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C. Richard King. *Redskins: Insult and Brand.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. 256 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-7864-6.

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Like a modern-day abolitionist tract, C. Richard Kingâs *Redskins* is a voice of truth clothed in one-sided and righteous language. If you feel that the Washington Redskins football club should change their brand, and you are looking for reasons to support your feelings, this is the right book for you; however, if you belong among the 60 percent of respondents who objected to changing the team name in the 2014 Rasmussen Reports, then you are more likely to feel distanced by Kingâs *Redskins* (p. 132). While the book is definitely on the right side of history, it comes across as a heavy-handed, moral crusade. Overall, King succeeds in at least two areas: amplifying the voices of Native American activists, and documenting the efforts of the NFL football franchise to defend and profit from its continued use of a racial slur. Nonetheless, Kingâs academic jargon, charged tone, moralistic arguments, penetrating bias, and idealistic conclusions are poised to alienate many of those who really need to read this book. That would be a shame, because there are no shortage of Americans who do.

King is a professor of comparative ethnic studies at Washington State University. He has been writing âabout the history and significance of Native American mascots for more than two decadesâ (p. 3). He identifies as âa casual fanâ of the Washington Redskins, yet he is unambiguous about his thoughts regarding the teamâs name, logo, and brand. He believes that the word Redskins âis a racial slur on par with other denigrating termsâ like the n-word (p. 1). Moreover, he believes the Redskins brandâand its associated images and practices, like the team song âHail to the Redskinsââhas âdeep roots in genocidal violence,â perpetuates anti-Indian racism, and denies Native peoples âcultural citizenshipâ while transforming âthem into props and playthingsâ (p. 167). Additionally, King does not believe that any American Indian âtrademarks, commodities, and brands can actually honor individuals or groups,â as their proponents often claim, and so he recommends that any ânew name for the Washington professional football team must make a real break with the nomenclature, iconography, and rituals of the past,â (pp. 156-158).

If that were all, *Redskins* would have been a much better book. But King advocates for more than just a brand change. What he really wants is for all of white America to wake up and confront the âuncomfortable realities of [anti-Indian] racism.â He wants the nation to âcome to terms with historic transgressions anchoring the team and its traditions,â and to âactively engage and address history, power, and race as manifested in U.S. settler colonialismâ (pp. 156, 166). He wants people to con-

front white privilege, end the âdouble standard on race,â and start caring about Natives the way they profess to care about other minorities (read: African Americans) (p. 82). This is a tall order; and, while Kingâs goal is noble, he does not always opt for a light touch. For example, he states that many Redskins fans have âunderdeveloped critical literacy,â âdo not have the faculties to be thoughtful,â and that Redskins owners âhave no interest in other perspectivesâ (pp. 54, 92).

This is the central problem with *Redskins*: King wants the book to be a practical argument against a very particular NFL brand, and a righteous indictment against a vague collection of ideas like white masculinity. Unfortunately, there is very little crossover here in terms of potential audience. America has many moderates, some even featured in this book, who would join the fight against the brand, yet are not interested in talking about âAmerican imperialism,â the âwhitestream media,â or âcritical literaciesâ in a ânew semiotic economyâ (pp. 120, 103, 172). Several times, Kingâs practical and idealistic tendencies actually come into conflict. For instance, when a source lays out a potential scenario where the brand may change by less than honorable intentions, King says this is âarguably worseâ because it points âto a moment in which [the owner] may be doubly rewarded for his past racism, receiving both public praise for advancing tolerance and largess for his business enterpriseâ (p. 97). Is King saying that he would reject such a proposal? That exposing one racist person is more important than changing a derogatory image that affects countless people?

King was motivated to compose *Redskins* in the spring of 2015 as a result of two questions: âHow do we stop the dehumanization of indigenous peoples? And how do we create new stories and spaces, reimagine self and society, and otherwise transform traditions to rehumanize them?â (p. 10). Predictably, *Redskins* does not succeed at answering these very ambitious questions. King ends the book with a list of seven proposals for making change, but most of them are abstract commandments. Readers are told to âstop stereotyping, divest, recognize humanity, educate, come to terms, honor, and create new imagesâ (p. 167). Without more clear action-steps, however, these instructions come off as wishful. Then, in his final paragraph, King abruptly calls for âthe league, and its media partnersâ to âpay reparations for decades of knowingly profiting off of racismâ (p. 172). Of course, there is no discussion about what this means in practical terms.

Oddly, King offers almost nothing about the history of the word Redskin prior to the teamâs existence. This is frustrating. Legacies of ethnic cleansing and dispossession are invoked repeatedly by King and his Native sources; yet *Redskins* offers no primary-source research before 1890, when Frank Baum used the slur in an editorial. Instead, King talks about myths and origin stories while relying on a brief summary of a few secondary works to inform the reader about the wordâs original meanings. The history of the word matters more than this. The n-word is despised largely because it was used against blacks by whites in acts of violence. If the same was true for the r-word, then the reader should know. Historical instances like these could have formed a very persuasive argument indeed.

Interestingly, King does not engage the counter arguments of critics who supposedly âmisconstrue the movement and its significance as âbeing âPCâ, liberal, or hating the âwhiteâ manâ (p. 53). This reviewer finds that strange, especially considering the rhetoric of the current presidential race. Many people honestly believe that political correctness is a real thing with an ability to erase identity. This view could foster interesting comparisons to both racism and cultural appropriation, which King argues serve to erase Native identity. But King does not seem interested in having that conversation.

Arguing that cultural imagery must be changed is a notoriously hard thing to do, and sometimes King overlooks the opposing arguments even as he invites them in. As he acknowledges, the word redskin, âlike many denigrating words, began as one thing and mutated over timeâ (p. 103). The issue with pursuing this line of reasoning is that it suggests the word is not actually the problemâthat its meaning was something else before (as he says, benign), and that it might just as naturally change again.

Nevertheless, King says something that inadvertently cuts to the heart of the PC debate. Although there is no reliable statistical measure for how many Native peoples actually dislike the Redskins brand, King inquires, âWhat percentage of the group in question â¦ needs to be offended before action should be taken?â (p. 135). That is a pressing question that the country should address. Thus far, there seems to be nothing approaching a standard. In the past year, African American activists and their allies have gotten a racist NBA coach fired, some Confederate flags lowered, and a diversity-themed Oscar presentation. All the while, protests by Native American activists have been relatively ignored.

Most notably, King does not discuss whether there could be some negative effects to changing the Redskins brand. First, changing the brand could mean that one more of the scarce referents mainstream society actually has to an idea of Native America is hidden from sight, foreclosing the opportunities for the productive and difficult conversations that had come along with it (this book included). Second, pressure surrounding the term Redskins has compelled the franchise to reach out to Native American communities, such as through the Original Americans Foundation (OAF). King proves that this organization is problematic, but that does not mean it cannot be made to work for native tribes in the future. If the brand was changed to a theme that did not reference Native Americaâlike the Washington Warriors, as the book suggestsâthen the franchise would lose its primary incentive for continuing these overtures. Maybe neither of these are good reasons to defend a racist slur; but, as counterarguments, they warrant discussion nonetheless.

Next, *Redskins* focuses too much on concepts like ethnic cleansing and anti-Indian racism, and too little on arguments that are most likely to compel a modern readership. The strongest case for changing the brand might be the harmful psychological effects that racial stereotypes have on young peopleâs self-esteem. These arguments are limited to a mere two-and-a-half pages, a section called âAppreciating Effects,â (p. 71-73). Similarly, one wishes King would have spent more time appealing directly to the people who are most capable of changing the brand, people like NFL commissioner Roger Goodall, Redskins owner Dan Snyder, sports commentators like Bob Costas, and Redskins fans. Kingâs two-page section entitled âRevenueâ hints at the kind of non-moralistic appeals that are most likely to convince or help these audiences, both those who are antagonistic toward the cause, and those who support it but are not about to attack colonial legacies on live TV.

All critiques aside, there are at least two things that King does very well and must be commended for. The first is amplifying Native American voices of protest and the second is documenting the sad efforts of the franchise to combat criticisms regarding its image. King argues that âThe [recent] impetus for change has come from Indian Country,â and he shows this throughout the text (p. 146). Readers will experience a wide range of indigenous voices with a variety of critiques about the Redskins franchise. This is far and away the best reason to pick up the book. It would be impossible for anyone to read *Redskins* and come away with the opinion that a sizeable number of leaders in the Native community do not strongly dislike the Redskins brand. Second, King does an excellent job at highlighting the often shameless strategies of the DC NFL team to protect its racial slur by hiding behind problematic surveys, âethnic frauds,â tokenism, and financial bribes (p. 115).

As a final note, the present reviewer is confused about why King permitted the name of his book to be *Redskins* while simultaneously declaring in a âNote on Languageâ that âpersistent reiteration makes [the slur] appear reasonable and even appropriate, a pattern that I think is important to disrupt and undermine,â (p. xiii). This is an obvious contradiction, since the title guarantees that the slur Redskins will be perpetuated on every website about the book. Perhaps King and his publishers are also tapping into the lucrative commercial prospects associated with brand recognition.

Overall, readers will have to wait and see whether Kingâs *Redskins* will be an effective tool for moving the needle towards change, or whether it will be perceived as just another partisan tract that is quickly forgotten. Either way, this reviewer can only hope the author is right when he states that Native American activism against the brand over the past four decades has reached a tipping point. After all, at its best the word redskins can invoke pride or apathy. At its worst, it can invoke hurtful imagery, low self-worth, and aggressive encounters between Natives and non-Natives, particularly at games and protests. In conclusion, Native activists will probably have to wait for Americans to actively engage their legacies of white privilege and settler colonialism. But they should not have to wait to be afforded the basic decency of not being labeled as a racial slur in the nationâs capital. All critiques aside, King could not be more right about that.

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