

Point of View

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Red Sambos and Uncle Tomahawks

By Bernice Powell Jackson

They came from the four directions, from reservations and big cities, from colleges and Big Sky country. They came from Cleveland and Atlanta to protest the misuse of their names and the racism of the images used by the World Series teams. They came to say no to Chief Wahoo and to the Atlanta tomahawk chop.



Bernice Powell Jackson

They were native American people who came to say that a grinning, red-faced, buck-toothed, big-nosed, bulging-eyed Chief Wahoo is no honor for them. They came to say that native Americans are human beings who should not be trivialized and dehumanized by making them sports team mascots. They came to say that taking away their humanity is the final insult to a people whose land was stolen and ancestors annihilated.

It's not funny to native Americans to see others, often drunk and rowdy at games, dressed up in feathers and face paint and whooping or making a so-called tomahawk chop. The image of the war-loving and less-than-human Indian is just as damaging and dangerous for native Americans as Aunt Jemima or Buckwheat or Amos and Andy were to African Americans a generation ago. Little black Sambo was racist then and Chief Wahoo is racist now.

It's not funny to native American children to be subjected to stereotypes of their people. Many native American children live with enormous self-esteem problems, resulting in the highest drop-out rates, the highest suicide and alcoholism rates and the lowest academic advancement levels of any people of color in this country. Incredibly, the Cleveland superintendent of school has encouraged children and teachers to wear Indians baseball attire and display Chief Wahoo posters in the schools. It's kind of like encouraging them to wear black face and Cleveland Native Americans have filed a class action suit to stop this.

It's not funny to native American people to have their spiritual dances and sacred clothing used by fans during games. Imagine how Christians would feel if fans dressed in clergy robes or how Jews would feel if they wore yarmulkes and prayer shawls.

Often one hears people say that the name "Indians" and the logo Chief Wahoo are to honor native Americans and Louis Sockalexis, a turn of the century Cleveland player who was native American. Sockalexis actually played less than three seasons for Cleveland, all the while being taunted by war whoops and yells of derision by fans, which contributed to his alcoholism and early retirement from the game. Today Sockalexis' descendants say Chief Wahoo is no honor to him or to them. If a name and logo offend the very people they are supposedly honoring, then the name and the logo must be changed. As Erik Brady wrote in USA Today, "Look closely at Chief Wahoo. Where, exactly, is the honor?"

Another often-heard explanation is that the name and the logos are traditions. Unfortunately, racism is a tradition in this country, but that does not mean we have to continue it. In the aftermath of O.J. and the Million Man March, we've heard a lot about how this nation doesn't get it when it comes to racism. When it comes to turning into mascots and stereotypes a dignified, religious people who have contributed language, law, medicine, culture and the land itself to our nation's legacy we still don't get it.

The Atlanta Braves. The Cleveland Indians. The Kansas City Chiefs. The Washington Redskins. Atlanta, Cleveland, Kansas City, and D.C. fans — let's stop the big lie about honoring Native Americans. Let's stop demeaning our Indian brothers and sisters. Let's stop buying and supporting racist names and logos.

Ted Turner, Atlanta can do better. Dick Jacobs, Cleveland can do better. Lemar Hunt, Kansas City can do better. Jack Kent Cooke, our Nation's Capital can do better. For the sake of us all, let's take racism out of sports. Let's prove that we in this nation are beginning to get it and aren't afraid to do something about it.



ALONG THE COLOR LINE INEQUALITY AND IMPRISONMENT

(Part one of a two part series)
By Manning Marable

A central reason for the success of the "Million Man March" and its popularity among a clear majority of African-Americans, was the general recognition that blacks were faced with an unprecedented crisis within the US political and economic system. Politically, both major parties had largely repudiated in the legacy of Civil Rights reforms and the social welfare expenditures of the Great Society. While politicians campaigned aggressively against affirmative action, minority economic set-aside programs, and majority-black legislative districts. Within the deep structure of the political economy and legal apparatus, blacks were caught within a vise characterized by unemployment, growing social inequality and imprisonment. Indeed, the single most important material reality of American society in the 1990s is the vast polarization of classes, the unprecedented rise in personal incomes and profits among a small minority of American households, and the expansion of social misery, falling incomes and inequality for the majority of the population of the country.

We can measure rising inequality by comparing family incomes. Between 1980 and 1992, for the bottom 25 percent of all US families in terms of average incomes, their share of the total national income fell from 7.6 percent to 6.5 percent. Real average annual incomes for the bottom 25 percent, adjusted by inflation, fell sharply from \$12,359 in 1980 to \$11,530 twelve years later. By sharp contrast, for the upper 25 percent of all US families, their share of the total national income rose

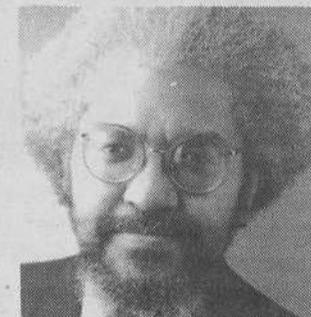
between 1980 and 1992 from 48.2 percent to 51.3 percent. Their real average family incomes increased from \$78,844 to \$91,368. But this actually underestimates the income inequality inside the US. One recent study by economist Lynn A Karoly found that those in the top ten percent of all incomes earned 5.6 times as much per hour in 1992 as did workers in the bottom ten percent. And when we measure total net wealth rather than salaries or wages, an even sharper class division becomes clear. As of 1993, the top one percent of all income earners in the US had a greater combined net wealth than the bottom 95 percent of all income earners. In short, a small number of individuals—two to three million at most—control the overwhelming majority of the resources.

The massive inequality can also be measured in our cities. According to a survey of the 85 largest metropolitan areas in the US by Wayne State University Professor Larry C. Ledebur, between 1973 and 1989, the overall average of all wage earners living in the cities fell by 16 percent. In the New York borough of Manhattan, where I live, the poorest one-fifth of the population in 1990 earned an annual income of \$5,237. The richest one-fifth earned an average income of \$110,199 annually. In individual neighborhoods less than three miles apart, the vast income gap between affluence and poverty can only be described as obscene. In West Harlem, for example, a predominantly African-American and Dominican community, the average annual family income was \$6,019. The average incomes for affluent families in one district

of Manhattan's upper East Side was \$301,209. In other words, for every dollar that the wealthy households have, the poorest have two cents.

The identical profile of inequality exists in every American city. In Los Angeles, the median annual incomes of the poorest fifth and the wealthiest fifth in 1990 were \$6,821 vs. \$123,098, respectively. In Chicago, the median annual income gap was \$4,743 vs. \$86,632. In Detroit, the difference was \$3,109 vs. \$63,625. And in Orleans Parish, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, the rich made 30 times as much as the poor, \$83,389 compared with \$2,793. Millions of median income households are forced to have three or more income earners, just to stay even. Millions have been pushed into unemployment and poverty, while for America's privileged and powerful elite, things have never been better.

The conservative political agenda of the 1980s and 1990s, from Reaganism to Newt Gingrich's "Contract With America," rests fundamentally on



DR. MANNING MARABLE

this core reality of escalating, expanding inequality. The ruling elites have to hide these statistics, or at a minimum, blame the hardships of white working class people on the behavior of blacks, Latinos and other people of color. "Race" is deliberately manipulated to obscure class inequality, and the decisive reason of poverty, unemployment and social unrest.

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