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on issues affecting African Americans  
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**Washington's So-called Redskins and the Politics of Intolerance  
The African World**

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Every year, with the opening of the football season, I have the same complaint: the name of the Washington, DC football team is obnoxious, racist (against Native Americans) and must be changed. And, every year I receive in response generally positive feedback from regular people who hold the same concern. Yet the team's name does not change.

There are many of us, DC-area residents and beyond, who have argued for years that the name "Washington Redskins" is a racist name that should be changed. Many college teams have removed offensive mascots, teams have changed names for any number of reasons, yet the resistance from the owners of the Washington football team is amazing.

The problem, however, is not just with the owners. It is difficult to exaggerate the level of football support that exists in the DC area. From the moment that the pre-season training begins, football starts to overshadow baseball in the media, whether radio, TV, or printed. African Americans are major enthusiasts for the Washington football team (unless they happen to be fans of the Dallas Cowboys - which is another story). Yet our enthusiasm seems to blind us to the name of the team and what it represents.

You have heard all of these arguments before: what if the Washington football team was called the Washington N---ers? I asked a Black cheerleader for the Washington football team that very question once, and amazingly she said that it would not make

any difference as long as the team was respected. Either the sister was out of her mind; had no sense of history; or was in complete denial.

Yet this year I feel even more strongly about this name issue. Particularly in the years since 9/11, we have been witnessing the demonization of various groups. Arabs, Central Asians, Muslims, or anyone thought to be one of those groups is subject to attack, and I do not mean just harsh language. Haitian and Latino immigrants, documented or not, are also subject to demonization. In fact, in a recent immigration raid in the South, Black workers supposedly cheered while watching as their allegedly undocumented Latino immigrant co-workers were being taken away. The bottom line is that the politics of intolerance is strengthening, and part of the intolerance is not just one's point of view, but whether one is considered "in" or one is considered part of the "other."

The name Washington Redskins reinforces the idea that it is ok to use racist, derogatory language in polite company. It is the equivalent of commentators using terms such as "towel head" or "diaper head" when speaking of Arabs. The moment that it is permitted, it turns an individual into a "thing." That person, in fact, is no longer a person, but an object of scorn.

While you may think that I am going overboard on this, my point is that one cannot look at the name "Washington Redskins" in isolation. Along with names like "Atlanta Braves" and "Cleveland Indians," the name actually mocks an entire **indigenous** population that was subject to one of the worst acts of genocide in human history.

Perhaps it is time to change the name and regain our own humanity?

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
**BlackCommentator.com** Executive Editor, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is the Executive Editor of BlackCommentator.com, a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of the book, [Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice](#) (University of California Press), which examines the crisis of organized labor in the USA. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Fletcher.

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