

Redskins and respect

By [E. Carrington Heath](#)

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Some of my favorite early memories involve the Washington Redskins. For as long as I remember, I've watched games on Sundays. My father is a Washington, D.C. native who has been a fan of the team since they moved to town from Boston in 1937. I've watched the 'Skins play with four generations of my family and, though I now live near a team that regularly makes the playoffs, my loyalty remains with my oft-beleaguered Washington football team.

I'm telling you all this to say, in short, that I am a lifelong Washington Redskins fan. I love them. I love them when they are beating Dallas. I love them when they are winning playoff games. And I even love them when they are getting destroyed by the Broncos at Mile High, like they were a week ago. I'm a dyed-in-the-wool Washington Redskins loyalist.

And I want them to change their name.

I can't remember exactly when it struck me that the name "Redskins" had anything to do with race or skin color. I had no idea when I said my favorite team's name that I was actually repeating what at least some Native Americans consider a racial slur. And the reality is that I think very few people who say the word "Redskins," as it pertains to football, have conscious racist intent.

But that doesn't mean it's not racist. And enough Native Americans have stood up to tell those of us who do not share their heritage that it is, in fact, offensive. That should be enough for us. Tessa McLean, who is a member of the Ojibwe Nation, recently [told](#) NBC News that the word "Redskins" is "a term that was created for proof of Indian kill." In other words, a "Redskin" is proof that a Native American is dead. Which, when you think about it, is both pretty terrible, and pretty counterintuitive for a team that has appropriated Native American imagery.

To me, this is where the folks in the front office of the Redskins should stop and realize that maybe offending a group of people with a pejorative name based on their skin color is not only a bad business practice but, you know, just plain indecent.

But, as of now, that has not happened.

In fact, Daniel Snyder, the team's owner, has gone so far as [to say](#) that, "We'll never change the name." He also [wrote](#) in a letter addressing the matter that "Our past isn't just where we came from—it's who we are."

What's odd to me about that is that the Redskins have made big changes in traditions before. For instance, the Redskins were the last professional football team to integrate, waiting until 1962 to do so. I'd like to think that we've come pretty far from that past. The team also changed the words to its fight song, "Hail to the Redskins" from "fight for all Dixie" to "fight for all D.C.," another positive change.

And then there's the part where they left Washington, D.C. and a stadium named for a champion of civil rights and moved to Maryland in a stadium named for... a package delivery company. So, clearly change is possible in the Redskins organization, even if it means that traditions and heritage are on the line.

I'm not sure what the real reluctance to change the name is about unless it's the fact that no one in the Redskins front office cares enough about the offense they are causing to at least a significant portion of Native Americans. It's not that there is a lack of other acceptable names. The *Washington Post* has suggested a slew of other names that capture the spirit of Washington, D.C. far better than "Redskins" ever has, for instance. Perhaps in a town filled with military personnel and government employees, a name that honored them would be more appropriate?

Pressure continues to build on the Redskins to change the name, coming from everywhere from Native American organizations, to newspapers and magazines refusing to use the team name in print, to the NFL itself. But the more a name change is called for, the more the team digs in its heels. Which makes me wonder, is anyone in the Redskins' front office capable of seeing that this isn't about being forced to change a tradition?

Changing the Redskins' name is not an example of political correctness run amuck. It's a testament to the fact that people deserve to be treated with respect. It's common courtesy. And, for those of us who are people of faith, it's also a matter of seeing the image of God in the other and refusing to use an offensive slur to name it. For me, this is a theological matter. This is about the basic business of loving one's neighbor as one's self. And none of us, Mr. Snyder included I'm sure, likes to be characterized by a slur (even if the one saying it means no harm).

For now, though, I'm not holding my breath that the Redskins will be changing their name in the near future. But I am also not opening my wallet in order to buy anything with the Redskins name on it. I refuse to display it, whether on a hat or a sweatshirt, because I refuse to knowingly cause offense. I also refuse to contribute to an organization that won't proactively change. Maybe other lifelong fans like me will choose the same route. And maybe, somehow, together we will send a message to Dan Snyder and the team that it's time for a change.

When that change comes, I'll be glad to line up at FedEx Field for tickets. And, more importantly, I'll be proud to call myself a Washington football fan. And who knows...with this issue of the name resolved, maybe the team could spend a little more time concentrating on making it to the big game? That would be a return to tradition that every Washington fan could get behind.

Originally posted at [Heath's blog](#)