

## This week's issue:

# SHOULD THE NFL REQUIRE THE WASHINGTON REDSKINS TO CHANGE THEIR NAME?

Dan Snyder, owner of the Washington, D.C., NFL football team, has announced that he will “NEVER” change the team’s name from “redskins,” despite widespread objections to the name on the grounds that it is an ethnic **slur**. The term “redskin” **stereotypes** Native Americans based on skin color. Imagine the objections if Latinos were referred to as “brownskins” or Caucasians as “paleskins”!

Snyder’s defenders say the name dates back to an era when the term “redskin” was common in western movies and TV shows. They argue it is not meant to **stigmatize** or offend Native Americans any more than the names Cleveland Indians or Atlanta Braves or Kansas City Chiefs. Those teams have not changed their names, but they have modified their logos in response to complaints, removing pictures that implicitly stereotype Natives and substituting symbols like arrowheads and feathers. Well-known sportscaster Bob Costas points out that terms like Braves, Chiefs, and Warriors honor Native Americans, whereas “redskins” can only be considered a stigmatizing slur.

But why is “redskin” a particularly offensive ethnic term? According to many opponents, it was introduced in the 1800s as a **derogatory** name for Native Americans and thus still carries those negative **connotations**. Ray Halbritter, of the Oneida Indian Nation, explained why the term is offensive: “Its origin is hated... [It] was used against our people when we were forced off our lands at gunpoint.” On the other hand,

not all Native Americans object to the term. Robert Green, former Chief of the Fredericksburg-area Patowomeck Tribe, said:

*“You can’t rewrite history – yes there were some awful bad things done to our people over time, but naming the Washington football team the Redskins, we don’t consider to be one of those bad things.”*

There are many terms that are used with intent to offend by some people but are not perceived as slurs. Some Latin Americans call U.S. citizens “yanquis” with derogatory intent, but most Americans don’t mind being referred to as Yankees. When white people use “the N-word,” it is considered a serious, perhaps unforgivable ethnic slur, but some black people use the word with each other with no negative connotations. Ethnic slurs are common, and many other terms can be offensive or friendly depending on how they are used. Perhaps the term “redskin” could be reclaimed as a badge of pride, as has happened for the term “gay.” Gay and queer used to be insults, but when gay men and women started promoting gay pride and queer theory, they redefined the connotations of the words from negative to positive. So calling someone “gay” is now not derogatory at all.

So should the word “redskin” and other terms that stereotype or stigmatize particular ethnic groups be eliminated from our speech? Or should we focus instead on getting rid of prejudice and intergroup conflicts that make such words offensive?



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**derogatory | stereotype | connotation | slur | stigmatize**

## USE THE FOCUS WORDS \*and alternate parts of speech

**derogatory** (*adjective*) insulting or disrespectful towards a person or group of people

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Mr. Lee's class rules prohibited students from making **derogatory** comments.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What do you do when someone makes a **derogatory** remark about someone you care about?

**stereotype** (*verb*) to mentally classify an entire group using a single characteristic

➡ **Sample Sentence:** The term "redskin" **stereotypes** Native Americans based on skin color – imagine the objections if Latinos were referred to as "brownskins" or Caucasians as "paleskins"!

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Does spending time with diverse groups of people encourage or discourage people from **stereotyping** others? Explain.

\***stereotype** (*noun*) an unfair or untrue belief about an entire group of people

➡ **Sample Sentence:** **Stereotypes** about women have prevented them from advancing in the workplace.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Where do **stereotypes** come from (TV, family, music, etc.)?

**connotation** (*noun*) the feeling or association suggested by a word

➡ **Sample Sentence:** "Redskin" was introduced in the 1800s to put down Native Americans and it still carries those negative **connotations**.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What **connotation** does the word "family" have for you? Explain your answer.

**slur** (*noun*) an insulting or disrespectful name or remark

➡ **Sample Sentence:** There are many terms that get used with intent to offend but are not perceived as **slurs**.

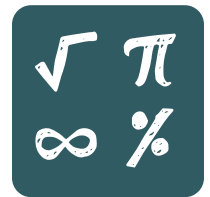
🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** How would you respond if you heard one of your friends use a racial **slur**?

**stigmatize** (*verb*) to label or brand negatively

➡ **Sample Sentence:** They argue it is not meant to **stigmatize** or offend Native Americans any more than the names Cleveland Indians or Atlanta Braves or Kansas City Chiefs.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Are some students at your school **stigmatized** for the clothes they wear? Explain your answer.

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## DO THE MATH

The debate over the name of the NFL football franchise the Washington Redskins was reignited in 2013. The term “redskins” is considered by some to be **derogatory** towards Native Americans, and dismissive of a past when they were **stigmatized** and nearly exterminated. Others, including the team’s owner, refute claims that the name is a **slur**; rather, they argue that the name promotes positive **stereotypes** about Natives such as bravery and strength. If the team does change its name, some fans would purchase new merchandise to support their team, which could potentially bring in large sums of money.

**Option 1:** In 2013, Forbes Magazine estimated that the Washington Redskins were worth \$1.7 billion, making them the third most valuable NFL team after the Dallas Cowboys and New England Patriots. Which number represents 1.7 billion?

- A.  $1.7 \times 10^8$
- B.  $1.7 \times 10^9$
- C.  $17 \times 10^9$
- D.  $1.7 \times 10^{10}$

**Option 2:** About  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the money from jersey sales goes to the NFL, while the other  $\frac{2}{3}$  goes to retailers and athletic companies. Let  $j$  = the number of jerseys sold and  $c$  = the cost of each jersey. Write an expression that could be used to estimate the revenue that the NFL takes in from jersey sales. Then calculate how much revenue the NFL will receive from the sale of 10,000 jerseys if each football jersey costs \$100.

 **Discussion Question:** Those who support the term “redskins” claim that it is the opposite of a **slur**, and actually **stereotypes** Native Americans in a positive way. They say that when the term is paired with a winning sports team and the image of a dignified Native, it connotes strength and skill. Others argue that **stereotypes** are inherently **derogatory**, even when they seem to promote positive qualities. For example, Asian Americans are often **stereotyped** as good at math, which can lead to the stigmatization of those who struggle in math class. Can you think of a **stereotype** that is positive, or are **stereotypes** harmful by nature? Explain your answer.

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## THINK SCIENTIFICALLY


Psychologist Mahzarin R. Banaji was surprised to find out that she is biased, meaning that she has prejudices against certain groups. The revelation came when Dr. Banaji was completing a computer-based task that she helped design, which asked her to associate black and white faces with positive and negative words. “It was stunning for me to discover that my hands were literally frozen when I had to associate black with good. It’s like I couldn’t find the key on the keyboard,” she recalled. This shocked Dr. Banaji, since as an immigrant, she is a member of a group that has been **stigmatized** and treated unfairly. She consciously avoids **stereotyping** groups and does not use racial **slurs**. So, how could someone like Dr. Banaji be biased?

Dr. Banaji is a doctor of psychology—the scientific study of the mind. Her research uses a computerized test called the Implicit Association Test to show that people can have opposing explicit and implicit attitudes. For example, a person who declares that people of all races are equally honest has explicit non-biased attitudes. However, the same person might more easily associate white faces with images of honesty and black faces with images of dishonesty, revealing implicit biases.

*Explicit* means clear and obvious.

*Implicit* means unspoken or hidden.

 Give examples of how joy can be expressed explicitly and implicitly.

 Next to each of the descriptions below, write whether the action reveals implicit or explicit attitudes about race.

1. A person looks at pictures of people of different races and associates light-skinned people with being American more frequently than dark-skinned people. \_\_\_\_\_
2. A person answers “yes” to the question, “Are you biased?” \_\_\_\_\_
3. An employer decides to hire a white person over an Asian person because of his beliefs about all Asian people. \_\_\_\_\_
4. A father teaches his daughter to cross the street if she notices a black man walking behind her. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Without realizing it, a principal gives harsher punishments to Hispanic students than to white students who break the same rule. \_\_\_\_\_

 How might supporting a team named “Redskins” affect people’s explicit and implicit attitudes towards Native Americans?

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## DEBATE THE ISSUE

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

### A

The Washington Redskins should not change their name.

OR

### B

The Washington Redskins should change their name.

OR

### CREATE YOUR OWN

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

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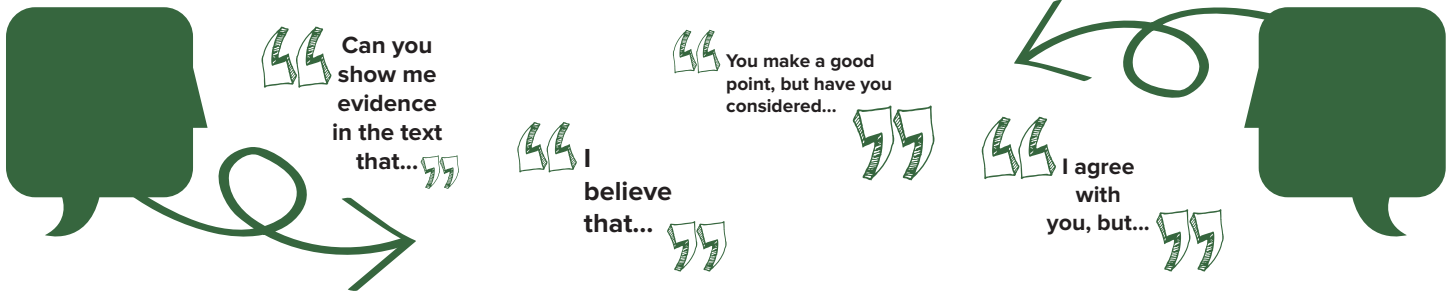
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Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:




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## TAKE A STAND

 Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

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