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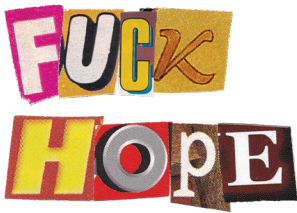
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The movement to ban, rename, or abolish Native American mascots in sports has seen successes over the last few years. There are no more Washington Redskins, and no more Chief Wahoo and Indigenous led momentum to push back against the Kansas City Chiefs was alive and well at Super Bowl LVIII in occupied Nuwuvi territory. Slogans were loudly chanted, signs were unapologetically held, and sports fans were confronted as they walked toward Allegiant Stadium.

There are plenty of valid reasons individuals are motivated to fight against Native mascots or offensive Native American imagery in mainstream media at large. There are harmful psychological effects on Native students at universities with Native mascots, the stereotyping of Indigenous people normalizes cultural imperialism, and many sports fans play Indian with varying offensive degrees of cultural appropriation. This exotification and othering are enough to motivate any Indigenous person to combat against it and the recent changes suggest some non-Natives are gradually disavowing the behavior as well. I am confident there will be a day when Native American mascots will be an embarrassing relic of American sports history.

However, settler-colonialism, characterized by the organized ongoing genocide of Indigenous people and the destruction of the land for the material benefit of massive settlements, will continue in that progressive future because the legacy of anti-Indigeneity remains fundamentally unchanged despite concessions to anti-mascot demands. Racist stereotypes, negative or tokenizing portrayals in media, and the cultural exploitation found on the dilapidated pit stops of Route 66 to the state-of-the-art mascot displays in billion-dollar football stadiums is only surface level activity for American colonialism. Any basic understanding of American history reveals the development and cultivation of the genocidal programs used against Indigenous peoples to the benefit of the settler's destructive appetite during the initial colonial invasion and the industrial revolution. Practically no one needs a history lesson on this today. Rather, everyone can be reminded that American capitalism has met changing popular attitudes against environmental destruction and resource theft with a savvy arsenal of greenwashed public relations campaigns to match their industrial ambitions to destroy Indigenous people and the lands we hold sacred.

Throughout the world, Indigenous people struggle against the interests of transnational corporations and the militarism of colonial states. Wherever there are Indigenous people living our own damn lives, there are men in business that require the land we are on and we will always be in their damn way. So, they use the police to remove us, the laws of the State to justify it, and then their growth capital will profit off our exploitation yet again. Today, a massive police training facility is being built by destroying Weelaunee forest where Muscogee were forcibly removed long ago, the Hualapai struggle against the development of a lithium mine in Ha’Kamwe, and the Tohono O’odham pilgrimage through U.S. border wall construction that pillages sacred sites of prayer and restricts free movement across their traditional territory.

This process of genocide has been rehearsed, performed, and perfected over and over again. Its repetition has created a dehumanization pathway that underpins settler activity regardless of individual intention, empathy, or ignorance. It’s a pathway for colonizers to travel effortlessly toward a profitable end, but for Indigenous peoples this dehumanization pathway is a hole in the earth severing our connection to the land. Settler society offers this dehumanization pathway for individuals and corporations alike. Whether you’re a small business owner hashtagging shop local online to peddle your extractive sage kits or you’re the National Football League accumulating wealth and resources through entertaining the discriminatory beliefs of every anti-Indian colonizer on stolen lands.

Discrimination through ethnic stereotyping is a facet of structural racism that emboldens non-Native individuals and groups to act upon their desires to dehumanize Indigenous people and view the land we are on as an undeveloped opportunity for their most capitalist schemes. Depictions of Native Americans as less than human function as a technique of dehumanization justifying genocidal actions against Indigenous people. If the logic of the dominant society, built through theft and murder, holds the same prejudices against Natives just like the few individuals committing forced relocation and resource exploitation, then how will the harm done be recognized let alone reconciled? It never will.

The fight against racist imagery is a fight against the colonizer’s technique of dehumanization. This fight will not be enough if we

don't reconsider Indigenous peoples' place, whether real or imagined, in the colonizer's conception of what it is to be human. If we have seen their vision and heard their articulation of what it is to be human, then we could ask if we should really desire or demand to be recognized by them as such. Eurocentric humanism has long emphasized the dominance and superiority of the human man over the lives of other humans, non-humans, and the land. This dominance and superiority define humanity through colonial restraints that historically excluded Indigenous peoples from its universal category. Instead, Eurocentric humanism chooses to frame Indigenous peoples as savages or primitive, creating a social position beneath their civilized humanity. If human is a social category designed, maintained, and policed by the colonizer's devotion to the Eurocentric ordering of the earth and its people, then what is the incentive for excluded humans, non-humans, and the land to achieve admission into this categorization today?

The American civilizing mission that was American Indian boarding schools was the colonizers attempt to forcefully assimilate or humanize us into their Eurocentric humanism and yet it still did not come with the privilege of safety and humane treatment that colonizers so comfortably enjoy/ed. Not as the Indian was killed and not as the man was saved. Not as they sang Hail to the Redskins and not as they sing Hail to the Commanders. Not when Peter Pan found out what made the red man red and not when Lily Gladstone was nominated for an Oscar. Not then and not now.

Indigenous people today are killed by police at an abnormally high rate and homicide is a high-ranking cause of death. The massive scale of the missing and murdered, the prison population, and the suicide rate of Indigenous peoples in so-called North America can only be accomplished with the pillaging infrastructure of industrial capitalism, the Indian-killing-legitimacy of the colonial State, and the fallacious superiority of the governing human colonizer.

Membership to humanness with the life affirming privileges it rewards will never be granted to Indigenous peoples so long as being counted as a human remains an affluent position within the material conditions of any society. An indigenous led fight that focuses only against dehumanization, may succeed, but would be a hollow reformation of a humanization qualification process in order for us to

proceed as an equal partner with colonizers and settler-colonialism. A partnership of self-defeat that can be seen now, has been seen before and, historically, benefited some Indigenous people only of a particular gender or color and only for a finite amount of time according to treaties that the colonizer was/is able to extract value from. In other words, settler inclusion demands a *humanity* with conditions and this inclusion can just as easily be given or taken away.

For Indigenous people under colonial occupation, to be human is to be sovereign and to be sovereign is to be nothing but a ward. A legal status no different than a national monument or an endangered animal. Under the dominion of civilized humans and their authority expecting our gratitude, labor, and support. An Indian in custody locked in a concrete cell, locked in a concrete classroom, and locked in a concrete workplace until we're buried in dead soil revitalizing the dirt next to concrete sidewalks beneath the ecocidal skyline of another massive settlement that could only be built with our genocide. This is the rate of return of the settler's humanism. We are human enough (by forceful assimilation) to be productive to the colonial project but inhuman enough to quickly become fodder at the first sign of unproductive insubordination.

An Indigenous led negation of humanization is a resistance to subsumption into Western paradigms that underpin the colonial logics of politics, humanity, and meaning. An Indigenous led negation offers a rejection of anthropocentrism, of the political as a colonial construct, and a refusal of the colonial narrative of progress. When we negate colonial systems and humanist ideals, we open space for existence not on any map. If we are not pursuing the negation of the human's ability to guard and permit entry into humanness then we are not liberating all life from the illegitimate denial of being our honored relative.



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## **A PROJECT OF INDIGENOUS NIHILISM**

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