

Every month I receive John Two Hawks newsletter and thoroughly enjoy it. I find that I agree and applaud almost every issue he presents. But, in this last newsletter I find something that I wholeheartedly disagree with. Below is an excerpt from the newsletter.

Hooray for the NCAA! The recent decision by the NCAA to place a ban on the use of "Indian" names and mascots in collegiate sports is a human rights victory we have sought for over 50 years. Many are angry and are protesting the ruling, but nothing they do will change this ruling. It is a ruling, which embraces respect and basic human decency. When America's public schools were de-segregated, there were protesters then too. They are looked upon today with frowns and disapproval. The same fate awaits the protesters of today, where respect for American Indian people is finally beginning to be realized as necessary. Sports are for fun. At their root, they are trivial in that they are for public entertainment. The names/mascots associated with any sports team are certainly trivial, goofy, silly and clown-like by nature. They are supposed to be funny. They are intended to be caricatures. These are the very reasons the NCAA has placed a ban on 'Indian' names/mascots.... they trivialize, disrespect, stereotype and make caricatures of American Indian people, and it is not funny. It is racism, plain and simple.

I, for one, have spent a lot of years on the front lines of this struggle. After such a long time, it is wonderful to finally see some major movement toward the removal of these offensive "Indian" names/mascots from so many of these sports teams which are supposed to represent institutions of learning and higher education. The NCAA has made its message clear, and it is a message of respect. Perhaps some other organizations will show American Indian people some respect as well in the near future.... NFL? MLB? For a more in-depth understanding of the 'Indian' mascot struggle, click this link: <http://www.nativecircle.com/mascots.htm>

I believe the American Indian Movement (AIM), which is the main organization that has pushed this decision, was founded on *victimization* and that the mindset this organization fosters continues to suppress the desire of our people [American Indians] to take their own power once again. I feel this movement may actually do more harm than good and there are many that see the AIM movement as racism in and of itself. The organization seems to want to go back in time and shut off from the whole world with the idea that this will protect our heritage. Only true understanding of our magnificent heritage will ever bring the respect of native peoples that AIM supporter's desire. People who feel victimized become victims and the spiral escalates. People who take their power become powerful and the spiral escalates.

Along with feeling victimized over the use of native names, there are many within the AIM organization that feel that no one other than full-blooded American Indians (are there really any pure races left on this planet?) should be allowed to use sage as a means to banish negative energies, to participate in sweatlodge purification ceremonies, to hold one of our eagle brother's feathers in honor of the spirit of this magnificent bird and the spiritual beliefs this bird embodied for our people, or to use a Medicine Pipe to connect our hearts and souls with Great Spirit. I do not believe this organization has the vision of our ancestors who understood that we are all related and one within the Universe. Certainly our people were abused and almost annihilated, but there hasn't been a race of people that has not been abused by another at some time in the history of this planet. You will find in the teachings of many great native elders, such as Black Elk and Chief Seathl (Seattle), that they were very proud to share their knowledge with anyone who would seek their wisdom and ways.

Personally, I am very proud to see the use of American Indian words and names because to me, it shows the influence that Indian people have had in our history. Over half of the states and thousands of cities across our country bear Indian names. Most of the people who live in those states and cities have no idea of the origin of those names. They should be taught. Most people have no knowledge of the influence the American Indian had on the founding fathers of this country and of their extensive contribution to the political structure adopted by our founders. They have no knowledge that the Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of

Independence were modeled after the Iroquois Confederacy's Kaianerekowa or *Great Law of Peace*; an agreement that had kept these people at peace for over 700 years. They have no idea that many common terms today, such as *caucus* (an Algonquin word) were adopted from the Red Peoples.

There is progress in trying to change public awareness and present the reality of what happened over the past two hundred years in the United States. I applaud Kevin Costner and the movie *Dances With Wolves*, and Steven Spielberg and *Into The West* for their concern for detail and accuracy. I applaud much of what I see on the history channels. This is a start and I see many brave individuals with native heritage or knowledge of that heritage willing to share that wisdom.

I do not believe that the individuals and groups who chose to name their teams after American Indians did so with any malice and it is not my place to judge what they were thinking and feeling. I want to believe they did so out of tribute to a courageous, strong people; people who are known for their love of competition. Our native ancestors participated in all sorts of wonderful games and athletic events. There was gambling of every kind and numerous opportunities were presented to express strength, prowess, cunning, and ingenuity. They did not consider these games trivial, funny, goofy, or silly. They were taken very seriously and the winners achieved high status and regard within their tribes and clans. The idea of *counting coup* on the enemy instead of killing shows a huge respect for human life and the understanding that *life is but a game*. Anyone can kill someone else, but the act of coming face to face with the enemy and getting close enough to merely touch the other on the forehead shows true bravery and power. The most serious of the games our ancestors played was probably on the famous Mayan ball courts in Mexico. Few understand the true nature of the games believing that the losers were the ones who were *put to death*, when in reality it was the winners who felt they had *achieved the right to move on to another plane or dimension*. With the act of winning they believed that had achieved *spiritual oneness* with the universe. Yes, our ancestors took games very seriously. I for one, would be honored to play on a team who considered their heroes to be Braves, Chiefs, and Warriors.

Today I believe the lesson is to *not* take our self so seriously. Continuing to feel victimized by others, never allows anyone to take their own power. Underneath self-pity there is anger and hate and only love will allow each of us to move forward on our paths to enlightenment. Trying to *demand* respect never works. You cannot change someone else's opinion, only your own. Is the battle that Two Hawks describes that has taken 50 years really won? It is causing a great deal of anger once again towards a people that are greatly misunderstood already. I would like to see the AIM movement devote their time to peacefully sharing the wisdom of American Indians and not fighting more battles.

Phyllis Playful Autumn Wind