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## **NO LOGO!: Visual sovereignty and the Washington Redsk\*ns debate**

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### **Abstract**

The paper draws upon the controversy over the use of indigenous-related sports emblems that has recently sparked a series of protests across the United States against the Washington Redsk\*ns name and imagery. It focuses on the visual aspect of the debate, tracing the white-supremacist foundations of the Washington team's insignia to the institutional construction of Native identity through popular Indian head pennies, gold coins, and buffalo nickels in the period between 1859 and 1938. Pointing at the seemingly paradoxical discrepancy between the minted messages and the systematic political, legal, and military invasion on American Indian sovereignty in that period, it proceeds to deconstruct the paradox by exposing the numismatic pictorial language as a manifestation of the same ideological project and the configurations of power that have remained unchanged to this day. The continued circulation of indigenous-based iconography in the contemporary American context shows that the same cultural imagination continues to serve not only as a powerful rationale for European America's historical, national, and political narrative but also as a form of "anti-conquest" that both obscures and enacts the established formulas of colonial domination and control. Observing the alterations of the Washington Redsk\*ns logo design across some of the key socio-historical moments of the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the analysis explores how various forms of national anxiety transcend into identity through the politics of representation. In that light, it regards recent activism against mass-mediated symbolization of indigenous identity as an important arena in which centuries-old hegemonic discourses are contested against new venues of self-determination and internal decolonization.

### **Keywords**

Washington Redsk\*ns · Native American mascots · indigenous representation · visual sovereignty · activism · decolonization

On October 12, 2014, a group of Native American protesters assembled outside the University of Phoenix stadium in Glendale, Arizona prior to an American football game between the Arizona Cardinals and the Washington Redsk\*ns. Continuing a decades-long struggle of American indigenous people against their cultural appropriation and stereotyping in sports, the protesters challenged the Washington team's name and logo with signs "change the name," "change the mascot," "we are not mascots," and "game over for racism" (Dueling... 2015, n.pag.). A few weeks later, on November 2, a few thousand protesters held a large rally and a march preceding the Washington team's game at the University of Minnesota's TCF Bank Stadium (Cox 2014c, n.pag.). In the next two months, similar protests took place in San Francisco, Indianapolis, and in front of Washington team's home stadium, FedEx Field (see May & Sernoffsky 2014, n.pag; Cox 2014b, n.pag; Wakpa 2014, n.pag.; Mack 2014, n.pag.). Apart from being exposed to white fans' obscenities and racial insults, the protesters faced an unexpected subversion of their endeavor by the Native supporters of the Washington team. Six buses of "Redskins" fans from Zuni Pueblo and the Navajo reservation arrived at the Arizona game, showing their clear support for the Washington team. One of the fans, tribal administrator from the Zuni Pueblo, Ava Hanaweeke, praised the team owners for their generous donation of financial aid, mobile homes, and transportation vehicles to her tribe, as well as for their multiple visits to the impoverished reservation to buy and place future orders for "jewelry, pottery, woven items, and other crafts." Likewise, the students from Navajo Red Mesa High School came to the Arizona game with free tickets provided by the team, wearing the very insignia protested by the activist group (Dueling... 2015, n.pag.). Yet, it was the photos of the Navajo Nation president, Ben Shelly and his wife with the Redsk\*ns hats on, sitting in the Washington team's VIP section right next to the team owner, Dan Snyder, that sparked a heated debate similar to the one from November 25, 2013, when Snyder's team honored a group of Navajo code talkers as part of the Native American Heritage Month (see Feldman 2013, n.pag.; Brady 2013b, n.pag.). A few days after the occasion, Roy Hawthorne, one of the three honored World War II veterans who had appeared at a Redsk\*ns game wearing the team's jacket with the Indian head logo, stated in an interview that the Washington team's name "is a symbol of loyalty and courage—not a slur as asserted by critics who want it changed" (Brown & Fonseca 2013, n.pag.). In addition to staging charity and homage parades, the Washington team has sought public sympathy for the continued use of its name by using media and poll services, asserting that the majority of Native Americans champion its mission to honor their virtues and achievements, as well as by emphasizing the fact that the same name is still being used by three Native high school teams, two of which are located on the reservations (Washington Redskins Name 2014, n.pag.). Although much of the controversy has concerned the disparaging effect of the team's name, this presentation shifts the attention from the linguistic to the visual aspect of the debate. Exploring the evolution of indigenous-based iconography, it attempts to unveil not only the ways in which colonial domination has been transcribed into representation but also the persistence of the same hegemonic cultural practices in contemporary American society that accounts for both the dominant group's supremacist aesthetics and the internal cultural myopia, the fact that some Native individuals still choose to root for and identify with the fabricated Indian on the helmet.

Even though the visual objectification of American indigenous people is as old as the colonization of their land, the beginnings of the institutional exploitation of Native identity concur with the advent of the American nation. Unlike the early colonial times, when American natives were portrayed as inhuman, “the worst of Satan’s creatures” (Pearce 1988, p. 294), the American Revolution marked a transitional moment in the popular cultural imagination of American Indian people. As the idealistic notion of the noble savage fused with the notion of the *common man* (see Rousseau 1754, n.pag.; Fernández-Armesto 2004, 60) and the urge of the emerging nation to define its identity apart from the European, more specifically, British cultural model, the idea of natural wisdom became a blueprint for asserting the national sovereignty. Consequently, a new tradition, “a set of practices . . . of a ritual or symbolic nature,” was invented in order “to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implie[d] continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 2012, p. 1). Though still perceived as a culturally inferior and ideologically intolerable element, at the symbolic level, indigenes became intrinsic to the construction of American identity. In his book *Playing Indian*, Philip Deloria discusses the cultural appropriation of the indigenous Other as a principal component of white America’s self-definition. According to Deloria, since the time of the Boston Tea Party, “playing Indian” has been integral to the establishment of American national character and asserting white dominance (P. Deloria 1998, pp. 5–20, 35–37). In the decades preceding the American Revolution, images of Native Americans served as a flexible tool of the colonial propaganda. By changing the Native’s gender, embellishment, and clothing, visualizing the Native as a savage enemy or a subservient Indian princess, British cartoonists depicted the American colonial landscape as rebellious, violent, and aggressive, or fertile, available to conquest, and civilized (P. Deloria 1998, pp. 28–29; Raheja 2010, p. 50). During the Revolution, however, those visual conventions were adapted to convey revolutionary messages. Colonial papers depicted the Indian Princess with European features, or whitened the complexion of Native bodies and clothed their nakedness, bringing the metaphoric Indian inside the boundaries of the American identity (P. Deloria 1998, pp. 29–30):

With the onset of outright war in 1775, the figure of the Indian appeared as not only noble and civilized, but also willful, determined, and strong. Indians appeared on military flags, newspaper mastheads, and numerous handbills. In a clear reference to the Tea Party, later printers would portray the American Congress as a colonist in Indian disguise. (P. Deloria 1998, p. 31)

Having secured its political independence, the new Republic sought to define itself in symbolic terms. Lacking the classical ornamentation of their Greco-Roman forebears, with no coliseums and pantheons in their landscape, the national mythmakers employed aboriginal cultures as its surrogate. Thereupon, in the mid-nineteenth century the first symbolic Indians appeared on United States coins as a sign of the country’s ancient tradition and its classical ideal (see P. Deloria 1998, p. 30; Zeitler 2008, p. 49).

One of the most popular coins of the time, known as the Indian Head Cent or Indian Head Penny (1859–1909), bore the portrait of a woman wearing a Native headdress.



Fig. 1. Indian head cent (1859–1864 / 1864–1909). *Numista*. <http://static-numista.com/catalogue/photos/etats-unis/g1280.jpg>. Accessed 23 May 2015.

Advocating its design, the coin's creator, James Barton Longacre, directly related its indigenous accessory to American democratic ideals:

From the copper shores of Lake Superior, to the silver mountains of Potosi from the Ojibwa to the Aramanian, the feathered tiara is as characteristic of the primitive races of our hemisphere, as the turban is of the Asiatic. Nor is there anything in its decorative character, repulsive to the association of Liberty. . . . It is more appropriate than the Phrygian cap, the emblem rather of the emancipated slave, than of the independent freeman, of those who are able to say "we were never in bondage to any man." I regard then this emblem of America as a proper and well defined portion of our national inheritance; and having now the opportunity of consecrating it as a memorial of Liberty, "our Liberty," American Liberty; why not use it? One more graceful can scarcely be devised. We have only to determine that it shall be appropriate, and all the world outside of us cannot wrest it from us. (as cited in Snow 2009, p. 25)

The Chief Engraver of the Philadelphia Mint, as the story goes, modeled his indigenous version of the goddess Liberty after the Greco-Roman *Venus Accroupie*, or Crouching Venus statue, which was on display in a Philadelphia museum, and his own sketches of his daughter, Sarah wearing the headdress of a Native American man. Four years earlier, in 1854, Longacre designed the three-dollar coin, depicting a female with a similar headdress on her head.



Fig. 2. Three-dollar gold coin (1854–1889). *U.S. rare coin investments*. [http://www.usrarecoininvestments.com/coin\\_info/three\\_dollars.htm](http://www.usrarecoininvestments.com/coin_info/three_dollars.htm). Accessed 23 May 2015.

He later adapted the same design for the gold dollar mint (Snow 2009, pp. 7–8, 21–26). In spite of their headdresses, which varied from a coronet (type 1 gold dollar) to a fanciful

feather bonnet (type 2 and 3 gold dollars), female figures on both the cent and the dollar mints were typically Caucasian, and their indigenous décor was distinctly unrelated to any Native tribe of the time.



Fig. 3. Liberty Head Gold Dollar—type 1 (1849–1854). *The coin spot*. <http://www.thecoinspot.com/1dg/1849%20ONE%20DOLLAR%20-%20GOLD%20Type%201,%20Liberty%20Head%20Obv.png>. Accessed 23 May 2015.



Fig. 4. Indian Princess Gold Dollar, small head—type 2 (1854–1856). *The coin spot*. <http://www.thecoinspot.com/1dg/1854%20GOLD%20DOLLAR%20-%20Type%202,%20Indian%20Princess,%20Small%20Head%20Obv.png>. Accessed 23 May 2015.



Fig. 5. Indian Princess Gold Dollar, large head—type 3 (1856–1889). *The coin spot*. <http://www.thecoinspot.com/1dg/1856-D%20GOLD%20DOLLAR%20Type%203,%20Indian%20Princess,%20Large%20Head%20Obv.png>. Accessed 23 May 2015.

A couple of decades before finding its way to the federal mints, during the 1820s, the noble Indian trope came to life. In tune with the romantic tradition and the national need for cultural independence from Europe, the era of visual celebration of American Indians began. While many painters from the East “produced Indian scenes in their studios,” some of them traveled

west to document Indians firsthand in their aboriginal surroundings (Flavin 2002, p. 1). The most famous artists from the latter group—George Catlin and Karl Bodmer—launched the generic Plains Indian prototype into the popular culture (Flavin 2002, p. 6).

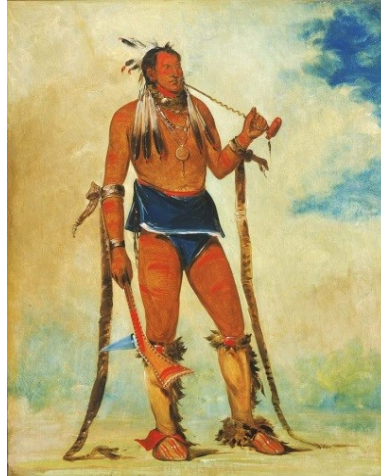


Fig. 6. George Catlin. Wah-chee-hahs-ka / Man Who Puts All Out Doors (1835). *Hoocher—index of George Catlin*. [http://hoocher.com/George\\_Catlin/Wah-chee-hahs-ka,\\_Man\\_Who\\_Puts\\_All\\_Out\\_of\\_Doors\\_1835.jpg](http://hoocher.com/George_Catlin/Wah-chee-hahs-ka,_Man_Who_Puts_All_Out_of_Doors_1835.jpg). Accessed 23 May 2015.

The wide recognition of their work (see Flavin 2002, pp. 6–11) added to the huge popularity of the Indian Head Cent, which was minted in more than a 1.8 billion pieces (Indian head cents mintage 2015, n.pag.).

Since late Roman times, the public circulation of coins has been an important medium of political propaganda. The social nature of coins, as objects existing in multiplied forms, distributed to a large number of people across a wide geographical area, allows for an effective dissemination of state sanctioned messages (see Elkins 2009, p. 30; Manders 2012, p. 3; Horster 2007, pp. 308–309):

[T]he ideological value of coins is demonstrated by the fact that emperors, the short-lived ones included, issued coin types immediately after their accession, that even usurpers who claimed the imperial throne for a short time minted their own coins and that the minting of coins by other persons than the emperor was considered a challenge to imperial power. (Manders 2012, p. 29)

However, unlike Roman coins, whose obverses regularly portrayed the emperor himself—when “the coin’s obverse bore a portrait other than that of the emperor, or one of his predecessors or family members, it is evident that the emperor’s authority was challenged and that a claim to power was made by an usurper” (Manders 2012, p. 32)—, nineteenth-century United States mints glorified the American Indian, suggesting a paradoxical discrepancy between the country’s political and cultural practices. The public circulation of Indian coins, from 1854 to 1938, concurred with the period of an aggressive indigenous expropriation and assimilation campaign. Introduced less than two decades after the forceful dislocation of the Five Civilized Tribes and

just a couple of years after the Mexican-American War, the Indian gold dollar became the most widely circulated federal coin of the time, a cherished symbol of the triumphant story of Western expansion and the California gold rush. Yet, while the minted images glorified indigenism as the “heart of American uniqueness” (P. Deloria 1998, p. 37) and the true legacy of the continent, a systematic legal, political, and military conquest of Native peoples was under way. For almost thirty years, the United States was engaged “in the first foreign wars in its history,” as Vine Deloria defined its warfare with the Plains tribes (1988, p. 51). In the same period, its government signed 285 treaties with Native nations—122 with their sovereign governments and 163 under domestic law. The last one, signed in 1904, also known as the Ten-Cent Treaty, sealed the federal policy of dispossession of its Native inhabitants by selling off ten million acres of Ojibwa land for ten Indian Head Pennies each (see also Camp 1990, p. 27). Turned into domestic dependent nations, American Indian people were not even citizens of the country that treasured them on its mints. Why then did the country devote its national currency to adversaries and ultimate victims of its imperial venture, turning them into emblems of the same statehood project through which their own sovereignty was denied? To resolve this paradox between the country’s political and visual program, one needs to examine both projects as products of the same ideological laboratory whose main aim was to remove indigenous people “outside the temporal bounds of modern society” (P. Deloria 1998, p. 94).

According to Huhndorf, in order to conceal the violent history of conquest, born from land theft and “genocide of Native peoples,” which “undermined the values of liberty and equality the nation claimed to hold dear” and “the legitimacy of the nation itself,” white Europeans had to turn Native Americans into originary figures of the nation (2001, pp. 23, 52). Significantly, upon the end of the American Indian Wars and the official closing of the frontier, as Native Americans ceased to be a military threat, the Euro-Americans began to identify with them on a large scale (Zeitler 2008, p. 1; Huhndorf 2001, pp. 35, 75). Defined as the predecessor of the quintessential American—the pioneer—the invented Indian became a principal character in the national creation myth.<sup>1</sup> The romanticized vision of the frontier past initiated a new turn-of-the-century masculine trend of going native marked by a proliferation of men’s and boy’s clubs and the Indian themed fraternal organizations that adorned the ancient and brave indigenous spirit and appropriated the Indian as their military ideal (Huhndorf 2001, pp. 65, 69). The Indian coin changed its gender accordingly. After fifty years of use, the popular copper and gold pieces bearing hybrid Caucasian-Indian princesses were discontinued and new Indian mints appeared—Half Eagle Indian Head Gold Coin (1908) and the Buffalo Nickel (1913).

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<sup>1</sup> As Michel Foucault (1971) explains, the discursive dominance is a manifestation of sorts of the real, institutionalized relations of power, whose practices produce new objects—the dominated, the subaltern, the marginalized, the Others. In that vein, in his study *Barbed Wire: A Political History*, French author and philosopher Olivier Razac argues that the disappearance of the frontier, open range cowboys, and “free Natives” turned the American West into a political myth that reflected a sense of loss of a society whose distinctive identity was grounded in conquest and encounter with the unknown (2009, p. 29).





Fig. 7. Half Eagle Indian Head Gold Coin (1908–1929). *Northwest territorial mint— numismatic coins*. [https://bullion.nwtmint.com/rare\\_halfindians.php](https://bullion.nwtmint.com/rare_halfindians.php). Accessed 23 May 2015.



Fig. 8. Buffalo Nickel (1913–1938). *USA coin book*. <http://www.usacoinbook.com/us-coins/buffalo-nickel-mound-type.jpg>. Accessed 23 May 2015.

Like their predecessors, the new numismatic Indians became the most cherished American coins. More than 1.2 billion pieces of Indian Head Nickels were minted in its quarter-century life, from 1913 to 1938. Designed by J. E. Fraser, six years before he sculpted his piece “The End of the Trail,” the new mint exhibited the main traits of the vanishing Indian trope—masculinity, nobility, and anachronism. Similarly to late Roman coinage, which reflected attempts of the emperor to naturalize his dominance by associating himself with the great past (Manders 2012, p. 45), the Buffalo Nickel evoked European America’s self-serving celebration of its military frontier days. Two decades after the end of the Plains wars, both the warrior on the obverse and the buffalo on the reverse came close to their demise. The 1910 United States Census data, which recorded only 237,000 Native inhabitants in the country (Porter 2005, p. 40), confirmed the prevailing political and scientific anticipation of their disappearance into history. Likewise, in the aftermath of the systematic decimation, by the end of the nineteenth century, only one herd of less than a thousand Yellowstone buffalo remained in the United States (Holm 2014). In tune with the federal tradition and law, according to which “no portrait of a living person” may appear on United States coins (Denominations 2015, n.pag.), the nickel paid homage to both the Indian and the buffalo by securing them within the boundaries of the national past.

According to Zeitler, “imperialist nostalgia”—the sentimental idealizing of the frontier period—reflects a broad-scale European-Americans’ desire to impose their narrative of the frontier conflict as the origin story of the nation (2008, pp. 92, 224). Reenacting history as spectacle, using the fetishized Natives in wild-west shows, motion pictures, and other forms of popular entertainment, the dominant group has staged its violent imperial history in its own

terms. Adoption of Native iconography in sport serves the same goal. More than a century after the frontier conquest, the sport-mascot Indian continues to vindicate the white masculine myth and national pride. It continues to exist as “the *indian*,” defined by Vizenor as a romantic colonial invention (1998, pp. 14, 35, 37, 183–189; 1990, p. 279; Bataille 2001, p. 4), a simulation that serves as the main disguise of colonial surveillance (Vizenor 1994, p. 9; 1976, p. xiii). According to Stuart Hall, in order to understand the traumatic nature of the colonial experience, one must be aware of the inextricable tie between hegemony and representation, as well as the fact that the politics of representation is a critical site for debating the production of cultural identities (1990, pp. 222–225):

The identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture . . . not “who we are” or “where we came from,” so much as . . . how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation. (Hall and Du Gay 2000, p. 4)

The fact that images represent a powerful instrument of colonial control that both reflects and enacts social hierarchies of power (see hooks 1992, p. 5; Loomba 1998, p. 99) is clearly visible in the evolution of the Washington team’s logo.

The team was founded in 1932, at the peak of the Great Depression. The present version of its name and its first logo were created in 1933, the year that marked the beginning of the New Deal. Four years later, in the period when the New Deal policies and the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act (1924) were taking their effect, galvanizing patriotism, national exclusivism, and cultural pride (see also The New Deal 2013, n.pag.; Bordeau 2010, p. 9), the team moved to the state capital and its second Indian logo came to life. United States’ military triumph in World War II, followed by the country’s rise to economic and political superpower, continued to fuel the national myth (see also Kennedy 2013, n.pag.). As the patriotic and nationalist spirit rose, resonating America’s post-World War II military endeavor for dominance abroad and the rise of conservatism and fear based policies at home, which culminated in the McCarthy era, the Washington team changed its logo design. Whereas the original style resembled Frazer’s popular vanishing Indian trope, the new Indian icon, introduced in 1952, showed an upright figure that replaced the fatigue and despair burdened face of its predecessor with fresh, optimistic features, evoking endurance, vigor, and hope.

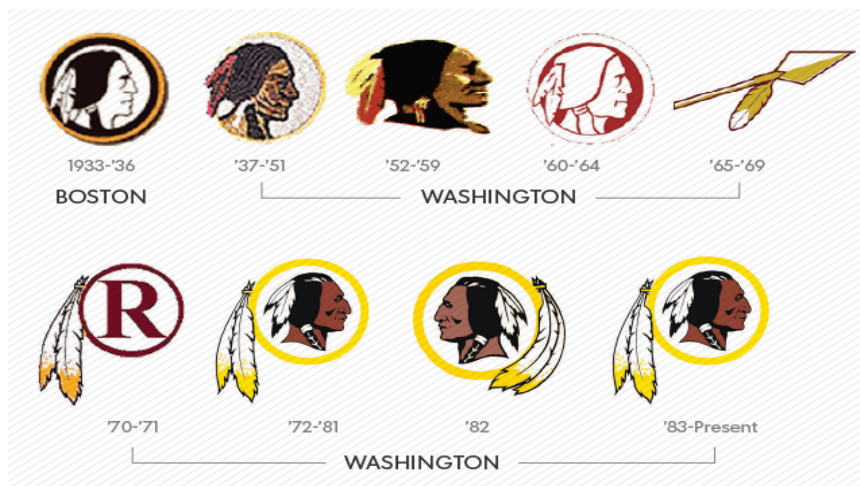


Fig. 9. Evolution of the Washington Redsk\*ns logo (1933–the Present). *USA Today—sports*. [http://i.usatoday.net/\\_common/\\_notches/8863c3fe-494a-4024-b2c9-b8793fccb630-Logos\\_2.png](http://i.usatoday.net/_common/_notches/8863c3fe-494a-4024-b2c9-b8793fccb630-Logos_2.png). Accessed 23 May 2015.

Yet, in the early 1960s, as the news on protest marches, sit-ins, and Freedom Riders in the Deep South swept across the country, announcing the spirit of the decade, the Washington logo changed its face once again. This time it became less elaborate, deprived of its cheerful smile and character shades and, most importantly, of its color; like its 1933 predecessor, the new metaphoric Indian on the Washington team’s logo became white. From 1965 to 1969, in the period when the mass revolt against injustice, oppression, and the war in Vietnam challenged the very essence of the nation—its social structures, ideological foundations, and hegemonic roots (see Zinn 2003, pp. 450–467)—along with other constructs of white America’s collective unconscious, the rugged pioneer masculinity lost its charm. Consequently, its symbolic Indian counterpart disappeared from the logo design. Its replacement with yet another symbol, between 1969 and 1972, coincided with the time of the mass pan-Indian movement. As indigenous activist groups occupied Alcatraz Island and staged sit-ins on college campuses and brief occupations of Ellis Island, Plymouth Rock, the Mayflower Replica, Mount Rushmore, and over fifty federal government sites (see also Rosier 2009, p. 256; Johansen 2013, pp. 12–21), the arrow got replaced with the letter R, leaving the iconic feathers as the last remnant of Indianness on the Washington team’s logo design. Another transformation of the logo, which occurred in 1972, coincided with the American Indian activists’ protest march on Washington DC known as the *Trail of Broken Treaties*. Described by Chaat Smith and Warrior as “the most important act of Indian resistance since the defeat of Custer at Little Big Horn” (1996, p. 165), the caravan, which started from the West coast, passed through almost all reservations, and ended with the occupation of the BIA building in the political heart of the nation (see Chaat Smith and Warrior 1996, p. 157; Indian activism 2013, n.pag.), initiated a new paradigm in the relationship between Native activists and the American political establishment, marked by the suppression of the American Indian Movement and its secret service surveillance and control. In the months preceding the resurgence of the frontier on Pine Ridge reservation, as the wounds of history and Native warriors’ conflict with federal military might were to be

reopened in Wounded Knee, the Washington team rehabilitated the spectacle Indian once again. The 1972 alteration of the logo design marked the end of a unique period in which, in the words of Howard Zinn, more movements for change were produced in such a short span of years than ever in American history. Yet, in the mid-1970s, the system that “in the course of two centuries had learned a good deal about the control of people” went to work again (Zinn 2003, p. 539). So did the logo of the Washington team. From then until today, the logo has only changed once, in 1982, but was soon returned to its 1972 shape. This brief chronology of the metamorphosis of the Washington team’s logo reveals its reciprocity to the social and economic processes, anxieties, and upheavals within broader American discourse. Moreover, by resonating with the shifting cultural mood—the adherence to or departure from the need to assert white supremacy by going native—the logo design exposes the internal dynamics underlying the dominant national myth and uncovers the direct correlation between the wielding of power and the distribution of power, manifested through what Mary Louise Pratt terms “the anti-conquest,” i.e. “strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony” (1997, p. 7).

Even though the visual identity of the logo has not changed since 1972, the legal and political battle for its redesign, which began at the same time (see Banks 1993, as cited in Zeitler 2008, p. 7), has carried on until today. The continued use of the Washington Redsk\*ns mascot has drawn strong opposition in the last few decades. In addition to two lawsuits—*Pro-Football, Inc. v. Harjo* and *Blackhorse v. Pro-Football, Inc.*—to revoke the trademark registration of the Washington team (see Bieler 2014, n.pag; Finnerty 2014, n.pag; Brady 2013a, n.pag.) and public appeals by the National Congress of American Indians (see Cox 2014a, n.pag.) and the United Nations special rapporteur James Anaya (see Washington “Redskins” Team Name 2014, n.pag.), over 115 civil rights professional organizations, educational, athletic, and scientific experts, sixty organizations that represent various groups of Native Americans, and 24 Native tribes have drawn attention to the harmful effect of using Native symbols and mascots by non-native sports teams, demanding that the Washington Redsk\*ns’ name and logo be changed (Steinfeldt et al. 2010, n.pag.). However, in spite of its large publicity, the battle against indigenous-related sports iconography seems far from over. Even though hundreds of college and high school teams have retired their mascots and team names over the years, professional teams have been unwilling to do the same. In fact, the name Redsk\*n continues to be “one of the most prominent franchises in the nation’s most popular sports league” (Brady 2013a, n.pag.). In 2014, in the same year when the United States patent office cancelled its trademarks, the Washington Redsk\*ns was the third most valuable franchise in the National Football League, valued at approximately \$2.4 billion according to Forbes magazine (Redskins 3rd-Most Valuable 2014, n.pag.), which largely accounts for Daniel Snyder’s persistent refusal to change his team’s brand.

However, the failure of indigenous activist groups to remove the Washington team’s name and logo design points not only to the ongoing domination of consumption-based representational practices that retail Native identity on the popular culture market but also to the persistence of the same hegemonic discourses and configurations of power that helped form those practices in the first place. Whereas the spirit of the civil rights and liberation movements

drew huge media and public support for the early 1970s Native cause (see Runtić & Knežević 2013, p. 172), contemporary activists have had to face fierce opposition from the white-supremacist and hard-core nationalist camps and act in a social climate marked by excessive patriotism, xenophobia, and economic unease similar to the one in which the Washington logo was born. In the wake of the Gulf Wars, post 9/11 sentiment, military operations in the Middle East, and the global economic crisis, initiatives such as the Tea Party—whose members have asserted their political and economic agenda in Indian disguise just like their eighteen-century namesakes (see St. Clair 2009, n.pag.)—and state legislations that tighten immigration control and stimulate racial profiling, the militarization and paramilitarization of the tribal border territories, and banning of Native books and ethnic studies programs, have turned the American public space into a new frontier in which indigenous identity, sovereignty, and human rights are compromised in the name of security and white national pride. Seen in that light, the contemporary activists' battlefield becomes much larger than a football ground. Contesting the centuries-old institutional investment in Native symbolization, the protesters inevitably challenge the very origin story of white privilege that it serves. Thereupon, their claim for visual sovereignty represents an important venue of indigenous self-determination and decolonization. It withstands the master narrative of colonial domination, as well as its deep-seated internalized mental residue, confirming Pratibha Parmar's words:

Images play a crucial role in defining and controlling the political and social power to which both individuals and marginalized groups have access. The deeply ideological nature of imagery determines not only how other people think about us but [also] how we think about ourselves. (Parmar 1990, p. 116)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This paper was completed in June, 2015, a few weeks before the *Blackhorse v. Pro-Football, Inc.* case was decided in favor of the plaintiffs and the U.S. Trademark Trial and Appeal Board's decision to cancel the Washington Redsk\*ns trademarks was affirmed.

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