



**National
Urban League**

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Washington Football Team Should Drop the “R” Word

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“At a moment when President Obama and Republican leaders remain deeply divided, this week saw them come to a bipartisan agreement on one thing: It is time for Washington’s NFL team to stop using a racial slur and to finally change its name.” Oneida Indian Nation radio ad

This past Sunday, as Dallas and Washington revived their annual NFL football rivalry, they also found themselves in the middle of an escalating fight over the name of the Washington football team. In fact, as part of its “Change the Mascot” campaign; the Oneida Indian Nation is running radio ads in Dallas and the other cities where the Washington football team is playing this year calling for DC’s team to drop the “R” word from its name.

This is all part of a larger movement among civil rights organizations and political leaders from both the left and right who correctly point out that the term “Redskins” is a racial slur. Suzan Shown Harjo, a Native American woman who lives in Washington and directs the Morning Star Institute, has been leading this fight and others like it since the 1960s. President Obama recently weighed in, saying, “If I were the owner of the team and I knew that there was a name of my team—even if it had a storied history—that was offending a sizable group of people, I’d think about changing it.” He added that he did not believe “attachment to a particular name should override the real, legitimate concerns that people have.”

Team owner, Dan Snyder disagrees. He has vowed to never change the name and in a letter to season ticket holders last week he called the team name, “a badge of honor.” Obviously not everyone agrees. The controversy has now gotten the attention of top NFL officials. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell recently said, “If we are offending one person, we need to be listening and making sure that we’re doing the right things to try to address that,” And officials of the Oneida Indian Nation and the NFL are scheduled to meet next month to discuss the issue. Consistent with our commitment to equality and the dignity of every human being, the National Urban League stands with all those demanding the Washington football team stop using the R word.

Ray Halbritter, leader of the Oneida Indian Nation, recently stated his opposition this way: "Let's be clear, the R word is defined in the dictionary as an offensive term. It was the name that was used against our people when we were forced off our lands at gunpoint. So it is has a sordid history and it's time for a change." He added, "History is littered with people who have vowed never to change something – slavery, immigration, women's rights – so we think one thing that's really great about this country is when many people speak out, change can happen."

The Dallas vs. Washington football game this year was played on the eve of Columbus Day, another reminder of the legacy of discrimination and oppression inflicted on Native Americans. Demanding the Washington football team remove the "R" word from its name is a simple request for respect. As the Oneida Indian Nation radio ad states, "This country may be politically divided...but we should all be able to agree that racial slurs are unacceptable and they shouldn't be used to market this country's capital city. We deserve to be treated simply as what we are: Americans."

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