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J 412

Final Project Proposal; Prompt 1

Our study will focus on the concept of “Selling” Native Americans, and how they are commodified through advertisements and products. This takes place in the food industry, entertainment, and even clothing industry. We aim to focus on Professional sports within the United States. We have chosen to study this topic, with a concentration in the theme of professional sports, due to the widespread reach the name and actions can have upon the American people. There has been little heard on this subject, due to how our culture has taught us to view the teams, and the little amount of Native Americans left to voice their opinion. Their small size does not allow for them to be heard, or noticed like other races can be heard, which has led to neglect. We not only want to prove that the organizations take over the image of Native Americans within all facets of the products they produce, but also do it in a negative and wrong manner. We aim to look into what the teams claim is done with honor to the Native American culture, when in reality they are not even close to having an accurate portrayal of Native American culture.

The research question we have chosen is, How are Native Americans commodified by products and advertisements within professional sports? This will allow for us to analyze the marketing and products from professional sports teams that reach millions of people, and therefore affect the nation the most. Professional teams such as the

Atlanta Braves, Cleveland Indians, Kansas City Chiefs, Chicago Blackhawks, and Washington Redskins were founded based on the culture of Native Americans and still use their image to this day. While others, such as the Atlanta Hawks, changed their names to reduce the negative imagery, but still maintain some of the old culture, due to their fan base still portraying old logos and negative imagery pertaining to the team. Some teams, such as the Seattle Seahawks, have been able to keep their relations with the local tribe strong, while still commodifying Native Americans in products and advertisements. This will be shown in a 5-10 slide Powerpoint slideshow, and analyzed in a 5-8 page paper.

Annotated Bibliography

Bresnahan, Mary Jiang, and Kelly Flowers. "The Effects of Involvement in Sports on Attitudes Toward Native American Sport Mascots." *Howard Journal of Communications* 19.2 (2008): 165-81. Print.

This article details the study of whether the degree of involvement in sports affected attitudes about the acceptability of Native American sport mascots. Through the measure of sport involvement, in a multitude of ways, it is seen that high sport involvement predicted greater acceptance of Native American mascots. Only sixteen percent of the study saw the Native American mascots as offensive, with the rest showing approval for the mascots. The article discusses mascots from universities and professional teams. This is discussed in conjunction with the power of the mascots image in shaping attitudes of Native Americans. This article was written by Mary Bresnahan from the Department of Communication, Michigan State University. Along with, Kelly Flowers from the Department of Journalism and Mass communications, University of Florida.

Davis-Delano, Lauren R. "Eliminating Native American Mascots: Ingredients for Success." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. 31.4 (2007): 340-373. Print.

This article describes what the author claims has been missed by others when discussing the problems with Native American mascots. The author states no scholar has systematically studied what factors affect the outcomes of struggles over Native American mascots. There are 14 different cases discussed throughout the article, with the author interviewing two opponents and two supporters of the mascots. The article further discusses the barriers that mascot supporters face, and why, along with possible answers to fix their problem. The overall focus is seen on educating the community and school members, especially those with influence within the community. This article was written by Laurel R. Davis-Delano from Springfield College, Massachusetts.

Johnson, Daniel Morley. "From the Tomahawk Chop to the Road Block: Discourses of Savagism in Whitestream Media." *American Indian Quarterly* 35.1 (2011): 104-34.

Print.

The article explores the use, perpetuation, and legitimization of anti-Indigenous rhetoric (discourses of Savagism) in media with regard to two major flashpoints of misrepresentation: racist sports imagery and anti-colonial Indigenous protest. This is all spoken in reference to the state of Native American representation within Canadian mainstream media, as well as the influence that the government has had upon Native American representation. It is seen that the role of print and broadcast media perpetuates the government's anti-Indigenous rhetoric and promotes its validity. Further discussion takes place on how the Canadian government's influence on media has affected the mindset of its people, and its youth, in regards to their attitudes towards Native Americans. In the end, Savagism-Civilization binary is seen to be alive in the minds of many non-Indigenous settler-colonists, which legitimizes the ongoing use of racist sports symbolism and Savagist discourse in media reporting of complex Indigenous issues. This article was written by Daniel Morley Johnson and his friend Daniel Heath Justice from the Cherokee Nation.

King, C Richard, and Charles Fruehling Springwood. *Team Spirits: The Native American Mascots Controversy*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. Print.

This is a book containing fourteen different articles, which relate to the Native American mascot controversy. The book studies the controversy over the use of Native American mascots by professional sports, colleges, and high schools, describing the origins and messages conveyed by such mascots as the Atlanta Braves and Washington Redskins. The chapters in this book, taken together, represent a broad critic of Native American mascots. They make plain that such enactments of indianness hinge on romantic, and frequently racist, renderings of Native Americans. Focusing on effects rather than intent, they further suggest that these invented icons harm embodied Indians. The articles are done by different authors. Donald M. Fisher, Mary Landreth, Richard Clark Eckert, Ellen J. Staurowsky, Patrick Russell LeBeau, David Prochaska, Suzan Shown Harjo, Ann Marie Machamer, Laurel R. Davis, Malvina T. Rau, Jay

Rosenstein, and Cornel D. Pewewardy. The authors of the book are C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, whom have three articles within the book.

Miller, B. Jackson "Indians, Braves, and Redskins: A performative struggle for control of an image." *The Quarterly journal of speech* [0033-5630] Miller yr:1999 vol:85 iss:2 pg:188 -20

The article is on the topic of how Native American groups across the country have been protesting the use of their symbols and heritage in sports for over a decade. Focusing more so on the fact that these protests have not generated significant changes in attitudes and practices. The article examines several Native American protest events to reveal the factors contributing to the failure of the reform movement. The fan culture found within professional sports contributes to the failure greatly. The protests mentioned take place outside of stadiums and at sporting events, and has proven to not be an effective strategy. Further strategies are discussed to discourage the use of the professional sports team logos, such as not purchasing the products as an economic strategy. This article was written by Jackson B. Miller an instructor in Speech and Theatre at Eastern Oregon University.

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Final Paper

The Commodification of Native Americans in Professional Sports

Native Americans have been belittled throughout the history of our country. This has affected the cultural practices and identity of Native Americans, through the distortion of their image in the public eye. The American population became intoxicated with Native American culture within the last century. A large reason for this is John Wayne's famous westerns, in conjunction with professional sports teams. Professional sports teams contribute to the idea of "Selling Native Americans", through the commodification of their culture and appearance through advertisements, products, fan atmosphere, logos, and mascots. These teams are in another realm due to their expanded reach and perpetuation of the racist stereotypes that comes with their logo, mascot, products, and fans.

This mass production of professional team's goods is meant to honor the Native Americans and portray their culture properly. However, this is not the case for a majority of the teams because of their lack of knowledge and overall ignorance towards real traditions and culture. As examples, we chose to look at Professional American teams, one of which are the Washington Redskins of the National Football League. It has become publicly known that the term redskin should not be used, and is

highly offense to a majority of Native Americans. Tim Giego, a leader of the protest movement, says, "It's not so much the fact that a team is named after a race of people or the color of that people's skin; instead, what protesters find offensive are the sham rituals and ridiculous impersonations that become a part of those rituals"(qtd. in Lipman)"(Miller 189). With that in mind, the Redskins organization still claims that they are using the name in honor of the people.

Along with this, the fans continue to dress and act like Native Americans. This includes the use of "red face", the idea of painting ones face red to mimic the Native American people. During the dress up, the fans will use tomahawks and wear feathers. "Embody the persona of the ideal sports fan (i.e. wild, chanting, uncontrolled, loyal to the group) is akin to embodying the role of Indian"(Miller 189). This has nothing to do with Native American culture, or how it's people act, and has turned into a perpetual mockery of the people. If you compare a modern Native American to the fans, you will see no resemblance in they way that they act or look. While formal attire does include feathers, the typical Native American does not walk around with an all feather headdress on a daily basis. This is something that has existed and manifested into out of control attire and actions that no organization can control. The fan culture will create its own images of Native Americans because of the name, and will always continue to 'support their team'. The team has created this perpetual culture around themselves, but have added to it through the sale of actual products that make Native Americans into commodities.

The creation of products is a factor that professional teams control with

meticulous detail, yet the idea of “Selling Native Americans” is still present within their actions. The Atlanta Braves of Major League Baseball changed their name from the Beaneaters in 1912, and have been objectifying Native Americans ever since. The original logo was simple, the side profile of a red faced Native American which they introduced at the 1914 World Series, a series they miraculously won. The logo has since changed from images of a Native American to the current logo of a tomahawk. This does not directly show the Native American, but paints a picture of what Native Americans represent. “We might thus think of dancing halftime mascots or Ted Turner and Jane Fonda doing the tomahawk chop at an Atlanta Braves game (all in good fun, right, Jane?) as a symptom of our European American culture succumbing to a self-inflicted mental disorder”(Johnson pg 107). Our culture has forced us to think of Native Americans in these terms, and this mental disorder has manifested in a new way.

Our European American culture is the reason for our preconceived notions of Native American oppression, which has manifested into “the sale of Indians” through overtly racist products. The Atlanta Braves’ old logo, screaming Indian, demonstrates oppression through overtly racist logos and products. It depicts a wide mouthed screaming Indian, with war paint and feathers. The logo is seen on bottles, caps, computer covers, golf balls, towels, and even floor mats. “Martinican author Frantz Fanon reminds us that racism is ‘one element of a vaster whole: that of the systematized oppression of a people’”(Johnson pg 106). The racist logo is no longer present, but represents how one product or image is apart of the larger machine of

racism and oppression. Oppression through overtly racist products is still relevant today, in other ways. The organization gives away foam tomahawks to the fans at home games to cheer for their team. This allows for every fan to participate and reinforce the oppression. One can only imagine that the fans see no issue with this product or practice, it is all apart of “being a good fan”. This furthers commodification as a cog in the machine of racism and oppression from European American subjection.

The machine of commodification, with its European American influences, led to the perpetuation of Savagist Discourse as well. This mindset was seen within the NFL, with the aforementioned Washington Redskins organization and the Kansas City Chiefs. The “Chiefs” got their name after moving from Dallas to Kansas City. The team was named after the current Mayor, H. Roe “Chief” Bartle, despite the fact that he had no Native American heritage or affiliation. “The team names “Redskins” and “Chiefs” share a genealogy with those nations and people who were renamed in the minds of invading Europeans”(Johnson 105). The naming of these teams was done within a mindset of the European’s whom claimed the people before, and have done so again through commodification. The original logo depicted a Native American chief running across the Midwest carrying a tomahawk and a football, which along with the name, is part of the “Savagist” discourse developed over time as part of European colonialism. The original logo represents the images deployed by these teams that relate to “tribal” and athletic ferocity within Native Americans. Although the current logo is an arrowhead, the team still perpetuates the “Savagist” discourse, which further commodifies Indigenous tribes.

The Cleveland Indians are another team that uses the Native American stereotype as their team mascot and logo. The logo was named Chief Wahoo in 1947, after the similarly named comic strip, and was later edited to its current form. Advertisements from these professional teams affect and reach a majority of the public within their cities. The Indians even more so, after being the featured team in two Hollywood films starring Charlie Sheen. This causes the public to see the images repetitively, which causes an association of the derogatory image with real life Native Americans, whether consciously or subconsciously. This can be further explained within the cultivation theory. "Cultivation theory suggests that greater exposure to images in the mass media potentially affects the perception of viewers in two possible ways (Gerbner et al., 1994). One effect is that the viewer may become more sensitized to a potentially problematic image and reject it. Alternatively, a viewer might become de-sensitized by frequent exposure to both helpful and harmful images, and accept them uncritically" (Flowers pg 166-167). This is the reason why five American newspapers have committed to not producing the Native American team names and logos. The simple advertisement of the logo through all mediums of media commodifies Native Americans, and desensitizes the public.

While in the theater, you see the Cleveland Indians' Chief Wahoo appear on the screen, with the small print of their season opener in 4 weeks. All the audience sees is a misconstrued image of an Native American, and what they have become to our culture today. The Indians organization has created an association between the image and their team, therefore driving attendance through the use of the Native American culture

and identity. Their advertisements mainly feature Chief Wahoo and the lead players for the club. The main issue, is that the organization uses this logo as their main brand identity. This identity manifests the conception of what Native Americans are, and how they should be treated. "I interpret the calls of 'racism' along the lines of, an entire people is being reduced to a sports logo and mascot, and that's more than a little demeaning"(Miller 195). The visual reminders of this image on screen allow the public to believe, that not only is this the proper way to portray an Native American, but the right way to do so.

The Team's Mascots further the commodification of Native Americans by change in public opinion. The Chicago Blackhawks is an organization within the National Hockey League. The team name is from the war chief Black Hawk of the Sauk tribe, which was located in the Midwest. The team's mascot is named "Tommy Hawk", and is an anthropomorphic black hawk, with native accents and the face of an Indian on the chest. This mascot represents negative Native American imagery, but is commonly accepted by those that attend the games. "The pro-[mascot folks]...buy [mascot] merchandise. They go to places that display [the mascot], or have [the mascot] theme...it keeps the message out there"(Davis-Delano pg 354). The mascot makes the misrepresentation seem acceptable, while keeping it in the forefront of everyones minds. This leads to a sway in public opinion concerning the topic, which negates any actions towards the removal of the logo, team name, or mascot. While still furthering the sale of the team products and the message it represents.

Native Americans, and their culture, have been suppressed and manipulated by

Euro-Americans for their own benefit. The commodification of Native Americans is present in many industries, but within professional sports, the commodification is far more reaching. Professional sports teams contribute to the idea of “Selling Native Americans”, through the commodification of their culture and appearance through advertisements, products, fan atmosphere, logos, and mascots. These main areas combine to perpetuate negative stereotypes, while creating a new identity for Native Americans at the same time. This new identity is then trademarked and sold throughout the nation for the teams benefit, and the further misuse of its image that is so prevalent within society today.

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