sports teams on all levels from high school to professional athletics persist in

their use of Native American names and symbols. Richard Lapchick notes that currently, in the United States, "forty-six colleges and universities and five professional teams use Native American names and symbols" (76).<sup>ii</sup> In a culture that has become increasingly sensitive to discrimination based on race, why does the use of these insensitive and degrading symbols continue with no apparent end in sight?

In this essay, I address the above question by focusing on three concepts which are central to this debate: culture, identity, and performance. Performance studies scholars have long recognized the interconnectedness of these three concepts. According to Elizabeth Fine and Jean Haskell Speer, the study of performance is "a critical way for grasping how persons choose to present themselves, how they construct their identity, and, ultimately, how they embody, reflect, and construct their culture" (10). As my discussion of several Native American protests will illustrate, "culture" and "identity" are what is at stake in this conflict, and "performance" is simultaneously a source of conflict and a means by which protesters and fans have shared their opinions. The Native American protests are rhetorical performances, created for the purpose of critiquing the performance behaviors of sports fans while attempting to change the rhetoric of sports culture.

The focus on "performance" is appropriate for examining these protest events because the Native Americans are concerned primarily with how sports fans perform "Indian."<sup>iii</sup> While the names and symbols that sports teams adopt are upsetting to many

protesters, the primary concern is how those symbols get used or embodied. Tim Giago, a leader of the protest movement, explains: "It's not so much the fact that a team is named after a race of people or the color of that people's skin"; instead, what protesters find offensive are "the sham rituals and ridiculous impersonations that become a part of those rituals" (qtd. in Lipman). Bob Roach, a Lakota Sioux activist, echoes this concern when he states, "We're upset with the antics of the fans, the ridiculous costumes and antics supposedly copying Native Americans" (qtd. in Montgomery). The protests can be viewed as a performative struggle for identity because they constitute an attempt to reclaim or recapture popular notions of what it means to be Native American.<sup>iv</sup> Clyde Bellecourt, executive director of the American Indian Movement and one of the protest leaders, says that the protests are about "trying to convince people we're human beings and not mascots" (qtd. in Wilkerson).

I contend that the Native American concerns have been rejected largely because the stereotypical views of how one performs Indian in mainstream American culture closely parallel the cultural rules about how one performs "sports fan." Specifically, fans, owners, and other individuals affiliated with teams that use Native American symbols and mascots are resistant to change because, in their minds, to embody the persona of the ideal sports fan (i.e. wild, chanting, uncontrolled, loyal to the group) is akin to embodying the role of Indian. Accordingly, I explore the relationship between "sports fan" and "Indian" by first, outlining three "dialectics" of modern sports culture,

then describing several protest events, and finally analyzing the arguments and counter-arguments presented by Native American protesters and sports fans.

In addition to revealing how the "rules" of the sports culture blind fans to the possibility of recognizing their actions as derogatory, this essay also shows the limits of rhetoric and public performance in a complex, pluralistic society. With a number of competing voices and power centers, there are many conflicts that cannot be solved. However, these disputes can be managed at a level where open conflict does not break out and public discussion, however strident, can continue. In a postmodern communicative environment, this is no small achievement.

### Sport as Cultural Performance

For sporting events, just as for plays, purposeful, directed, and structured activity is enhanced with props and performed with the end of providing a gratifying experience for participants and spectators alike. (Raitz vii)

Most fans, owners, and athletes recognize professional sports as popular entertainment. Indeed, few people would dispute the notion that sports mirror the values and beliefs of the dominant culture. The role which sporting events play in shaping cultural values, however, is typically downplayed or ignored.<sup>v</sup> Viewing sports as cultural performances, as I am suggesting here, means acknowledging the power of sporting events to create culturally shared beliefs and values.<sup>vi</sup> This

perspective on sports is by no means an unfamiliar idea; Michael Novak, Allen Guttman, Stephen Figler, and others have noted the role which sporting events play in creating culture on both psychological and sociological levels.

What I hope to contribute to this discussion is a framework for describing how the cultural values of sports are shared, presented in the form of three dialectics: ritual/play, equality/disparity, and insider/outsider. These dialectics are "descriptive" because they,

refer to a kind of explanation built upon an appeal to a "deep" (and perhaps hidden) structure as accounting for the surface appearance. It is a "hermeneutic" description built upon dialectical thought so that the deep structure is characterized by contradictions.

(Grossberg 240)

There are many different contexts in which tensions arise among these particular dialectics; yet, I contend that major sports events are unique in the extent to which these tensions are emphasized through visceral, embodied performance acts. As I explicate each dialectic in the following paragraphs, this performative tension should become evident.

The dialectical tension between "ritual" and "play," where "play" is taken to mean "make believe" and "ritual" is taken to mean "making belief," is present, to some extent, in all performance events.<sup>vii</sup> Performances, whether in the theater or in the ballpark, invite participants to oscillate between the "real" world and the "pretend" world. The performative tension between



ritual and play results from the fact that the lines between the two terms have become altogether blurred. According to Victor Turner, "the play frame . . . has to some extent inherited the function of the ritual frame. The messages it delivers are often serious beneath the outward trappings of absurdity, fantasy, and ribaldry" (124).

Sporting events are both ritualistic in nature (note the "sacred" symbols, places, events, and music) and ludic by design. In her analysis of British football songs, Mikita Hoy acknowledges the tension between ritual and play in sports when she describes the sports arena as an environment of "regulated festivity" which invites behaviors (such as racial slurs and other ritual insults) which would not normally be tolerated outside of the confines of the event (291). Examples of the ritual/play tension in the sports world include taking a charge in basketball (where players are frequently accused by sports announcers and fans of "faking" a fall), and the "art" of professional wrestling (a sport which purposefully juxtaposes the "real" with the "pretend").<sup>viii</sup>

Another dialectic featured in the sports culture is "equality" versus "disparity," or, in more sports-friendly terms, "fair" versus "foul." Guttman explains that "modern sports assume equality" in two senses: "(1) everyone should, theoretically, have an opportunity to compete; (2) the conditions of competition should be the same for all contestants" (Ritual 26). Sports fans and players, under the guise of equality, assume that sports performances can be equal for all regardless

of race. For athletes, there is the notion that any disparities based on race are eliminated through sheer, physical talent. For fans, equality in sports means that all races and creeds are united by a desire to support their teams. Examples of the equality/disparity dialectic on the playing field include rules about changing sides (as in tennis, football, or volleyball) and the rules governing the "coin" toss to determine which team gets the ball first.

Contrary to the "illusion" of equality in sporting events is the reality of disparity both on and off the playing field. Virtually all fans recognize that some players are stronger, faster, and more skilled than others. Fans also routinely speculate that referees (the gatekeepers of equality) favor some teams or players over others. Yet, even the fans themselves are not equal in the sense of being representative of society as a whole, for, as Garry Smith notes, most sports fans in the United States are "males from the middle and upper social strata" (4).

The third dialectic, insider/outsider, is perhaps *the* main premise of sports culture. Novak emphasizes the importance of the insider/outsider dialectic when he writes, "In sports the form of life is conflict. . . . An athletic event is an agon. In the ideal event, the antagonists are closely matched and the stakes are as nearly final as possible" (156). Indeed, Guttmann echoes this emphasis when he states that one of the "strongest attractions" of sports "is its ability to present precisely defined dramatic encounters between clearly separate antagonists whose uniforms immediately mark them as 'our side' and 'their

side' " (Sports 184).

It would be misleading, however, to think that the antagonism remains on the playing field. Figler speaks of the way this dialectical tension flows out into the stands and the surrounding community when he notes, "People who associate themselves with sports teams, whether as athletes or fans, gain an identity with those teams. A feeling of 'us' as the in-group is solidified by intense rivalry with 'them' as the enemy or out-group" (23). Performatively, this dialectical tension is most clearly marked by the manner in which fans dress up and, in some cases, even sit in certain sections to show solidarity with their respective sides.

Having defined and described the three dialectics of sports culture, their relevance to performing "Indian" requires some clarification. The ritual/play dialectic is evident in the tension between viewing Native American cultures as ritualistic, spiritual, full of sacred objects, dress, and so forth, while simultaneously seeing these same cultures as "playful" in light of "the Euro-American prioritizing of the rational over the mythical" (Smith, Rasmussen, and Makela 106). The equality/disparity dialectic applies in the sense that the theme of equality has been advertised to Native Americans and other minority groups by casting America as a great "melting pot"; but, particularly with Native Americans, "melting" has meant "vanishing." The notion of the "vanishing red man," or as Randall Lake defines it, "the belief that primitive native societies must and would give way before the advancing tide of

Euramerican civilization, either to be absorbed or crushed," illustrates the disparity in the treatment of Native Americans (126). Finally, the insider/outsider dialectic is perhaps most obvious given the long-contested struggle with Native Americans over space and the subsequent "us" versus "them" mentality. The whole notion of "winning" the West meant that Euro-Americans had to have an enemy to conquer, and Native Americans were cast in this role. As my descriptions of protest events shall illustrate, Native Americans continue to be cast as "outsiders" to this day.

#### Protesting Performance Via Performance

If major sports events are cultural performances, then certainly the same holds true for public protests.<sup>ix</sup> Seen in this light, the Native American protests add another layer of tension to the already charged atmosphere of major sporting events. Staged primarily outside of ballparks and stadiums, protesters wield signs and engage in performance acts in an attempt to change the attitudes of the gathering fans. In the following descriptions of protest events, derived largely from newspaper accounts, the strategies of resistance used by the Native Americans in the dispute over team names and symbols are identified and discussed.

The protests at the 1991 World Series between the Minnesota Twins and the Atlanta Braves were the first large-scale protests against professional sports teams. The Native Americans were particularly outraged by what Atlanta fans call the "chop." The "chop" is a rhythmic chant accompanied by a rhythmic arm motion

which is supposed to emulate the swing of a tomahawk. As the Braves entered the postseason, fans started to augment the "chop" with foam rubber tomahawks which were used as props for the chant. This "chop" was performed every time the Braves attempted a rally of some sort, and thus the "chop" literally became the rallying cry for fans.<sup>x</sup>

In addition to the "chop," protesters were also concerned over game-time activities perpetuating Native American stereotypes, activities which the Atlanta Braves organization has historically encouraged. For instance, Robert Lipsyte reports that during the 1970s the Braves "had an actor, playing Chief Nok-a-homa" who would come "war-dancing out of a teepee whenever a Brave hit a home run." While the Braves had done away with "Chief Nok-a-homa" well before the 1991 World Series, the organization's reputation regarding Native American stereotypes preceded it. Gary Pomerantz explains that while there are no officially sanctioned Braves' mascots who dress as Native Americans, there are several contemporary figures such as "Tomahawk Tom" who "is a Braves zealot and mascot wannabe [sic] who dresses for games in an Indian headdress, a catcher's mask and a cape." Pomerantz reports that Tomahawk Tom "leads fans in cheers at the stadium, signs autographs and passes out baseball cards to kids" ("Atlanta").

The antics of the Atlanta fans certainly caught the attention of Native American groups in 1991 because several of the games were played in Minneapolis. Bill Means, national director of the American Indian Movement, said of the 1991

protests, "We're not out to spoil anybody's good time. But when you come to Minneapolis, where there are 50,000 of us (in the state), you have to respect our heritage and our history" (qtd. in Levine, "Chop"). Protests were staged in both Minneapolis and Atlanta during and just before the start of each game of the series. In both cities, the protests were held outside the ballparks, usually near the main entrances, so as to attract attention from both fans and the media.

Mark Maske explains that the protest at the first game of the series in Minneapolis included a march by "150 pickets" that traveled "about a mile along a downtown street to the stadium. There, the number of demonstrators grew to 800." The protesters then set up "across the street from the Metrodome" where they distributed "leaflets to fans walking into the ballpark" (Maske). At the first game and throughout the series of games, protesters set up informal picket lines in which they carried signs reading statements such as, "If Martin Luther King Was Here Which Side of the Picket Line Would He Be On?" and, "We Are Not Mascots! How About the Atlanta Klansmen?" (Levine, "Chop"). It should be noted, however, that just because the protesters were anti-Braves did not necessarily make them anti-sports. Maske states that "several of the protesters' signs included 'Go Twins!' slogans on the reverse side." Another activity that the protesters engaged in, according to Al Levine ("Protest"), was the playing of "a drum song" in an attempt to get those who passed by to contrast authentic Native American music with "the tom toms of Braves fans" which "pounded mercilessly in the background."

While the above description of the protest in Minneapolis sounds peaceful, the protesters were involved in several conflicts. At a protest in Minneapolis, for instance, six children were arrested because of a confrontation with several Braves' fans. Bellecourt recalls that the kids "saw some Atlanta Braves fans wearing chicken-feather head dresses, which was very disrespectful, and when they confronted them to take them off, they (the fans) threw beer on them" (qtd. in Rosen). Protesters' descriptions of their experiences in Atlanta also show evidence of conflict. Aaron Two Elk recalls that "In Atlanta, we got spit on, they poured beer on us, we heard every racial slur you could conceive of" (qtd. in Rosen).

Just four months after the 1991 World Series, at the 1992 Super Bowl, tensions between protesters and fans escalated. This game, which was also played in Minneapolis, featured the Washington Redskins and the Buffalo Bills. The "Redskins" name and logo is considered by many Native Americans to be the most derogatory of all sports teams, and while the "Bills" is somewhat less offensive by contrast, Buffalo Bill Cody is certainly not a celebrated figure in Native American history.<sup>xi</sup> As with the 1991 World Series, the location of the event played a large role in generating involvement in the protest. Unlike the 1991 World Series, which involved several games and hence several protests, the Super Bowl was a one-shot-deal for the protesters. Since the Super Bowl reaches a much larger television audience, the Native American protesters were particularly concerned with fan behavior in addition to the hotly contested topic of "whether it's proper

to have a team name that derives solely from skin color” (Kornheiser).

Leonard Shapiro reports that the Native Americans in the Minneapolis area organized “a four day ‘national summit on racism in sports and the media,’ including a protest march and informational picketing at the Super Bowl Sunday” (“Native Americans”). This summit culminated in two main protest marches: one at a pregame dinner the day before the Super Bowl, and one on the day of the Super Bowl itself. Isabel Wilkerson notes that the pregame dinner protest included “about 50 Chippewa, Sioux, Winnebago and Choctaw Indians . . . carrying signs reading, ‘We Are Not Mascots,’ ‘Indians Before Football,’ ‘Promote Sports Not Racism,’ ‘Names Without Shame,’ and ‘Repeal Redskin Racism.’” Bellecourt and other protest leaders attempted to get some television coverage at this pregame dinner protest, but to no avail. Shapiro reports that “an NFL spokesman denied a request” by the Native American protesters “to hold a news conference in the league’s media center” (“Native Americans”).

The gathering the next day outside the stadium before and during the game, Ken Denlinger notes, included “more than 2,000” protesters. Denlinger goes on to explain: “The rally started about four hours before kickoff and included a parade and march around the stadium.” Protesters again carried signs displaying slogans such as “Shook our hands/Took our lands. For the Games/Took our Names. What’s Next?” and large banners reading “D.C. Racism Is Not Fun” and “Washington Rednecks.” One sports fan turned protester, a young man “whose high school teams were



nicknamed Redskins . . . had his high-school letter jacket pinned to a sign that read: 'I apologize for wearing this. Racism is wrong.'" (Denlinger).

While protesting both the use of the term "Redskins" as well as the team logo, Wilkerson reports that the Native Americans again focused their attention on "fans wearing chicken feathers and painting their faces and chopping foam rubber tomahawks into the air." The protesters hoped that their presence outside the Metrodome, dressed in jeans and button-down shirts, would remind fans and players that Native Americans do not fit into the stereotypical views perpetuated by sports fans. The Super Bowl protests also included some carryover from the 1991 World Series protests. Shapiro reports that the protesters again voiced their concerns about "the so-called 'tomahawk chop' cheer and Indian war chants by the Atlanta baseball fans" ("WTOP").

The 1995 World Series, dubbed the "World Series of Racism" by many protesters and others sensitive to their cause, pitted the Atlanta Braves against the Cleveland Indians. The series also featured the heaviest emphasis on stereotypical images of Native Americans, as fans in both Atlanta and Cleveland wore feathers, painted their faces, played drums, and engaged in various chants to support their respective teams. Protesters mobilized in both cities, again carrying signs outside the ballparks and discussing their viewpoints with fans and other onlookers.

The protesters at the 1995 World Series used some of the previously discussed protest tactics, such as picketing, informal

discussions, and music. Morehouse describes one of the protest events at the 1995 World Series as follows:

On a cold spot of sidewalk just a baseball's throw from Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium, four Native Americans sat in a circle Saturday, beating a drum and chanting a sacred song. Twenty feet and a steel police barricade away, Braves fans Jason Grant and Larry Zimmerman sang the Braves chant and waved bamboo tomahawks as the bright red, yellow, and blue feathers of their head dresses rippled in the breeze.

("Beliefs")

As with the earlier protests, the Native Americans attempted to situate themselves in contrast to the fans entering the stadium, thereby showing that true Native Americans do not look or act as fans might imagine.

In addition to these tactics, however, the protesters also raised the stakes by actually embodying and, hence, performing roles other than authentic "Native American." Morehouse reports that some of the protesters dressed "in costumes" to "mock Jews, blacks, the Pope and others" ("Indian"). According to Pomerantz, the protesters took on several roles including "entertainer Al Jolson in black face, a Ku Klux Klansman, a Jewish man carrying money (to mock Indians' owner Richard Jacobs, who has refused to change his team's nickname), and as a nun and the Pope" ("Protest"). The protesters hoped that these costumes would heighten fan awareness of the inappropriateness of dressing up as Indians to support their teams. As Michael Haney, a protest

organizer during the 1995 World Series protest put it, "We're not trying to offend people, we're trying to get a message across. If they do get offended, maybe that's good. They will understand our feelings" (qtd. in Pomerantz, "Protest"). As the forthcoming analysis illustrates, however, fans who "understand" their feelings are few and far between.

### Identity and Culture Contested

While the protests have failed to generate change, in that to this point not a single professional sports team has adopted new symbols or mascots, the protests have generated a considerable amount of discourse surrounding the use of Native American symbols and heritage by sports teams.<sup>xii</sup> The analysis which follows is a description of the specific points raised by the Native American protesters and their supporters, and the counterpoints raised by fans, team owners, and other interested citizens. A closer look at these arguments will reveal that those who oppose changing names and mascots of sports teams do not really see a problem with performing and hence co-opting Indian culture. The counter-arguments presented by fans are also reflective of the ritual/play, equality/disparity, and insider/outsider dialectics discussed earlier. The Native American objections have been either ignored or dismissed by fans and owners primarily because the protest techniques used by the Native Americans feed directly into (and can be easily answered in reference to) the dialectics of the sports culture.

The main objection raised by the Native American protesters and those sympathetic with their cause is that the sports team

logos and mascots are a result of ignorance and racism on the part of team owners and sports fans. Bob Roche, executive director of the American Indian Movement in Cleveland, said, "The struggle is not about the mascot, it's not about the name. What it really is about is racism, racism right here in Cleveland, Ohio" (qtd. in McIntyre). Similarly, in reference to the Atlanta Braves organization, Clyde Bellecourt remarks,

They [Braves' officials and fans] are totally scholastically retarded about Native American culture. Like everyone else, they have a John Wayne attitude about Indian culture, tradition and history . . . and they're ignorant to the racism that's going on. (qtd. in Maske)

Regarding the Cleveland Indians' mascot, Lou Duchez attempts to clarify exactly what the protesters mean by saying the symbols and logos are "racist":

Most folks don't see Chief Wahoo as "racist" because they don't view him as representative of Indians. . . . I can't argue with that. At the same time, I interpret the calls of "racism" along the lines of, an entire people is being reduced to a sports logo and mascot, and that's more than a little demeaning.

While "racism" is the main issue for most protesters, the protesters and their supporters raise several other concerns about team names and fan behavior.

One such concern is the extent to which the mascots, logos, and the practices of sports fans evoke a false sense of history.

Don Messec, a protester, underscores this point when he states, "Any understanding of Native American people as modern people is obstructed by these symbols" (qtd. in Lipman). Protesters particularly object to the emphasis on the war-like nature of the Native American, as well as to the notion that Native Americans are somehow extinct. Messec, for instance, takes issue with the cries and pretend scalplings among Atlanta Braves' fans because they "present Indian cultures as being war-like, savage cultures which is derogatory stereotyping" (qtd. in Lipman). Protesters also object strongly to the way in which the symbols serve to condemn Native Americans to the past. Edward Lazarus, a Washington native and author of a book on the Sioux, illustrates how the symbols and mascots of sports teams serve to immortalize Native Americans as a part of the past when he states that such symbols perpetuate "the crippling myth that Native Americans . . . are like Trojans, Spartans, Buccaneers, Pirates, 49ers, Vikings--heroes or villains to be studied as history, and history alone" (qtd. in "This Nickname"). Lazarus and others are concerned with the degree to which sports teams perpetuate an image of Native Americans as fixed in time.

Native Americans also offer their objections on the grounds that they are the only group so widely "celebrated" in our sports arenas. Regarding the dispute surrounding the "Washington Redskins," for instance, protesters point out that the term "Redskins" is "a pejorative whose counterpart for blacks or Jews or any other ethnic group would never be permitted as a team logo" (Wilkerson). Protest leader Clyde Bellecourt makes a

similar point when he says of the Atlanta Braves,

I'm sure they wouldn't call [the team] the Atlanta Bishops and hand out crucifixes to everyone who comes into the stadium. How about the Atlanta Klansmen? They could hand out sheets to everyone who comes in. They would never call the team the Atlanta Negroes.  
(qtd. in Maske)

As Bellecourt indicates, by his reference to "Bishops" and "crucifixes," protesters also take issue with fans mocking Native American religious practices through the wearing of headdress and other performance acts.

*Ritual/Play Counter-Arguments*

Fan response to the charges made by the protesters shows evidence of confusion over whether or not their performances of Indian are serious or playful. Some fans defend their performances by arguing that such behaviors are all in the spirit of celebration and, therefore, should not be taken seriously. By contrast, other fans (and for the most part, all of the owners, managers, and coaches) suggest that the "playful" performances are meant to honor or pay tribute to Native Americans. One fan very bluntly makes this point when he states, "All the tomahawkin' and chantin' and choppin' is a sign of respect for a ball club and a culture. It demeans nothing" (Williams).

Among those fans who view dressing up like Indians as harmless play, a common argument is to say that their behavior should not be taken at face value in the playful context of sporting events. These fans believe that if there is any

"racism" involved, it does not travel beyond the confines of the stadium and hence does not truly affect the "real" world. One fan on the "Cleveland Indians Discussion Group" Internet site stated, "I am partly Native American, and I find no offense to CHIEF WAHOO! For it is only a fictional caricature that has no significance to my heritage" ("Re: Will"). Jenese Busch, an Atlanta Braves' fan, also talks of fan performances as harmless play when, during the 1991 protests, he said, "We love Indians, but I'll be out there doing the tomahawk chop at tonight's game. . . . We don't mean to be disrespectful. We're just having fun" (qtd. in Levine, "Protest"). Fans also draw analogies to other teams to emphasize the harmless nature of using Native American symbols and mascots. As Ronnie Char states, "I honestly think what Chief Wahoo means to the Cleveland Indians baseball club is like what the pin-stripes mean to the Yankees."

In stark contrast to those fans who maintain that the use of Native American symbols and names is harmless play, there are those who believe that symbols and mascots are meant to honor Native Americans. These fans and owners cannot understand why Native Americans would not want to be associated with such great teams. Andrew Glass, for instance, points out that the Cleveland Indians got their nickname because of "one Louis Francis Sockalexis, a Penobscot Indian, the first Native American to play pro baseball"; he goes on to argue that symbols and mascots are meant to honor Native Americans by making the analogy to "Americans of Irish descent" who "take pride when the Notre Dame football team takes to the field as the 'Fighting Irish.'" Paul

Tagliabue, National Football League commissioner, used a similar tactic when he responded to Native American claims of defamation at the time of the 1992 Super Bowl protests by stating, "In the context of sports, those nicknames are extremely positive. You think of great players and great rivalries" (qtd. in Wilkerson). John Kent Cooke (executive vice president of the Redskins at the time of the 1992 Super Bowl protests) emphasized the great "honor" his team bestows on Native Americans when he remarked, "We're keeping the name. We've had it a long time. It represents the finest things in the Indian culture" (qtd. in Shapiro, "Indian Group"). Regarding the protests against the Atlanta Braves in 1991, Georgia native and former President Jimmy Carter argued, "With the Braves on top, we have a brave, courageous, and successful team, and I think we can look on the American Indians as brave, successful, and attractive. So I don't look at it as an insult" (qtd. in "Carter Defends").

#### *Equality/ Disparity Counter-Arguments*

A common response to the protesters by industry officials is to say that first and foremost they must be "fair" to the majority of people involved, which means honoring the wishes of the fans. These high-ranking officials have the influence to make the changes which the protesters so desperately seek; yet, they claim that fans and supporters do not want the names of their teams changed to satisfy the Native American protesters.<sup>xiii</sup> For instance, Fay Vincent, the commissioner of baseball during the 1991 protests, deferred to the fans stating, "It is inappropriate to deal with it now. Telling 57,000 people to



change is beyond my capacity" (qtd. in "Indians Stage Protest"). Regarding the 1992 Super Bowl protest, Rene Sanchez reports that the Washington Post printed a survey about the "Redskins" name which indicated that "89 percent of those surveyed said that the name should stay." A similar tactic has been used by the Cleveland Indians' owners who recently decided to keep their controversial "Chief Wahoo" logo. The owners produced a petition with ten thousand signatures that a group of fans collected asking the owners to keep the logo.<sup>xiv</sup>

Fans often argue that the Native American protesters are making an "unfair" request by asking them (the fans) to give up their first amendment rights. As W. Keith Beason states, "No culture should have the right to exclusively dictate the metaphorical use of signs associated with itself. The borrowing of specific symbols, especially when there is no malice intended, is surely part of our freedom of speech." In a similar fashion, Cynthia Tucker argues, "It is awfully narrow-minded for some Native Americans to claim that none of the rest of us has the right to wear a headdress or carry a tomahawk. I have attended seders [sic] and learned to eat with chopsticks. White Americans sing blues and rap and tap dance." One Cleveland Indians' fan who is identified only by the online pseudonym "The REAL Chief Wahoo" wrote on the "Cleveland Sports Graffiti Wall" web page, "What's all this about the words 'Tribe' and 'Indians' are going to be banned? We have the right of FREE SPEECH in this country, so you can forget about words being banned" (1 July).

Still other fans worry that if these changes are made to

satisfy the protesters, all sorts of other changes must be made in the spirit of equality. David Nevard poses the question, "Do Native Americans also have 'copyright' on places which were named 'in honor' of Indians? Should we rename Indiana, Indianapolis, and Sioux City?" Another fan points to the fact that by the logic of the protesters, many other teams should change their names when he writes, "I think that it [is] demeaning to Scandinavian Americans, like myself, to have the NFL team in Minn. [the Vikings] mock our ancestors. Wearing those plastic helmets and long, blond braids is stereotyping [sic] and should not be allowed" (Erickson).

*Insider/Outsider Counter-Arguments*

Some fans cast protesters as "insiders" by emphatically encouraging the protesters to join the sports culture. Don Carter, an Atlanta resident, expressed this desire to make the protesters part of the event when he stated, "I suspect that if the original Americans were alive today, they'd be at the stadium, yelling and screaming, doing the 'chop,' eating hot dogs." Mark Edwards, a Redskins' fan, remarked before the 1992 Super Bowl, "We support the Indians. We love 'em. To think we're against them is crazy. We're gonna win the championship for 'em'" (qtd. in Denlinger). Paul Croce offers another suggestion for how the Native Americans might be incorporated into the sports culture when he suggests that the Braves present "well-produced, entertaining tributes to the Indians of Georgia during breaks in the game" and display "artwork by and about Native Americans in the stadium."

Fans who view the protesters as "outsiders" attempt to shift the blame for the controversy and even deflect the charges of racism back at the protesters. A fan on the "Cleveland Indians Discussion Group" said, "For a Native American to assume that the TRIBE logo somehow represents 'the Man's' understanding of his culture is racism itself. Do you really think we're that stupid?" ("Will"). One fan on the "Cleveland Sports Graffiti Wall" directly accused the protesters by stating, "If you would call yourselves Americans instead of 'Native Americans,' the racism would stop. It's you that is making America the way it is, and by dubbing yourselves 'Native Americans' you are trying to make yourselves different" (3 July).

Another argument raised by fans who critique protesters as "outsiders" is that the protesters have their priorities mixed up. By casting protesters as "outsiders," fans are in a position to tell the protesters what they should be doing and thinking. Kriste Kline expresses this view when she states, "There have to be more important issues confronting Native Americans than a baseball team and its fans." Another fan's advice to the Native American protesters is to

use the energies spent on being angry about a sports team's name to help your situation in the world.

Press forward for educating your children in all facets of living, for taking your proper place in this country, for raising your standard of living. Educate your fellow Americans about Native Americans. (Lee)

Cleveland Indians' General Manager John Hart, when asked to

comment on the protests, said, "Look at our club--for anyone in the world to imagine we're racist . . . We've got ethnic diversity. We go for talent and character and we have it. You're blind to anything else" (qtd. in DiGiovanna, Newhan, and Nightengale).

Fans also cast protesters as "outsiders" in a historical sense. Viewing Native Americans from the "vanishing red man" perspective, these fans contend that "real" Indians do not exist. As Greg Butler explains,

the ever-revisionistic Liberal weenies want to write their own history and claim that this was all done to slur the Indians, whoops excuse me I mean the Native Americans (whoops again, I mean Sibero-Americans, nobody's native to America!). . . .

Nevard expresses a similar viewpoint when he states, "Perhaps what Native Americans really resent, is that sports teams can choose Indian mascots because all the real Indians are DEAD. Just like the Spartans and Trojans, they're a vanished race, existing only as a symbol."

### Conclusions and Implications

While most of the objections raised by the protesters have been either effectively deflected or altogether disregarded by fans and team owners, the protesters have made some progress. It would appear, for instance, that getting fans to stop dressing up is an attainable first step in changing the sports culture. There is evidence to suggest that fan attitude toward dressing up as the Indian "other" is changing. Atlanta's Cleto Montelongo,

who helped organize the 1995 protests, observed, "When we first came here in 1991, there were a lot of people wearing war paint with the feathers and drums, the full Indian regalia. But a lot of people are just wearing regular clothes today" (qtd. in "Group AIMS"). Also, Michael McIntyre reports that at the start of the 1996 baseball season in April, Beachwood Middle School in Cleveland "encouraged students to dress up for the team's home opener . . . but strongly suggested they wear the Indians' colors and not the Wahoo logo." Despite these small advances, changing fan belief in the sacred symbols of their sports teams will be a slow and difficult process. It is one thing to get a Braves' fan to stop wearing face paint and chicken feathers, but it is an entirely different matter to get the same fan to relinquish a favorite sweatshirt or jacket adorned with the Braves' tomahawk. What rhetorical strategies, then, can the protesters incorporate to help reclaim these images?

First, the general question of whether or not current strategies are effective must be addressed. From the nature of the responses by fans and owners, it seems that some of the tactics used by the protesters play directly into the dialectics of the sports culture in a way which is ultimately disadvantageous for the reform movement. Regarding the insider/outsider dialectic, for instance, the location and timing of the protests casts the protesters in the "outsider" role from the outset. The protests are literally staged "outside" the stadiums and ballparks, marking the protesters instantaneously as "outsiders" to the sports culture. This positioning only

reaffirms what fans already believe--the protesters do not really understand what is going on inside the world of the game. Also, the blatant charges of racism, though completely justified, contradict the emphasis on "equality" over "disparity" in the sports culture and are therefore quickly dismissed by fans, owners, and players. Finally, the performances staged by the protesters at the 1995 World Series can only have contributed to the blurred distinction between ritual and play in the minds of fans who witnessed protesters dressed up as the Pope or Al Jolson. Instead of "offending people," these performances likely served to reaffirm fan belief in the "harmlessness" of dressing up at sporting events.

While the above-mentioned protest tactics have backfired to some degree, I do not mean to suggest in any way that the protests have not been effective. For instance, the protests have been successful to the extent that awareness has been raised about the bastardization of Native American symbols and rituals by the dominant culture. The protesters are certainly motivated by the deep fear that there is truly nothing left to save as Native American identity markers; indeed, these fears are buoyed by fans' belief that "real" Indians don't exist any more. Through their actions the protesters have, at the very least, given fans a sense of what this fear of losing identity feels like. After all, if the protesters are successful in their attempts to reclaim the symbols and practices, the fans will lose their identity. While the irony of this situation seems to be lost on many fans, the sheer amount of newspaper articles and the

number of times the issues turn up as topics of discussion on Internet sites verify that the protests have certainly struck a nerve with fans. Unfortunately, however, newspaper articles about the protests invariably are placed in the later pages of the sports section, and most of the Internet discussion occurs on sports-related sites where sentiments are overwhelmingly opposed to any reforms. Where, then, can the protest movement go from here?

To this point, the protesters have lumped fans, owners, and players together. Each of these groups, however, has separate interests in preserving the names and logos, and it would be to the protesters' advantage to craft their appeals individually. Owners ultimately have the power to change a team's name, and with enough public support, changes are possible. For instance, the NBA "Washington Bullets" elected to change their name to the "Washington Wizards" in the face of public outcry over the violent nature of the "Bullets" name and logo. Owners, however, will fight to preserve the status quo as long as it remains profitable. The protesters must attempt to demonstrate that using Indian names and logos could ultimately hurt the organization economically.

Of course, to create a significant negative economic impact, protesters have to convince fans to literally stop "buying into" the team logos and mascots. Success with the fans ultimately revolves around the ritual/play dialectic because protesters need to convince fans that the pretend can do harm to the real. At present, fans see no actual harm in pretending to be Indians.

Protesters need to convince fans that performance is a powerful way to transmit culture and that dressing as "Indians" is a blatant misuse of that power. The task of reeducating fans will be difficult, particularly since entire generations of fans grew up playing "cowboys and Indians." To these fans, performing "Indian" is as harmless as childhood play. Letting go of Native American symbols in our sports arenas, for some fans, means letting go of precious myths of how the American West was won.

Sports in America are about the "uncivilized" worshipping the rules, and for centuries the mainstream American culture has been preaching this same theme of conformity to Native Americans. The use of Native American symbols and mascots in our sports arenas is just one of the more subtle attempts to dominate and control Native Americans. The subtle nature of this attempt in some ways makes it far more dangerous than other, more obvious instances of race discrimination. Fan performances at sporting events demonstrate the belief that Native Americans are on the outside of American culture, looking in. The fans look down at the field and worship the games before them, and by dressing as "Indians" the fans are suggesting, albeit indirectly, that Native Americans should also adhere to the values of the sports culture. The Native American protest movement will enjoy success to the extent that it is able to resist and subvert those values.



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<sup>i</sup> For examples of how Native American symbols have been appropriated into the mainstream culture, see S. Elizabeth Bird, ed., Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture (Boulder: Westview, 1996).

<sup>ii</sup> The figure for colleges and universities has recently changed to forty-five. The board of trustees at Miami (Ohio) University voted in late September of 1996 to eliminate "Redskins" as their nickname. Refer to Jack Carey, "2 Contested Nicknames are Dropped." USA Today 26 Sep. 1996: 1C.

<sup>iii</sup> I am using "Indian" here and throughout the remainder of the essay to refer to the stereotypical views of Native Americans which grew out of the mythology of the American West.

<sup>iv</sup> Alice E. Feldman mentions a similar move to reclaim or recapture Native American identity in her description of Native American performances in museums. Refer to Feldman, "Dances with Diversity: American Indian Self-Presentation Within the Representative Context of a Non-Indian Museum." Text and Performance Quarterly 14 (1994): 212-15.

<sup>v</sup> Novak notes, for instance, that many sportswriters "pronounce sports 'essentially entertainment,' apart from 'the serious issues' of our time." See Novak 23.

<sup>vi</sup> Cultural performances are distinguished in a similar fashion by Victor Turner, who writes, "cultural performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change." Refer to Turner 24.

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<sup>vii</sup> Dwight Conquergood has described this tension using the terminology "making" versus "faking." Refer to Conquergood, "Communication as Performance: Dramaturgical Dimensions of Everyday Life," in The Jensen Lectures: Contemporary Communication Studies, ed. John Sisco (Tampa: U of South Florida P, 1983), 27.

<sup>viii</sup> Sharon Mazer examines the tension between "making" and "faking" in the world of professional wrestling in considerable detail. Refer to Mazer, "The Doggie Doggie World of Professional Wrestling," The Drama Review 34 (1990): 96-122.

<sup>ix</sup> Kirk Fuoss discusses public protests as cultural performances in his analysis of the Workers' Alliance of America's 1936 seizure of the New Jersey State Assembly. Refer to Fuoss, "Performance as Contestation: An Agonistic Perspective on the Insurgent Assembly," Text and Performance Quarterly 13 (1993): 331-49.

<sup>x</sup> The "chop" actually is a tradition that the Atlanta fans borrowed from the Florida State (Seminoles) collegiate football team. Florida State, during the time of the 1991 World Series, was receiving a lot of attention on their way to an undefeated season and a national championship.

<sup>xi</sup> A famous soldier and hero of the American West, Buffalo Bill toured the country and the world with his "Wild West Show." This show featured groups of Native Americans doing everything from staging pretend attacks on settlers' cabins to holding up stagecoaches. Refer to William E. Deahl, "A History of Buffalo



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<sup>xii</sup> The discussion and debate about this issue occurs in many different venues. Most of the information I share here is derived from newspaper accounts, editorial columns, and Internet discussion groups.

<sup>xiii</sup> In his description of "administrative rhetoric," Theodore O. Windt discusses how leaders of an organization frequently respond to protesters by saying that the protest groups represent a minority, while the institution must act in favor of the majority. Refer to Windt, "Administrative Rhetoric: An Undemocratic Response to Protest." Communication Quarterly 30 (1982): 247.

<sup>xiv</sup> Refer to "Sports People: Baseball; Chief Wahoo's Domain is Still Turbulent," New York Times 2 July 1993, natl. ed.: B8.