

## Chasing Objectivity?

### Critical Reflections on History, Identity, and the Public Performance of Indian Mascots

Over the last twenty years, historians have sought to answer a single question that has become a hallmark of historical inquiry: is there such a thing as an objective truth? Entire canons of work have sought to uncover the political, social, and historical factors that shape our understandings of truth. Apprentices in the historical discipline are now subjected to unending discussions about the search for the grail of objectivity and the recognition that truth often resides in a gray area surrounded by myriad opinions.<sup>1</sup> Historians spend their first few years of professional training engaged in “critical reading” which teaches them how to deconstruct texts from introduction to conclusion so they can weigh the relative strengths and weaknesses of evidences against one another in order pronounce a certain scholar’s work as meaningful, interesting, and objective. The rubric of perfection mandates a level of attention to critical inquiry that allows scholars to quickly realize that monographs are rarely perfect and the individuals who produce them are often reliant on the evidences available to them. Underlying the unyielding quest for objectivity is its resulting trauma to inquiry itself: historians are often forced to decide between the strict disciplinary pedagogy that encourages distance from one’s subject in

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.) Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Wesleyan, 2005.) Joyce Appleby, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W.W. Norton Co, 1995.) Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W.W. Norton Co, 2000.)

order to maintain an air of objectivity via the utilization of archival research and the writing of politically-charged history where subjectivity becomes a central theme.

The subjective-objective divide becomes readily apparent as students progress to researching and writing their respective topics. In my own case, I had spent so much time and energy criticizing other's work and writing pithy five-page critiques that it was not until I was charged with creating my own monograph that I realized just how unprepared I was to position myself within and against the prevailing subjective-objective framework: I had effectively spent my formative education learning to be a critical reader—rather than a critical *writer*—of history. My anxiety over the personal acts of researching and writing pursued me relentlessly, most particularly because my work did not—and still does not—stay confined to the professional spaces within which historians are usually most comfortable (such as the library or traditional archive). Instead, my dissertation chased me through the streets of my hometown, appeared during extended family dinners, and showed up at the bar during Friday night outings with friends (similar to what Lauren Berlant refers to as engaging with a national image archive.)<sup>2</sup> Sports surrounded me on a daily basis; my particular field of interest was pervasive: My dissertation had a living, breathing, representational embodiment—“Chief Illiniwek,” the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign mascot.<sup>3</sup> His cartoonish visage appeared on t-shirts, car bumpers, billboards, notebooks, and in the windows of local businesses. He danced at half-time of my favorite sporting events, was hotly debated in the local papers, and appeared as the subject of national debates on programs as diverse as ESPN's

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<sup>2</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.)

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Guiliano, “Native Americans on the Field: Sports Mascots and the Consolidation of an American Empire, 1920-2005” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, n.d.), in progress.

*SportsCenter* and Comedy Central's *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. In short, he became a shadow that accompanied my daily walks through the popular vestiges of our historical present.

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A confession: I grew up with “the Chief,” and began researching Indian mascots in 1997 as an undergraduate student at Miami University to understand why people were so attached to their sporting icons and why my newly adopted school was transforming its sporting icon from the “Redskin” to the Redhawk. As a child, I had cheered the Chief, spent holidays with Chief ornaments hanging from living room Christmas trees, and taken drinks from collector’s bottles of Coca-Cola products adorned with Chief insignia. I was part of a vast consumer-driven market, continually asking “Does that come in orange and blue?” As a college student, I cheered the Miami (Ohio) men’s basketball team to the Sweet Sixteen whilst surrounded by an ocean of “Redskins” paraphernalia that came in red and white. Yet, the act of becoming an historian in the years that followed divested me of my Chief allegiances and caused me to flinch at friends who continued to wear “Redskins” apparel. This personal transformation forced me away from my subjective experience of fandom into the intellectual realm of archives and monographs. I embraced critical narratives that educated me on the history of U.S. colonialism, racial hierarchies, and the privileging of whiteness.<sup>4</sup> In turn, I welcomed the transdisciplinary field of critical sport studies (or what some might call “physical cultural

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<sup>4</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (University of California Press, 1994.) Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.) Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.) Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.) George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.)

studies”) as an avenue of inquiry that allowed me to engage race, class, gender, and emotion in a way theretofore hampered by my disciplinary borders. And yet, by embracing new understandings, I metaphorically divorced myself from my family history and the broader fan communities at Miami University and, subsequently, the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

My willingness to engage with narratives of privilege and chart the public history of Indian mascots at Miami University and the University of Illinois—and later whilst doing fieldwork at the University of North Dakota, Florida State University, and Stanford University—created *personal* consequences. For instance, I could no longer claim to belong to the sporting communities in which I was raised and my family still actively participates. After one particularly passionate dinner discussion, my parents banned the subject of Indian mascots in order to preserve peace between myself and my siblings. During sporting events, I sat wearing my “Racial Stereotypes Dehumanize” button beside siblings in their “Chief Forever” T-shirts or hoodies. More troubling, I could no longer talk about my work at the exact moment when my work was slowly becoming who and what I was: I could not “turn off” my historically conscious self. I faced it in classrooms, where my students wore Chief T-shirts; while driving through town, where motorists displayed their “Chief Forever” bumper stickers; and even at the dentist’s office, where Chief posters adorned the waiting room walls. My professional endeavor had become my personal crisis. How could I—*why should I?*—maintain the level of objectivity my discipline demanded when my dissertation work seemed to demand such politically and personally charged conclusions?

Turning to interdisciplinary works such as Kristin Hoganson's *Fighting for American Manhood*, Laura Wexler's *Tender Violence*, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* helped me reconcile that "objective truth" was probably beyond my reach but that "objective understanding" could become my mantra.<sup>5</sup> I saw salvation in anthropologists who struggled with their role as participants in tribal communities, in the work of the Trinidadian cultural Marxist, C.L.R. James, and others like him, who struggled with their relationship to the game of cricket and its attendant colonialism, and in the writings of Hayden White, who seemed to suggest that history was, at its core, interdisciplinary, and that my distance from my subject was merely a guise of objectivity.<sup>6</sup> Yet the more I began to feel liberated from the constraints of objective truth, the louder my historian's indoctrination on the importance of "evidence" seemed to grow. Was not every conclusion better with corroborated evidence? Did readers really care about my own personal crisis? Or would they, too, clamber during graduate seminars to rip my evidence from its monographic moorings and denounce my work as too much a personal manifesto and too little a historical inquiry? "Evidence" seemingly was everywhere; in newspapers, on a student's shirt in class, on the evening news, and in the halftime performances at men's basketball games and women's volleyball games. It was the choices people made in what to wear, in the discussions over coffee, and in the cheers that echoed across the gym. Yet, as Peter Novick has noted, historians have long

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<sup>5</sup> Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American War and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.) Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in the Age of US Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.) Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.)

<sup>6</sup> Hayden White, "New Historicism: A Comment," in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veesser (New York: Routledge, 1989), 29. C.L.R. James, *Beyond A Boundary. 'Race,' Sport and British Society*, ed. Ben Carrington and Ian McDonald (New York: Routledge, 2001.)

struggled with the valuation, preservation, and analysis of evidence.<sup>7</sup> History, Novick writes, is continually being structured and restructured according to the contemporary moment, and I seemed to be living a moment of extreme contestation and flux.

To such an end, I shifted between the interdisciplinary nature of critical sport studies that offered me a home where I could less problematically blend historical inquiry with my autoethnographic travails and the starkly disciplinary audience of historians who would demand neutrality that I did not know if I possessed—or *wanted* to possess. As the critical historian Howard Zinn has offered, objectivity is not only impossible, “it is also undesirable.” Zinn continues, “[T]here’s no such thing as a pure fact, innocent of interpretation. Behind every fact presented to the world by a teacher, writer, anyone, is a judgment.” I knew Zinn was correct. That fact, or “evidence” as historians like to dress it up, was weighed down with implicit and explicit understandings that produced a privileging of certain positions above others. Race, class, and gender were continually circling my consciousness, each of the “trinity” of analytical concepts consistently warring with another. Race, class, and gender were wrapped up in my own sense of the stakes of the project: I was researching and writing against the dominant public narrative, one expressed every day by family, friends, and the community in which I lived. As a result, I chose to become mute (even as I was being silenced by those around me). My hope was that submersing myself in the quiet peace of the archive and travel to other institutions would give me some distance in order to grapple with my anxiety over becoming a “critical writer” who, while bringing forward politically relevant conclusions,

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Novick, *The Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.)

would not become overwhelmed by personal hyperbole. The remainder of this essay marks one step toward unraveling these dilemmas.

## II. “Alone with the Stanford Indian”

In seeking the quiet of the archive, I was attempting to sooth my fledging project and restore some sense of cohesion to my compartmentalized life. I had started this project not to place myself in the middle of a very loud and contemporary struggle that bridged issues of race, access, identity, and politics across the United States or to separate myself from my family and community. Instead, I wanted to solve two very (what I thought were) simple questions: Where did these caricatured images of Native Americans come from? and Why did so many schools and sports teams articulate themselves in such similar ways? I thought that by choosing to begin my research at a school—Stanford University—that had removed its mascot over thirty years earlier that I would be getting back to my initial impetus: to document the past in a way that could contribute to contemporary understanding without becoming ensnared in my own personal politics. I was encouraged by my initial research there. It seemed temporal distance from the Stanford mascot had alleviated the omnipresent figure of Chief Illiniwek and the specter of historians as judge, jury, and intellectual executioner. I could retreat into the calmingly clear archive of a subject to which I had no direct social, political, or personal connections. When family and friends called or emailed to ask how things were going, I became adept at disguising my efforts to re-direct the conversations away from my research. I deployed every clichéd discussion of weather, politics, and restaurant experiences that I could while I worked to grapple with my concern over my work’s

reception in my home discipline, department, university, and family. I could easily grasp onto demands for an originary moment and could connect that moment to larger national movements to preserve and display Native cultures, to formulate commercial identities for higher education institutions, and even to the importance of spectacle and personal activism. I was liberated from my sense that I needed to defend every word from the onslaught of disapproval.

There was a sense of calm surrounding the narrative of the Stanford Indians rise and fall that was an effect of the thirty-plus years that had passed since its demise. There was no contemporary vocal majority waging verbal campaigns in the student newspapers and no administration charting a carefully constructed course that encouraged opposition versus collaboration. The archive was indexed, cross-indexed, and the staff itself was disarmingly helpful. I was given access to materials that had not been utilized by researchers before, and the archival administration was graciously willing to discuss the various historical actors and their roles in the larger community. There was intellectual relief in this archival collaboration. I was not alone in my search for nuggets of information with which to reconstruct the rise and fall of the Stanford Indian, and I took comfort in my imagined sense of collectivity. *I was not alone in the archive.* I was surrounded by others who saw immense promise in my topic instead of an opportunity to argue the merits of its contemporary usage.

The historical origins of the Stanford Indian are, at first glance, relatively straightforward. The Associated Student Government of Stanford University voted in the fall of 1930 to adopt the “Stanford Indian” as its athletic symbol. Their allegiance to the Indian symbol grew out of both the repetitive use of Indian warfare metaphors when

discussing Stanford football by local sports writers and an earlier 1923 effort by Dr T.M. Williams, an 1897 alumnus and founding member of the Board of Athletic Control, to utilize the Indian symbol. A 1931 *Stanford Illustrated Review* article “Stanford Goes Indian” explains the choice:

There were unlimited possibilities for its development. For look you, all the other Western universities has their official symbols the names of various animals, such as Cougars, Bears, and the like (never mind the Trojans). The Indian was their original lord and conqueror. His superiority was unquestioned. Then, too, the colorful qualities of the Indian's costumes and customs would go well in rallies. Our Stanford Red might rightly be identified with the Indian red. And the war-dances that could be held around the bonfire! Truly, it was an inspiration.<sup>8</sup>

Yet in 1923, the *Review* notes, students were apathetic to the use of the Indian name and its relationship to its athletic teams. “Truth” be told, in the case of Stanford, and contrary to other narratives to be discussed later the initial use of the Indian name did not grow out of either student desire or their growing exposure to civic organizations like the Boy Scouts of America that utilized Indian metaphors and histories. Instead, the adoption was proposed by someone of a previous generation who utilized his position within the institution’s athletic booster network to provide material support to Stanford football players. That is to say, Dr. Williams commissioned A. Phimister Proctor, the sculptor who had dazzled many at Chicago’s 1893 Columbian Exposition with thirty-seven small bronzes, to design a concrete Indian statue to be utilized as the university athletic symbol and placed at the open end of the University Stadium. Self-dubbed the “sculptor in buckskin,” Proctor’s role in the Stanford Indian ascent has been largely ignored. A contemporary of Frederic Remington and friend to Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and other important expansionist figures, the majority of Proctor’s work was

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<sup>8</sup> Claude; Amyx Petty, Darryl, ""Stanford Goes Indian"," *Stanford Illustrated Review*, January 1931.

sculpted to reflect his life-long interest in nature and Indian life.<sup>9</sup> He traveled with George Pratt to gather specimens for the Smithsonian Institution, lived among the Nez Percé, and was adopted by the Cheyenne Chief Little Wolf all prior to his 1918 move to Palo Alto, California. It was there that Williams and Proctor forged their relationship that positioned the famous sculptor to design a Stanford Indian statue. He began with an initial Indian head symbol that Mrs. Williams sewed onto the blankets given to each player. Utilized for only a single season, the Stanford student body was not interested in the efforts of the Williams family and Proctor to adopt an Indian name and symbol. Students withheld their vote of support for the adoption of the Indian name and one of the foremost American sculptors left Palo Alto without ever having completed the Stanford Indian statue.

Proctor is vital to new understandings of the origin of the Stanford Indian precisely because he failed to complete the statue. The power of the student body to determine its own name and symbolic representation contrary to the desires of an important university figure suggests that *students*, not the larger community or former university officials, could determine its identity. In that historical moment, students were providing the leverage and articulation of their identities against the interests of an alumnus who was trying to solidify his own grasp on athletes and the culture of athleticism being articulated at Stanford. The patronage exhibited by Williams is not unlike similar patronage expressed today by alumni who are highly engaged with their

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<sup>9</sup> Vivian A. Paladin, "A. Phimister Proctor: Master Sculptor of Horses," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 14 (Winter 1964). Most recognizable to today's audiences are *The Bucking Bronco* and *On the Warpath* which reside in Denver, Colorado and depict the century old roles of cowboy and Indian.

alma mater's athletic programs through season ticket purchases and university donations.<sup>10</sup>

The failure to adopt an alternate athletic name or symbol suggests that Stanford students did not conceptualize its athletic endeavors as social identifiers separate from the university itself and the Stanford Red name commonly utilized by students. Importantly, this suggests that the student population and the larger university must have shifted its conceptualization of athletics and their role in the university between the 1923 moment and the 1930 adoption. What occurred between 1923 and 1930 that convinced students of the need for a more specific identity than that of their university name and colors? Was it the development of educational institutions as commercial entities with concerted advertising campaigns or was it related to the development of athletics themselves as commercial symbols of the institution? I experienced the legacies of the commercial entity known as college athletics almost continually during my youth and into my college years. From television ads beckoning students to join the Illinois student body to businesses that exhorted me to buy the latest basketball and football jerseys of the season's hottest players, the University seemed less like a place to be educated than a big-box store advertising its athletic success. Returning from Stanford, I had to use even stricter criteria for choosing which restaurants and businesses I wanted to patronize based

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<sup>10</sup> Repeatedly, in my travels around Champaign-Urbana, at board meetings where the "Chief" issue was to be discussed, and at athletic events, alumni seemed to be a large part of the force behind the "save the chief" movements. They started societies, purchased billboard space, and campaigned in local newspapers for the continuation of the "Chief Illiniwek" tradition. And like Williams, who was trying to further his own sense of belonging to the athletic teams by providing material support (be it blankets or a statue), University of Illinois alumni utilize their financial status to exert pressure on the university today. In both cases, students seem to occupy a peripheral position where their interests are seen as subservient to the interests of athletic boosters/alumni. At Stanford, there was no omnipresent figure, no rallies on the campus, no billboards slinging accusations at administrators. Those moments were seemingly past and my daily life was about the students of the past and their battles, not my own.

on how much “Chief” I could stand in my daily routine. Aunt Sonya’s, a local landmark that my Grandfather loved, was not only a place to avoid patronizing but was someplace I couldn’t even drive by without cringing.<sup>11</sup> In choosing which athletic events to attend, I had to time by trips to the snack bar or restroom so that I could avoid the “Chief” performances. More and more, I felt like I was living in a world where I was forced to choose between my interest in an education and my sports fandom and my continually evolving perspective on Indian mascotry. In one notable instance, I tried explaining to fans around me the inaccuracies of the “Chief” performance and was chided for not having “school spirit.” It was as if every step further into my research I took, the more alienated I felt from the community I was a part of. I started avoiding those campus rallies and dodging requests to speak in classrooms because I kept returning to a fundamental uneasiness: Was this my community any longer? And, if it was, did I completely understand what I was trying to be part of? Was this modern-day theatre based on stereotypes of race and colonization or was it educationally-based “community” at its most fractured?

I returned to the relationship between Williams and Proctor to explore education and community development via the direct relationship between the adoption of Indian mascots and their relationship to colonial discourses as revealed in the work of Carol Spindel.<sup>12</sup> Examining images of Native Americans from the photographs of Edward

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<sup>11</sup> Aunt Sonya’s was a local family-owned restaurant that was open for business from 1961-2005. Aunt Sonya’s utilized the chief-head symbol (a circular emblem of the disembodied head of Chief Illini) on its signage with University of Illinois posters, apparel, and color schemes inside its restaurant. With forty years of material goods related to the Chief, Aunt Sonya’s was, in effect, a multi-year encapsulation of Chief representations that surrounded diners. A landmark, it also served as the apex of the commercialization and racialization associated with the “Chief”.

<sup>12</sup> Carol Spindel, *Dancing at Halftime: Sports and the Controversy over American Indian Mascots* (New York: New York University Press, 2000.) C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, *Team Spirits: the Native American Mascots Controversy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.)

Curtis, the Columbian Exposition of 1893, the St. Louis Exposition of 1904, from Wild West Shows, and into boy scouting movements and popular literature, Spindel weaves together a consciousness of Native Americans informed by images of Indians as colonized peoples. Utilizing earlier work by historians Robert Berkhofer, Fergus Bordewich, L.G. Moses, and Philip Deloria, she rightly argues that the majority of Americans learned about Indians and their culture through three main avenues: dime-store literature, colonial exhibits like those staged at the World's Fairs and early anthropological-ethnological displays, and through the growing movement of civic organizations like the Boy Scouts of America that educated young men about Native life and culture through quasi-anthropological investigations and role-playing.<sup>13</sup> In the case of the University of Illinois, it was amateur hobbyist and student Lester Leutweiler who created the "Chief Illiniwek" mascot when he led the band onto the field during halftime of the October 1926 game with Pennsylvania at the behest of the assistant band director.<sup>14</sup> "Chief Illiniwek" danced in front of the Illinois band while they performed and then smoked a calumet peace pipe with William Penn, the Pennsylvania mascot, before leaving the field arm in arm. Spindel has connected Leutweiler and the individuals who played "Chief Illiniwek" following him to the national movement lead by Ralph Hubbard, the famous biologist, writer, and Boy Scout leader who leveraged his collector's ethos into a marketable commodity with a Colorado ranch where he taught "authentic" Indian dances and a Hollywood career in which Hubbard designed Indian

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Berkhofer, Jr. *The White Man's Indian* (New York: Vintage Press, 1978.) Fergus Bordewich, *Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998.) L.G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.) Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.)

<sup>14</sup> Spindel, *Dancing at Halftime*, 80-95.

costumes for early Western films. It was Hubbard who facilitated a national consciousness of Indian custom and identity (albeit through white subjectivity).

Leutweiler was merely a local manifestation of a national phenomenon much like Williams, who created an opportunity for Proctor to transfer his much more developed construction of Native identity to the local Stanford community.

Proctor's direct participation in the colonial moment of the Columbian Exposition and travels on anthropological trips to reservations across the United States, including at least one foray with George Pratt to British Columbia, allowed him to leverage a career that paralleled the growing disciplinary interests in the categorization of nature and the preservation of Native cultures by anthropologists at the Smithsonian Institution and other educational institutions.<sup>15</sup> Williams turned to Proctor not just because of his artistic excellence but also his perceived status as "educated" in the ways of Indian life.<sup>16</sup>

Collectively, then, while Williams and Leutweiler are both vital to the local narratives within their individual institutions it is their participation and understanding of the more broadly conceived national movements embodied by Hubbard and Proctor that allow for the development of a national narrative of Indian mascot development. More simply, it was not necessarily the person "playing Indian" that revealed the nuanced motives spearheading developments in Indian mascotry, but instead were the people who educated and who created the space for that person that revealed the most.

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<sup>15</sup> Ira Jacknic, "The Ethnographic Object and the Object of Ethnology in the Early Career of Franz Boas," in George W. Stocking, Jr., ed. *Volkgeist as Method and Ethic* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 215-256. George W. Stocking, Jr. *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.) Clara Sue Kidwell, "Every Last Dishcloth: The Prodigious Collecting of George Gustav Heye," in Shepard Krech III and Barbara A. Hail, eds. *Collecting Native America, 1870-1960* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 232-258.

<sup>16</sup> Petty, "Stanford Goes Indian."

The importance of a national narrative uniting these educational institutions cannot be overstated. The development of these institutional sporting identities did not occur just on a local level. It was the exchange between the local and national that explains the similarities among Indian mascots both historically and in the contemporary moment. These similarities have largely been written out of contemporary discourse on Indian mascots in favor of narratives about the local discourses surrounding particular Indian mascots. The archive demonstrates that Indian mascots are local manifestations of national consciousness about Indians. Concentration on case studies wherein each school maintains separate relationships to Native peoples is a direct effect of the nature of debates in the last thirty years over the authenticity of such images. In an effort by sports teams and educational institutions to attempt to claim the legitimacy of their images through the derivation of a direct Native tribe or community, the commonality between these images has been written out of the discourse.<sup>17</sup> Returning to the archive and investigating the role of national figures like Hubbard and Proctor in the production of these images will, I believe, reveal a much more unified theory of their expansion. In effect, it might answer the question why so many institutions adopt symbols around the same time as each other and why they exhibit a remarkable similarity.

In working through this local-national interplay, I felt a measure of triumph. While I might not have every answer, I had something substantial that I could hang my dissertation on. In an increasingly competitive field where publication and resources were scarce, I could make a claim backed by “evidence” that was my own. I could set myself apart from others by claiming an authority as the researcher. Yet, even as I was exhorted

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<sup>17</sup> For example, The University of Illinois claims direct descent from the Illinois Indians. Stanford University claims direct descent from a California Indian, usually the Klamath River-Yurok Indian Tribe. And so forth.

by my advisor to admit that I was “the foremost authority” on the topic, I was still grappling with being chased through the streets by my subject. If I claimed authority and privilege from my position, I would have to confront the contemporary protests and would have to publicize my revelations. I would have to defend my work on campus, in the dissertation, at dinner with friends and family, and to readers who might not understand how intensely vulnerable I felt working on this subject and the amount of time and effort that went into each aspect. I was reading about people who had been largely forgotten in the historical annals and I feared that I, too, would be subsumed by contemporary events. More painfully, I worried if I, not just my dissertation, would be able to stand up to the level of criticism I normally brought to bear on the work of others. I did not want to be a single mention in someone’s footnote ten or even twenty years down the line in some obscure journal article. I wanted to contribute to historical understandings of race and sport, just like Proctor and others (rightly or wrongly) shaped understandings of Native peoples in America.

Yet look what happened to Proctor: his role in the development of the Stanford Indian appears to have disappeared following its *single* mention in the *Review*. As a result of this evidentiary erasure, the Stanford University community becomes detached from larger developments in the history of anthropology, ethnology, and the growth of movements to record and preserve Native American cultures. This outcomes are made all the more apparent when positioned over and against two *alternative* theories of the origin of the Stanford Indian name and symbol. The first, the student body as originating body, masks the earlier effort by Williams and Proctor to develop a separate Stanford University identity that was distinctly Indian-based. The second demonstrates a more

troubling archival issue when investigating the history of Indian mascots. Often, conclusions about the origins of these symbols rest on public narratives that are difficult to substantiate in the historical record. In the case of Stanford, the historical record is exactly one sentence long: "The General Manager reported that the Associated Students had adopted the Indian as the official Stanford symbol."<sup>18</sup> Dated 15 November 1930, there is no discussion of the origin or adoption and the University newspaper offers no further information. Despite the lack of evidence almost exactly forty-five years later, the New Founders League of Stanford, an organization dedicated to the preservation and revival of the Stanford mascot who had recently been retired, recorded a vastly different origin for the Stanford Indian. Noting a painting by Otto Schroeder dated October 6, 1906 that hung in the Faculty Club, the New Founders League wrote in the legend of the "Original American":

Although we tried to obtain information about the Indian, no one we contacted seems to know where, exactly, he came from or how he got there. So, with a bit of imagination, we let this be the Legend of the Stanford Indian. The Original American, the last of his tribe, wandered across the great Prairies on his horse. His people were all gone; some had just left, many had died from strange illness. He was only a survivor, and now he was looking for a new home. The buffalo were all gone from the Great Praries, and so he pointed his horse toward the West.<sup>19</sup>

Setting aside the admittedly fictionalized nature of the account and the illusion that the Original American was, in all likelihood not from a California tribe but probably a Sioux Indian, the direct recapitulation of the colonial narrative of the "close call" of Indian extinction demonstrates a willingness to discard the "actual" origins of the Stanford Indian in favor of one that positions Stanford University and subsequently the New

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<sup>18</sup> Board of Athletic Control, "Resolution on the Indian as Symbol," in *Minutes of the Board of Athletic Control* (Burlingame: Stanford University, 1930).

<sup>19</sup> New Founders League of Stanford, "Stanford's Direction," in *Indian, Stanford* (Stanford, California: 1975).

Founders League as preservationists of Indian life and customs. A common thread in the origin of Indian stereotype, this mimics early anthropologists who endeavored to “preserve” Indian customs and, in so doing, *positioned their understanding of Native life over that of Indians themselves*. Further, it reifies Sioux culture and imagery as the model for “appropriate” Indianness as understood by white popular culture. And further still, by divorcing the relationship between the choice for an Indian mascot versus an animal mascot from the narrative, the fictional origin story again positions Indians themselves along a much longer historical narrative that argued Indians were animalistic and savage (i.e., the Indian was the “original lord and conqueror” of the animals and through their positioning along the biological hierarchy could ensure athletic superiority). Importantly, though, the racial hierarchy inherent within the equating of Indians to animals goes unexplored in most every text on mascotry.<sup>20</sup>

### III. ON THE MOVE, TURNING INWARD:

Turning away from the content-based narrative of the origin of the Stanford Indian to the praxis of archival research, the Stanford University archive offered me an important initial lesson in the process of constructing an evidentiary basis for writing an historical inquiry: organization both on behalf of the archive itself and a researcher’s individualized organization of primary sources. The Stanford University archive was almost completely pristine in its organization. The majority of its collection was indexed both electronically and through a paper card catalog and an overwhelming amount of the University based

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<sup>20</sup> Carol Spindel, *Dancing at Halftime: Sports and the Controversy over American Indian Mascots* (New York: New York University Press, 2000.) C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, *Team Spirits: the Native American Mascots Controversy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.)

materials included finding aids. Because of the stellar job by the archivists at Stanford, my own research was incredibly structured and progressed much faster than I had initially planned. By the third day of my research trip, I not only could receive, process, and record materials pertinent to the subject but could also simultaneously catalog them in my own citation system according to common keywords and references. In effect, I was able to utilize the Stanford organizational structure as a customizable template for my other inquiries at Florida State University, the University of North Dakota, and Alcorn State University which allowed for one collective database to see the national patterns that Williams, Proctor, Hubbard, and Leutweiler had convinced me were a necessity.

However, just as I was being challenged at home by the specter of “Chief Illiniwek”, I was being threatened during my research trips by that which every graduate student fears: limited time and scarce financial resources. I did not have the dream scenario of a year-long research trip with significant financial support. I was paying my own way around the country and my choices often had less to do with what might be best for the dissertation (or my own comfort) than what I could afford. I stayed in student housing, rode Amtrak fourteen hours to North Dakota because it was three hundred dollars cheaper than flying, and stretched every penny because it could allow a few extra hours or even days in the archive. I took preparation to an obsessive level: not only did I scout out the archives, make extensive listings of what I wanted to look at, and ask archivists to pull materials before my arrival, but I went so far as to court archivists as if they were possible suitors. I arrived early to chat them up and offered to help in any way I could in the off chance that they might have nuggets of materials hidden away that

could be revealed to me. And my strategy worked! At Stanford, I received a special previewing of a video produced by the university that documented its mascot tradition with testimony from the University presidents who were in office during its removal that had not yet been released. It was as if I had suddenly become “The Anointed One.” I might have been running from my own community, but here was someone who saw the value in what I was doing. I might not have had scads of time and funding, but I had someone who seemed to believe in what I was doing that was not a member of my dissertation committee required to care by the university. Yet even as I reveled in the insider-status I had been bestowed with, I was unaware that I was going to have to confront the insider-outsider dynamic in a way that would strip away the illusions of distance from “Chief Illiniwek” and the contemporary struggle for and against Indian mascots. Research at North Dakota would force me to confront everything I had been trying to escape.

A little background first. The research that forms the basis of my work on the University of North Dakota was generated from three main sources: the University of North Dakota Special collections which feature the majority of university records, the American Indian Cultural Center which is linked with the American Indian studies program at the University of North Dakota, and the Office of the University President. In examining the origins of the “Fighting Sioux” name the overwhelming majority of archival materials resided not in the University Special Collections as I had assumed they would, but in the Office of the President. This was a direct result of the contemporary debate over the legitimacy of the Fighting Sioux name and a self-study commissioned by the National Collegiate Athletic Association on the history and use of Indian mascots. I

arrived at North Dakota after the completion of the self-study but prior to the release by the NCAA of its decisions regarding individual institutional use. As a result, I was directed to the individual in charge of the self-study who was supposed to provide me with access to all of the materials in the Office of the President. During our initial meeting, a question was posed that I had never before been asked to answer: “Are you an Indian?” I had answered questions regarding my educational background before and had gotten quite streamlined in charting my intellectual and educational pedigree. I could spill out five sentences without even thinking that would provide just enough information to introduce myself but not so much as to welcome further questions. I was super-student who could fling jargon and pedigree without having to stretch first. Yet, with this new question, it seemed as though my authority as a researcher was contingent on answering in the negative. I was not prepped for this. I hadn’t even had this conversation with my advisor! He had prepared me for the methodological challenges of the archive once I got there but not for how to deal with getting through the door itself. This was a public institution, right? Responses tumbled through my mind beginning with “Are you really asking me that?” through “Why does it matter?” and finally ending with “What business of it is yours if I am or am not?” I could not grasp how the individual charged with assessing the climate of the University and its relationship to its Indian mascot could pose a question about my personal background.

I remain unsure why I was so surprised. I had experienced a small measure of the efforts of university administrators to control and produce the “authorized” narrative of Indian mascotry at University of Illinois filled with pages of evidence. But being confronted with this directly felt very different. I struggled with how to respond. If I

challenged the appropriateness of the question, would I be refused access to the materials despite their being in the public domain and open to access? If I explained my own ethnic background, would that not be affirming the premise that the question itself was valid? If I responded in the affirmative, would I be denied access? Is this how minorities feel everyday living in a world of white privilege? In thirty seconds, it was like my brain went askew. Part of me wanted to scream, “I just wanted to gain access to the fucking materials!” and get on with submersing myself in the archive. What I most certainly did *not* want to do was grapple with my own (white) privilege and stop pretending that all was equal and that I had no inherent privilege to who I was as a person much less as a scholar. It was as if all the quieting effects of my Stanford research on the specter of “Chief Illiniwek” had been ripped away to reveal the ugly truth beneath—*my* whiteness was a passkey to the materials. I worked so hard to grasp that nuances of historical subjects and their relationship to Indianness that I completely ignored how I, as a (white) researcher, was positioned within the praxis of white privilege through my own educational development and presence in that office.

Eventually, after what seemed like hours but was only a minute or two, I responded to the question posed by choosing to affirm its very basis: “No.” In answering truthfully, I willingly utilized my whiteness to take the easy way out. But by not asking “Why does it matter?” and opening a discussion about the question itself, I affirmed that individual’s right to ask that question, which effectively confirmed that Native heritage could have limited my access.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> I do not mean to suggest that ethnic background does not play a role in both individual subjectivity and objectivity in the process of researching and writing critical history. Instead, I am suggesting that the questioning a researcher about their ethnic, racial, class, sexuality, or gender is disturbingly problematic

Looking back at that exchange today, I wish I had not answered the question. I wish I had recognized my privileged status as a researcher, as a white woman, and as a member of a certain socio-economic class in order to affirm the right of equal access regardless of personal history or position. Instead, I completed my research at the University of North Dakota with a sense that for all the intellectual development that had taken place during my disciplinary training, I failed to understand one basic thing: my whiteness was a privilege, and I was never without it.

In the weeks that followed, I realized that I could neither objectively understand nor write critically about Indian mascots without first confronting my subjectivity. I needed to figure out how to reopen those conversations with my siblings to better understand the relationship between the Chief that hangs over my daily routine, the disciplinary boundaries that demanded objective research methods, and the subjective reality of my whiteness. I could not hide within my discipline and pretend that my work was not politically and personally relevant. My whiteness, my education, my very existence within the discipline of history demands the recognition that the work of writing critical history is always subjective.

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More than a year later, and now halfway through writing my dissertation, I am still struggling with the subjective-objective boundary and my place within it. I have read more, asked more, and thought more about my privilege within and against the disciplinary mechanisms of the Academy. I have sought counsel from faculty and colleagues alike who have been kind enough to share with me their own struggles with

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within the context of a public institution like the University of North Dakota. It violates the very premise of the institution itself and suggests an elitism that stunts intellectual inquiry.

evidence, subjectivity, and privilege (or the lack thereof.) I have shared the story of North Dakota and my sense of being chased through the streets of Champaign-Urbana. And in talking about my privilege and my struggles with the discipline of history, I have finally found some measure of peace. I can now recognize that my fears, while legitimate, are a by-product of the inherent commitment to and vulnerability associated with an almost decade long effort to learn and engage in the practice of history. Increasingly, and while still being chased through the streets, I now stop and stare back unflinchingly at the image of “Chief Illiniwek.”