

APA Resolution Press Release dated 10-18-05:

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Retrieved May 18, 2010 from <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2005/10/mascots.aspx>

October 18, 2005

APA Calls for the Immediate Retirement of American Indian Sports Mascots

Such Sports Mascots Promote Inaccurate Images and Stereotypes and Negatively Affect the Self-Esteem of Young American Indians

WASHINGTON, DC—The American Psychological Association is calling for the immediate retirement of all American Indian mascots, symbols, images and personalities by schools, colleges, universities, athletic teams and organizations, the Association announced today.

APA's action, approved by the Association's Council of Representatives, is based on a growing body of social science literature that shows the harmful effects of racial stereotyping and inaccurate racial portrayals, including the particularly harmful effects of American Indian sports mascots on the social identity development and self-esteem of American Indian young people.

"The use of American Indian mascots as symbols in school and university athletic programs is particularly troubling," says APA President, Ronald F. Levant, EdD. "Schools and universities are places of learning. These mascots are teaching stereotypical, misleading and, too often, insulting images of American Indians. And these negative lessons are not just affecting American Indian students; they are sending the wrong message to all students."

Psychologist Stephanie Fryberg, PhD, of the University of Arizona, has studied the impact of American Indian sports mascots on American Indian students as well as European American students. Her research shows the negative effect of such mascots on the self-esteem and community efficacy of American Indian students.

"American Indian mascots are harmful not only because they are often negative, but because they remind American Indians of the limited ways in which others see them," Fryberg states. "This in turn restricts the number of ways American Indians can see themselves."

The issue of the inappropriateness and potential harm of American Indian mascots is broader than the history and treatment of American Indians in our society say many psychologists who have studied issues of race in America. Such mascots are a contemporary example of prejudice by the dominant culture against racial and ethnic minority groups, according to these scholars.

Psychologist Lisa Thomas, PhD is a member of the APA Committee on Ethnic and Minority Affairs which drafted the Indian mascot resolution.

“We know from the literature that oppression, covert and overt racism, and perceived racism can have serious negative consequences for the mental health of American Indian and Alaska native (AIAN) people. We also need to pay careful attention to how these issues manifest themselves in the daily lives (e.g., school, work, traditional practices, and social activities) and experiences of AIAN individuals and communities. As natives, many of us have had personal and family experiences of being the target of frightening, humiliating, and infuriating behaviors on the part of others. This resolution makes a clear statement that racism toward, and the disrespect of, all people in our country and in the larger global context, will not be tolerated,” Dr. Thomas states.

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The American Psychological Association (APA), in Washington, DC, is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 150,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 53 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting human welfare.