The New Beginnings Newsletter, September 2020

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Mascots and Cultural Appropriation

Outside the 1991 World Series in Minneapolis, the AIM movement staged a protest against the Atlanta Braves for using a demeaning Indian mascot as the symbol for their sports team. Other grievances included the tomahawk chop, ‘Indian’ headdresses and war paint commonly seen at games. For many non-natives, it maybe hard to understand why the Indian mascots are problematic. Some even argue that the mascots are an honor to native people. However, the use of Indian mascots is harmful to American Indians both socially and
psychologically and continues a long history of misrepresentation and commodification of native cultures.

Mascots are another way that colonialism dominates native people. They privilege a representation of native identity and culture that aligns with colonial interests while silencing native people’s ability to define themselves (Ziff and Rao 2014). For example, sports mascots promote an image of American Indians as violent warriors, savages, and cartoonish “redskins” for the purpose of representing a team’s fighting spirit and ferocity. Such a representation of natives continues a colonial ideology that defines the native through the lens of a “frontier mentality,” as savage, uncivilized and violent (Davis 1993). At the same time, mascots trivialize dances, drumming and clothing which have specific cultural meanings and reduce them to meaningless symbols (Davis 1993). Instead of presenting American Indians in an accurate and contextualized way, they are reduced to generic collections of stereotypes.

Reducing American Indian identity to simplistic, generic symbols also serves the purpose of commodifying American Indians in order to make their image serve the purposes of marketing and branding. The ability to create and sell a distorted vision of native identity for the purpose of consumerism further demonstrates the level of control that colonial institutions and businesses have over native culture and identity (Black 2002). While beneficial to business interests, the mascots distort how most non-natives see native people due to a lack of alternative media representations that are accurate, modern, and contextualized (Friberg et al. 2008).
Mascots have also been shown to have negative consequences for the ways American Indians view themselves and their communities. In one study, American Indian subjects primed with images of Indian mascots scored significantly lower in self-esteem and community worth measures. The subjects also generated less achievement-related possible selves, the ability to imagine yourself as a successful person in the future (Friberg et al. 2008). The authors explained their findings through social representation theory, which posits that we get our sense of self and self-worth from social representations of our identities. They explain that mascots lack positive guidelines from which natives can construct a positive social identity and sense of self-worth.

Mascots do not honor American Indians or their culture because they produce harmful representations of native people that have adverse effects on both how the public views American Indians and how American Indians view themselves. Indian mascots give inordinate power to businesses and universities to distort what it means to be native and often reduce natives to worn out stereotypes in the process. Since there are few alternative representations of American Indians in the media, mascots are yet another force drowning out a more accurate representation of America’s hundreds of diverse native tribes and nations.

For further information and to see a history of progress, please click here

References


Lakota Language Instructor Position Available

The American Indian Studies Program, American Indian Student Center, and the Wokini Initiative have come together to offer an exciting career opportunity for a Lakota Language Instructor/Lecturer at our Brookings campus. We are looking for a creative individual grounded in Lakota culture, language, and communities to join our collaborative programs beginning in August of 2020. This is a nine-month, full-time, benefits-eligible position, supervised by School of American and Global Studies Director in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.
SDSU is especially interested in candidates who can effectively contribute to and/or coordinate course offerings that address the experiences of underrepresented minorities in organizations and our university’s understanding of Indigeneity, tribal relations, treaties, and sovereignty. Indigenous people, women, minorities, veterans, and people with disabilities are especially encouraged to apply.

For more information on this position and to apply, click here.

**Assessment and Grant Specialist Position Available**

South Dakota State University is currently seeking an Assessment and Grant Specialist to lead and coordinate grant writing and the collection, analysis and interpretation of data connected with the Wokini Initiative. The Specialist will develop assessment and program evaluation tools, collect and analyze data, and prepare reports for programs and activities related to the Wokini Initiative. The position will also develop statistical models to measure the impact of Wokini programming on American Indian student recruitment, retention, and graduation rates. Grant duties include researching grant opportunities that align with Wokini Initiative goals and collaborate with both internal and external departments to develop competitive grant proposals consistent with the vision of the Wokini Initiative. This is a 12 month, full-time, benefit-eligible position. This position is supervised by the Wokini and Tribal Relations Director.

For more information on this position and to apply, click here.
Featured Events

Jahmal Cole – Founder/CEO/Author
My Block My Hood My City

A CHAMPION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE, JAHMAL COLE’S MISSION IS TO BUILD A MORE INTERCONNECTED CHICAGO ON THE Pillars of SERVICE AND EDUCATION. AS THE FOUNDER AND CEO OF THE CITY’S FASTEST GROWING SOCIAL IMPACT ORGANIZATION, MYBLOCK MY HOOD MY CITY, JAHMAL IS THE CREATOR OF AN EXPOSURE-BASED EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR TEENS AND A NETWORK OF VOLUNTEER INITIATIVES THAT SERVE CHICAGO COMMUNITIES YEAR-ROUND.

“What’s something simple I can do that will have a positive impact on my block?”

September 10th in Jack’s Place @ 11:00 am

Sponsors: Office of Multicultural Affairs, University Programming Council & Black Student Alliance

You can also watch by clicking this [Zoom link](https://zoom.com)
The Office of Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, & Access presents the:

DIFFERENCE IS

DIALOGUE KICK-OFF

EVENT

CLOSING EQUITY GAPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

JOIN ZOOM MEETING
HTTPS://SSTATE.ZOOM.US/JOIN/92517635605

This series offers a space where everyone is welcome to engage in conversations important to our community. The kick-off event will explore the topic involving closing equity gaps in higher education. The mission of the dialogues is to ask questions, share your thoughts, raise concerns, and learn from one another to strengthen our campus community.

KIM HUNTER REED, PH. D.
KEYNOTE SPEAKER

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18 10A.M.

CO-SPONSORED BY: BLACK STUDENT ALLIANCE, VAN D. AND BARBARA B. FISHBACH
HONORS COLLEGE, AND AFRICAN STUDENT ASSOCIATION
Celebrated novelist David Treuer has gained a reputation for writing fiction that expands the horizons of Native American literature. In *Rez Life*, his first full-length work of nonfiction, Treuer brings a novelist’s storytelling skill and an eye for detail to a complex and subtle examination of Native American reservation life, past and present.

With authoritative research and reportage, Treuer illuminates misunderstood
contemporary issues like sovereignty, treaty rights, and natural-resource conservation. He traces the convoluted waves of public policy that have deracinated, disenfranchised, and exploited Native Americans, exposing the tension and conflict that has marked the historical relationship between the United States government and the Native American population. Through the eyes of students, teachers, government administrators, lawyers, and tribal court judges, he shows how casinos, tribal government, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs have transformed the landscape of Native American life.

A member of the Ojibwe of northern Minnesota, Treuer grew up on the Leech Lake Reservation, but was educated in "mainstream" America. Treuer traverses the boundaries of American and Indian identity as he explores crime and poverty, casinos and wealth, and the preservation of his native language and culture. *Rez Life* is a strikingly original work of history and reportage, a must read for anyone interested in the Native American story.

**Lakota Word of the Month**

Čhaŋwápe Ġí Wí (September) The moon of brown leaves

[Listen here](#)