



# **Seattle Human Rights Commission**

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## **Resolution No. 15-01: Urging a Name Change for the Washington, D.C. N.F.L. Team**

WHEREAS, all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights; and

WHEREAS, the Seattle Human Rights Commission (the “Commission”) is committed to protecting and advocating for justice, human rights, and the equal treatment of all people who live and work in Seattle; and

WHEREAS, the City of Seattle was declared to be a Human Rights City on December 10, 2012, thus committing itself to protect, respect and fulfill the full range of inherent human rights for all as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and numerous other international human rights treaties; and

WHEREAS, the United States ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (“CERD”) in October 1994 and Article 7 of CERD requires the national government “to adopt immediate and effective measures, particularly in the field of teaching, education, culture and information with a view to combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination and to promote understanding, tolerance and friendship”; and

WHEREAS, the United States endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the “Declaration”) on December 16, 2010 and Article 15 of the Declaration recognizes the right of indigenous peoples “to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information” and places an obligation on the national government to “take effective measures, in consultation and cooperation with the indigenous peoples concerned, to combat prejudice and eliminate discrimination and to promote tolerance, understanding and good relations among indigenous peoples and all other segments of society”; and

WHEREAS, Article 22 of the Declaration provides that the national government “shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination”; and

WHEREAS, Article 24 of the Declaration recognizes that “[i]ndigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health” and places a duty on the national government to “take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right”; and

WHEREAS, the Commission seeks to combat prejudice and eliminate discrimination and to promote tolerance, understanding and good relations among indigenous peoples and all other segments of our society; and

WHEREAS, the Commission seeks to protect the mental health of indigenous women, children, and men; and

WHEREAS, indigenous peoples have the right and authority to determine and define for themselves what actions, logos, and names serve to honor them, their history, their heritage, and their ancestors; and

WHEREAS, on January 18-19, 1993, the National Congress of American Indians, the oldest and largest alliance of Native Nations in the nation, representative of more than 250 Native Nations, passed resolution 93-11 publicly stating that “the term R\*DSKINS is not and has never been one of honor or respect, but has always been and continues to be a pejorative, derogatory, denigrating, offensive, scandalous, contemptuous, disreputable, disparaging and racist designation for Native American’s [sic]”<sup>1</sup>; and

WHEREAS, Amanda Blackhorse, an indigenous woman and lead plaintiff in *Blackhorse et al v. Pro-Football, Inc.*, brought a claim to revoke trademark protection of the term “Washington R\*dskins”<sup>2</sup> because it is disparaging and brings indigenous peoples into contempt or disrepute;<sup>3</sup> and

WHEREAS, on June 18, 2014, the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board of the United States Patent and Trademark Office voted to cancel the six trademarks held by the Team in a two-to-one decision that the term “r\*dskins” is disparaging to a “substantial composite of Native Americans” as demonstrated by NCAI Resolution 93-11 and “the near complete drop-off in usage of ‘r\*dskins’ as a reference to Native Americans beginning in the 1960’s”<sup>4</sup>; and

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Blackhorse et al v. Pro-Football, Inc.*, Cancellation No. 92046185, 65 (USPTO 2014), available at <http://ttabvue.uspto.gov/ttabvue/v?pno=92046185&pty=CAN&eno=199>.

<sup>2</sup> All references to the official team name have been altered with an asterisk out of respect for the human rights of indigenous peoples and in an attempt to avoid continued use of the name.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 71-72.

WHEREAS, Ms. Blackhorse has subsequently been targeted and harassed by the team and its supporters with a counter suit and with “hostile, aggressive, racist, and sexist” hate mail;<sup>5</sup> and

WHEREAS, Psychologist Dr. Michael Friedman, author of the report *The Harmful Psychological Effects of the Washington Football Mascot*, cautions that “[n]ot only does the use of this slur risk causing direct damage to the mental and physical health of our country’s Native American population, it also puts us all at risk for both participating in and being harmed by ongoing prejudice” and “use of the term may cause stress among the nation as a whole”;<sup>6</sup> and

WHEREAS, studies show that “prejudice perpetuates major mental disorders such as depression, anxiety and alcoholism, as well as physical health problems” as a result of both increased stress and “worsening self-concept as a result of prejudicial behavior”;<sup>7</sup> and

WHEREAS, “[t]he rate of suicide among Native Americans has risen 65% in the past decade”;<sup>8</sup> and

WHEREAS, the American Psychological Association in 2005 strongly urged the banning of all Native American mascots from sports teams in “acknowledgment of the catastrophic effects of prejudice on the Native American population”;<sup>9</sup> and

WHEREAS, the term “r\*dskins” has a lengthy history that harkens to the early days of our republic when indigenous peoples were openly treated as subhuman; the name “is rooted in the commodification of native skin and body parts as bounties and trophies” and was based on a European history of “chopping off enemies’ heads and mounting them on stakes, and of scalping, skinning, dismembering, and other tortures and trophy-hunting”<sup>10</sup>; and

WHEREAS, the term “r\*dskins” has a pejorative meaning historically used to degrade and dehumanize indigenous peoples, who continued throughout this nation’s history to suffer national efforts to eliminate their physical, cultural, and political existence; and

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<sup>5</sup> <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/12/03/blackhorse-hate-mail-i-receive-hostile-aggressive-racist-and-sexist-158113>

<sup>6</sup> <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/09/27/harmful-psychological-effects-washingtons-redskins-mascot>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/09/27/harmful-psychological-effects-washingtons-redskins-mascot>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/09/27/harmful-psychological-effects-washingtons-redskins-mascot>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/09/27/harmful-psychological-effects-washingtons-redskins-mascot>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jan/17/washington-redskins-racism-pro-football>. For additional history on the Team name see <http://www.bostonglobe.com/sports/2013/12/29/redskins-wonder-what-name-the-answer-traces-back-boston/GmfYbPTnHx1Ht5NgqN1EOM/story.html>.

WHEREAS, the term “r\*dskins” continues to have a pejorative meaning for indigenous peoples, as recognized in at least eight mainstream dictionaries,<sup>11</sup> and serves as a shocking and constant reminder to indigenous peoples of the American legacy of death, dispossession, and almost entire elimination of their race and of their status as sovereign nations; and

WHEREAS, the Team Owner has averred that “We’ll never change the name. It’s that simple. NEVER—you can use caps”<sup>12</sup>; and

WHEREAS, recent events have shown the team owner Dan Snyder seeking to divide the American people and indeed indigenous peoples in his attempt to continue using the pejorative and death-laden name for his team;<sup>13</sup> and

WHEREAS, indigenous peoples protesting the use of the name at team events have faced verbal abuse and harassment by team fans;<sup>14</sup> and

WHEREAS, fifty United States Senators have sent a letter to N.F.L. Commissioner Goodell urging the N.F.L. to endorse a name change,<sup>15</sup> and legislation has been introduced in both the United States Senate and United States House of Representatives that aims to remove the National Football League’s tax-exempt status due to its lack of action in enforcing a Washington, D.C. N.F.L. team name change;<sup>16</sup> and

WHEREAS, individual sportscasters and sportswriters have exercised leadership in advancing human rights by discontinuing use of the official name of the Washington, D.C. N.F.L. team in their announcing and writing.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission hereby calls upon Dan Snyder and the Washington, D.C. N.F.L. team to honor the humanity of indigenous peoples by changing the team name to something that all Americans can embrace.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2014/09/25/amanda-blackhorse-nfl-washington-suing-defiant/16128077/>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.bostonglobe.com/sports/2013/12/29/redskins-wonder-what-name-the-answer-traces-back-boston/GmfYbPTnHx1Ht5NgqN1EOM/story.html>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2014/oct/13/daniel-snyder-navajo-nation-president-washington>; [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/redskins-owner-dan-snyder-makes-visits-to-indian-country-amid-name-change-pressure/2013/12/21/5f939266-6777-11e3-a0b9-249bbb34602c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/redskins-owner-dan-snyder-makes-visits-to-indian-country-amid-name-change-pressure/2013/12/21/5f939266-6777-11e3-a0b9-249bbb34602c_story.html).

<sup>14</sup> <http://missoulanews.bigskypress.com/GreenRoom/archives/2014/09/26/ill-fucking-cut-you-behind-the-scenes-of-the-1491s-segment-on-the-daily-show>; [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/at-fedex-field-redskins-name-protesters-exchange-sharp-words-with-fans/2014/12/28/f3aa1acc-8ed3-11e4-a412-4b735edc7175\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/at-fedex-field-redskins-name-protesters-exchange-sharp-words-with-fans/2014/12/28/f3aa1acc-8ed3-11e4-a412-4b735edc7175_story.html).

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/senators-introduce-bill-to-revoke-nfls-tax-exempt-status-if-redskins-name-stands/2014/09/19/07778876-3f8f-11e4-b03f-de718edeb92f\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/senators-introduce-bill-to-revoke-nfls-tax-exempt-status-if-redskins-name-stands/2014/09/19/07778876-3f8f-11e4-b03f-de718edeb92f_story.html).

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/senators-introduce-bill-to-revoke-nfls-tax-exempt-status-if-redskins-name-stands/2014/09/19/07778876-3f8f-11e4-b03f-de718edeb92f\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/senators-introduce-bill-to-revoke-nfls-tax-exempt-status-if-redskins-name-stands/2014/09/19/07778876-3f8f-11e4-b03f-de718edeb92f_story.html); <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/citydesk/2014/11/12/del-norton-introduces-bill-to-strip-nfl-of-tax-exempt-status-over-washington-football-team-name/>.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission calls upon Roger Goodell, Commissioner of the National Football League, to take necessary steps to ensure that the Washington, D.C. N.F.L. team name is changed to something that does not violate the human rights of indigenous peoples or cause racially-charged division among the American people.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission urges the Mayor and City Council of the City of Seattle to prohibit the use of City funds to purchase goods or services from the official corporate sponsors of the Washington, D.C. N.F.L. team, which currently include FedEx, Bank of America, Bud Light, Ameritel, Ticketmaster, and StubHub among others (the “Corporate Sponsors”).

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission urges the residents and businesses of the City of Seattle to boycott purchases from the Corporate Sponsors, and to send a letter to the Corporate Sponsors letting the Corporate Sponsors know that they are withdrawing their support of the business so long as it continues to support an N.F.L. team that defiantly violates the human rights of indigenous men, women, children, and elders.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission urges its own N.F.L. team, the Seattle Seahawks, to refrain from using the other Washington N.F.L. team’s official name in stadium banners, stadium screens, the team website, and other print and television advertising used by the Seahawks so long as the team name stands as a human rights violation.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission commends the Seattle Times for largely banning the use of the official name of the Washington, D.C. N.F.L. team in their news reporting and urges the Seattle Times and all news sources in the City of Seattle to fully ban use of the official team name in their reporting until the name no longer stands as a human rights violation.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission strongly urges all sportscasters and sportswriters, especially in the City of Seattle, to discontinue use of the official Washington, D.C. N.F.L. team name so long as it stands as a human rights violation.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission strongly urges Congress to pass the legislation previously proposed by Senator Maria Cantwell and Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress and to additionally propose and pass legislation that bars the use of public funds for news outlets that continue to use the official name of the Washington, D.C. N.F.L. team name in their reporting so long as that name stands as a human rights violation.

Seattle Human Rights Commission – Resolution No. 15-01

Adopted by the Seattle Human Rights Commission on January 8, 2015.



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Ethel Branch, Co-Chair



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Sarah Bishop, Co-Chair