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## American Indians: We're Not Mascots! New Book, Co-edited by IWU Prof, Probes Use of Native American Mascots by College, Pro Sports Teams

Bob Aaron

*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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**CONTACT:** Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181

	<p><b><u><i>American Indians: We're Not Mascots!</i></u></b> <b>New Book, Co-edited by IWU Prof, Probes Use of Native American Mascots by College, Pro Sports Teams</b></p> <p>"Every time I watch the Washington Redskins or the Cleveland Indians (with their grotesque Chief Wahoo) I wonder what it must feel like to be a Native American sports fan and see oneself depicted this way. It just plain gives me the willies. <i>Team Spirits</i> shows me why." Rick Telander Sports Columnist <i>Chicago Sun-Times</i></p>
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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--The Wichita Whites . . . the Kankakee Kikes . . . the Detroit Darkies . . .  
or the Johnstown Japs.

Would you be horrified if your favorite football, baseball or basketball team's nickname  
amounted to a racial slur?

Of course.

But, most Americans take it in stride when they tune in to a Washington Redskins' football  
game, buy a ticket to an Atlanta Braves' baseball game, or read a magazine article about the  
exploits of the Florida State Seminoles.

Why?

The use and abuse of Native American mascots by high school, college, and professional sports  
teams--and the emotional controversy surrounding these images--are the target of a new book co-  
edited by an Illinois Wesleyan University Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Charles  
Fruehling Springwood.

### **"Team Spirits"**

The book, "Team Spirits: The Native American Mascots Controversy," is the first  
comprehensive look at the debate over this issue. It's hitting the bookstores at a time when a  
college like the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign is grappling with the future of its sports  
team symbol, the controversial Chief Illiniwek, and as a case is on appeal in the courts involving  
the Native American-style trademark of the Washington Redskins.

In "Team Spirits," according to the publisher, the University of Nebraska Press, "activists and academics explore the origins of Native American mascots, the messages they convey, and the reasons for their persistence into the twenty-first century.

"The essays examine hotly contested uses of mascots, including the Washington Redskins, the Cleveland Indians, and the University of Illinois's Chief Illiniwek, as well as equally problematic but more complicated examples such as the Florida State Seminoles and the multitude of Native mascots at Marquette University. Also showcased are examples of successful opposition, including an end to Native American mascots at Springfield College and in Los Angeles public schools."

"Team Spirits," a 288-page volume, will be published next month. Springwood's co-editor is C. Richard King, assistant professor of anthropology at Drake University.

### **Poses Powerful Questions**

"Team Spirits" probes several powerful questions, including: What does it mean to 'play Indian' at half-time?, Why are Native American mascots so common and other racially based mascots nearly non-existent? Why do these mascots persist?, Why do some Native Americans support them?, How do these mascots change over time?, and What do these mascots say about the changing role of Native Americans in public culture?

"Team Spirits" also contains groundbreaking analyses of major universities, including Florida State, Marquette, and the University of Illinois and their Native American mascots. It also includes studies of important American Indians and their entanglements with mascots, namely Olympian and pro-football standout Jim Thorpe and the Oorang Indians.

Essentially, "Team Spirits" is about power, Springwood said in an interview on the eve of the book's publication. "White Americans," he explained, "have the power to name things and control them." The controversy over Native American mascots, he added, is about "who ought to be in control of popular symbols of Native Americans--the Native Americans aren't in control and they are fighting for it."

Springwood estimates that animals and Native American symbols are the two most common sports team mascots, respectively. But, why do some sports teams choose Native American symbols as team mascots?

"Supporters say it honors Native Americans," according to Springwood, who decries this notion, pointing out that many of the mascots do not accurately depict Native American culture. "It is a repackaging of history," he added.

Vine Deloria, Jr., author of the acclaimed "Custer Died for Your Sins" wrote in the Foreword to "Team Spirits": "Sports mascots have come under increasing fire by American Indians as they try to achieve equal status as an identifiable ethnic group within American society . . . Why are Indians singled out as a group of people devoid of the sentiments that characterize other groups?"

No team in any sport has its logo or slogans used to demean another identifiable ethnic, religious, or economic group."

Deloria added: "And when a group . . . filed to cancel the trademark of the Washington Redskins, some sportswriters complained that now Bears, Dolphins, and Lions would all complain. This kind of racism is buried so deeply in the American psyche that it may be impossible to resolve."

Springwood describes Deloria as "the most famous Native American scholar" and a plaintiff in the Washington Redskins' trademark case.

### **Progress Cited**

Deloria and others concede some progress has been made in curtailing Native American images in American athletics. "Progress is being made in many places in this country," Deloria wrote in the Foreword to "Team Spirits," "as school after school, and college after college, changes its name and adopts neutral slogans and mascots."

The National Coalition on Racism in Sports and Media reports that more than 80 colleges and universities still have Native American mascots. However, many campuses have scuttled use of these mascots: Dartmouth changed its nickname from Indians to Big Green, Dickinson State (N.D.) changed from Savages to Blue Hawks, St. John's (N.Y.) went from Redmen to the Red Storm, and Stanford adopted the nickname Cardinal, replacing the moniker, Indians.

"As for high schools," Springwood says, "my professional guess is that several hundred such nicknames and mascots still exist, and a few hundred have been retired over the last 20 years."

Schools have been most successful in retiring their Native American mascots, Springwood pointed out, when change comes from the top. At Eastern Michigan University, for example, the president spurred the effort to switch the school's symbol from the Hurons to the Eagles.

### **Resisting Change**

However, some schools have resisted giving up their Native American mascots. Springwood notes that supporters of these symbols claim that changing them would trigger a loss in financial and other support from alumni, boosters, and fans.

While Springwood acknowledges the "emotional investment" boosters have in these Native American symbols, he also observes: "Perhaps there might be an initial decline in alumni contributions, but time seems to heal" such wounds "in perhaps as little as five years." He also notes that in 10-15 years a substantial number of alumni would have grown up with the new team name and symbol, making previous symbols antiquities.

### **Long-Term Interest**

Springwood's interest in Native American mascots dates to his days as a student at the University of Illinois, where Chief Illiniwek, dressed in "authentic Indian attire" has symbolized the campus' varsity sports teams since the 1920s.

As a native of Illinois, Springwood said he was aware of the controversy swirling around Chief Illiniwek. However, he became persuaded to the position of the critics as he gathered information in connection with a piece that he wrote as a graduate student.

"I began to interview people," Springwood explained, "and do library research. I spoke to Native Americans and people in the sports information department."

As time went on, Springwood was smitten by the subject and decided to team up with his co-editor to do a book with a divergent range of voices discussing Native American mascots at different levels of athletics.

Springwood, who describes himself as a "big sports fan," hopes readers come away from "Team Spirits" with a strong interest in the issues surrounding Native American mascots. He also wants readers to understand the broad scope of issues affecting specific communities where these mascots are controversial.

"I want people," he explained, "to come away with a sense of the importance of these issues. People aren't fighting over a silly symbol. These mascots have histories that many people are unaware of. This issue should be taken seriously."

### **About the Editors**

Springwood, 36, is a native of Naperville, Ill., a Chicago suburb. Prior to joining the Illinois Wesleyan faculty in 1994, he was an assistant professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and at Luther College. He is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Purdue University and received a master's degree and Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Springwood is a member of the American Anthropological Association and the Society for Cultural Anthropology. He is the author of "Cooperstown to Dyersville: A Geography of Baseball Nostalgia" (1996).

King, 32, is originally from Manhattan, Kan. He received a bachelor's and master's degree in anthropology from the University of Kansas and a doctorate in the field from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. King is the editor of a collection, "Postcolonial America," and the author of "Colonial Discourse, Collective Memories, and the Exhibition of Native American Cultures and Histories in the Contemporary United States." He is a member of the American Anthropological Association, Society for the Anthropology of North America, and the Society for Cultural Anthropology.

### **About "Team Spirits"**

"Team Spirits" is organized into five parts: Inventions, Whiteness, Activism, Interventions, and Complications. It contains 14 essays and an epilogue by the book's co-authors.

"The book has a mix of authors," Springwood said. "The authors are Native Americans and Anglos, some are academics, and two or three are Native American activists."

A description of the book points out that, "'Team Spirits' brings together a collection of scholars and activists whose diverse professional and political experiences energize the volume and its critical perspective. In the classroom and in the courtroom, as activists and as authors, all of the contributors have engaged Native American mascots previously and passionately."

Two of the authors of essays in "Team Spirits" were lead plaintiffs in litigation against the Washington Redskins of the National Football League. They are Vine Deloria, Jr., the renowned Native American intellectual and Susan Shown Harjo, executive director of the Morning Star Institute.

"Team Spirits: The Native American Mascots Controversy" (ISBN 0-8032-7798-9) is priced at \$24.95 per copy. For further information, contact: Erika Kuebler Rippeteau at the University of Nebraska Press, 233 N. 8th Street, Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0255; phone 402/472-3581 or FAX 402/472-0308.

### **About IWU**

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls more than 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. A \$26 million library and a \$6 million student center are under construction.

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***Editor's Note:*** To arrange interviews with Illinois Wesleyan University Assistant Professor of Anthropology Charles Fruehling Springwood about the new book he co-edited, "Team Spirits: The Native American Mascots Controversy," call: Bob Aaron, Director of University Communications, Illinois Wesleyan University, at 309/556-3181 or e-mail at [baaron@titan.iwu.edu](mailto:baaron@titan.iwu.edu).