

The American Anthropological Association regularly publicizes statements on current topics of cultural interest, such as this one on the use of stereotypical or offensive names for sports teams and their mascots. Many team names are problematic when looking through a lens of respect for diversity.

Consider the US-based Atlanta Braves with their trademark “tomahawk chop.” Or the Cleveland Indians, whose mascot “Chief Wahoo”—finally officially retired in 2018—has been named the most demeaning caricature of Native peoples in US sports (Tracy 2013). The Edmonton Eskimos of the Canadian Football League are currently assessing the results of a public 2018 survey on whether their name, which many Inuit people find demeaning, should be changed.

These names reduce to stereotypes the ethnic identities of people with diverse histories of colonization and resistance, who are often living today in marginalized communities. It’s important to note that the AAA argues that these names are demeaning whether or not that is the intention of the users.

Excerpt from “AAA Statement on Sports Team Mascot Names”

Adopted by the AAA Executive Board March 20, 2015

Whereas:

- Anthropologists are committed to promoting and protecting the right of all peoples to the full realization of their humanity, that is, their capacity for culture, and rights to self-determination, and sovereignty....

- The AAA denounces and is proactive in combating all forms of racism and racist ideologies, as expressed through the use of language, symbols, images, names, nicknames, logos, personalities, and mascots that perpetuate stereotypes....
- The continuing harm done to American Indians who are offended by demeaning and racist mascots must be acknowledged and viewed as the basis of determining what is a racist representation or depiction; it is inappropriate and unjust to base this evaluation on whether or not those who use these images view their behavior as racist or claim non-racist intentions.
- The use of American Indian mascots undermines the ability of American Indian nations to represent their own experiences, cultural practices, and traditions in authentic and meaningful ways....
- Research has established that the continued use of American Indian sports mascots harms American Indian people in psychological, educational, and social ways;
- The continued use of American Indian mascots in sport has been denounced by American Indian advocacy organizations, as well as academic, educational, and civil rights organizations....

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT The American Anthropological Association calls for professional and college sport organizations to immediately denounce and abandon the use of American Indian nicknames, logos, and mascots, while respecting the right of individual tribes to decide how to protect and celebrate their respective cultural heritage. (American Anthropological Association 2015, www.americananthro.org)