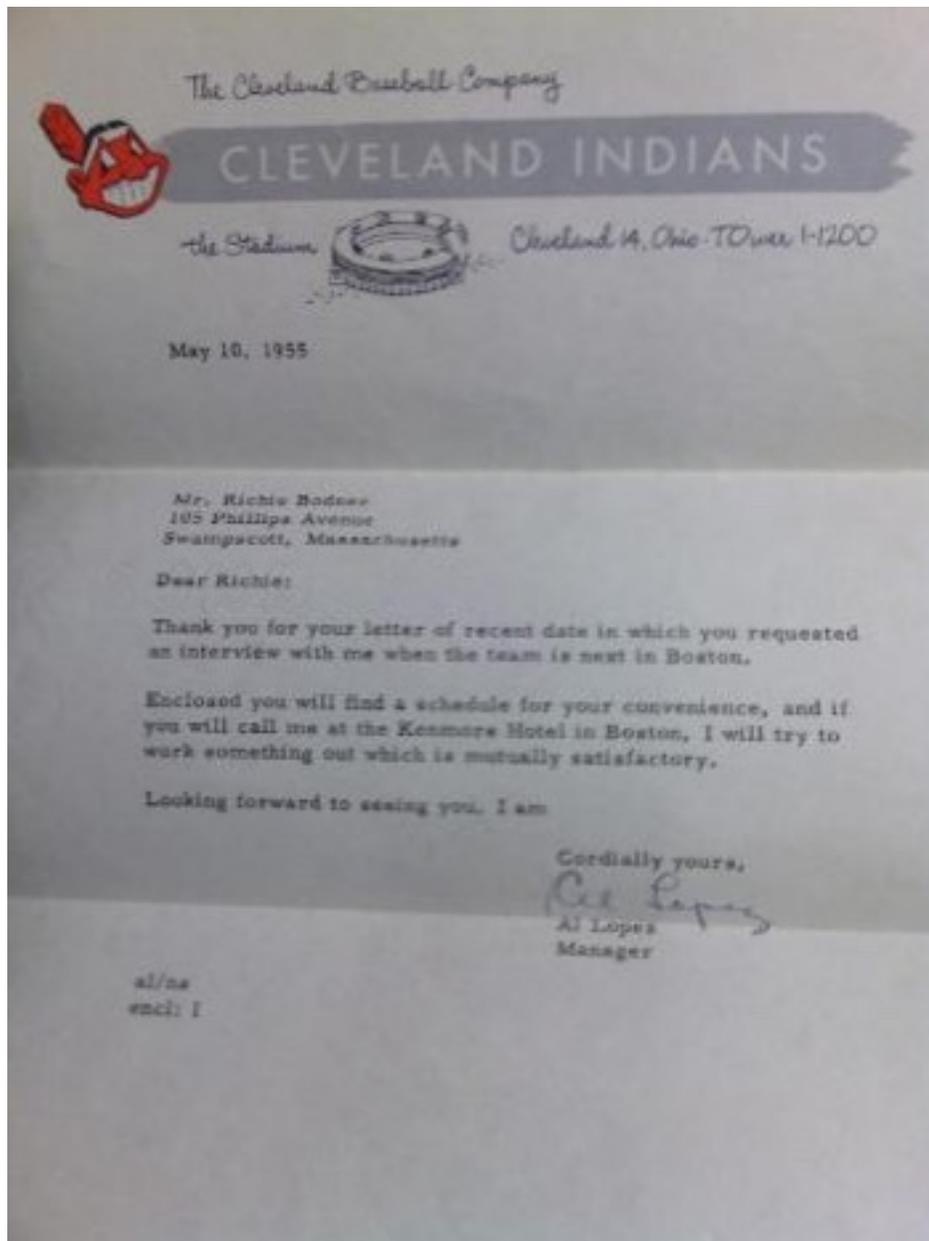




**With the Cleveland *Indians* on the cusp of a World Series victory (or loss), I've dug out the letter the Indians' manager Al Lopez sent me in May 1955, when I was most of the way through the 7th grade, not just a devoted *Indian* fan, but heading into my second year as an infielder with the Swampscott Little League's version of the *Indians*.**

Imagine my excitement at seeing that logo on the envelope! And then at the letter from the great Al Lopez, with its incredible letterhead, thus held onto all these years. Holy mackerel. We were on! I didn't keep a copy of the letter I'd written him, asking for an interview for a school publication that existed mostly in the imagination, mine & a budding sportswriter classmate. All it took was a little *chutzpah* & a stamp, though I'm sure I didn't really expect a response, let alone one so personal.



Alas, I didn't keep the schedule, or ticket stubs showing when my friend & I made the great adventure to Fenway to do the interview itself. I had never been there before. I kept no notes, never thought to get a ball signed or take a picture, and, as far as I recall, never wrote up the interview or experience—all part of a dream.

The fall before, I'd raced the few miles home by bicycle rather than waiting for the bus in order to catch every possible second of the 1954 series games on tv—which the Indians lost in 4 straight, with many shining moments embedded in baseball history. My buddy

(& Indian teammate) Al Clevens & I didn't just root for the Indians, although ambivalent when matched with our native Red Sox, especially against the alien league's Giants, but we took the lore to heart & details seriously, devouring every issue of *Sport*, etc..

We both had visions of being sports writers, though Al's interest turned more toward boxing, with thoughts of writing for *Ring* & Joey Giardello for his hero. After one or two times, "Rocky" couldn't convince me to put the gloves on with him, and we went back to the bat, ball & glove.

Not that I was that much better with them, but I enjoyed it a lot more—& could hold my own with Al as we fired back & forth, drilling each other on line-ups, batting orders & other stats, having to catch, throw & speak the next required information as fast as possible, without bobble or hesitation (e.g., Lemon, Hegan, Wertz, Avila, Strickland, Rosen, etc. in a round by fielding position, then batting order, etc.).

Apparently, I was a "Ritchie" my two junior high years as an *Indian* in Swampscott, between the *Ricky* of my childhood in Revere & the Dick I became in high school & college. None were intentionally chosen. The same can be said for having been "drafted" by the *Indians*, or most other "identifications," family, place, religion.

There but for the grace of chance, I could have been a pin-striped Yankee—that main adversary Red Sox & Indians fans share(d). In that case, my deeply imprinted emotional reaction to the Indians logo—who is apparently known as Chief Wahoo—might be quite different. Any useful discussion of such a logo must start with the shared recognition (& mutual acknowledgment) that different responses are predicated on just such unintentional accidents of personal history.

That means any useful dialogue starts with respect for the other's experience, and a willingness to acknowledge its "legitimacy." However opposite individuals may or may not end up in their conclusions, they (we) will nevertheless understand each other's perspective more clearly, more fully, and more insightfully.

Before bringing reason to the table, to reason the issue out together, in other words, it's important to realize that the "reactions & responses" themselves are also prior to reason. Those who believe the Chief Wahoo logo more or less profoundly offensive do so as a gut response, neither more nor less so, however, than the wholly positive excitement of that 7th grader, whose response to the image includes awe, affection, and *identity*.

To the 7th grader, or any Indians fan, for that matter, it's not about somebody else's conception of what that identification means, least of all a racist stereotype of a

demeaned *other*, but about *us*. That doesn't mean *not listening* to how others respond, and why, first to understand, and then, with understanding mutual, to reason.

Until checking Wikipedia, I never knew the grinning "fool" in the caricature used in the logo was named Chief Wahoo. To one who wore the logo on his hat, it simply meant, 1st, *Indians* or *Indians fan*, and 2nd, a "crazy fool," or "fan of crazy fools," although not necessarily in that order. As the Wikipedia coverage makes clear, many find the "fool" offensive and some even claim "harmful," with more or less scientific backing on both sides of that issue. I'm prepared to keep thinking, to understand the issues more fully.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cleveland\\_Indians\\_name\\_and\\_logo\\_controversy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cleveland_Indians_name_and_logo_controversy)

At least for the time being, however, I believe it's also important for those who know the positive side of the relationship to stand on their principles, and not to give up their fundamental freedom just to go along with misguided arguments, however sincere. If those opposed to Chief Wahoo want a fair hearing, they ought also to give the logo's fans the same.

In the following (the first drafted October 2014, the second just now), I explore a few sides of the issue, including the nature of caricature, and the 180-degree shift between negative & positive use of same, each ending up with quite different animals.

Recognizing these factors doesn't automatically settle the issue, but would seem to be a pre-requisite for informed thinking about it and its implications.

## ***1. The LOGOS (Inner Logic) of Sports Logos***

Posted on **October 13, 2014**

### ***The LOGOS (Inner Logic) of Sports Logos***

*The logo is a quirky beast  
some love the most, some think the least.  
No matter whether west or east,  
bring the heart to cap the feast....*

In the news recently, the Washington *Redskins* are reaching out to Native Americans, today the Navaho & Zuni. The team's providing free tickets & a tailgate party for the Zuni, and sponsoring an arts project for the Navaho. News footage shows Native Americans calling the *Redskins* "our team."

Whether successfully or not, they are trying to tap the potential for native identification, if only to buffer attacks on their logo from those who consider the name & logo offensive. There ought to be some potential for doing so—just imagine who you would root for if you were Native American, as for example against the Cowboys. Clearly, team management wants to turn around what’s been a strong surge in public opinion *against* the *Redskin* name—with political pressure brought to bear through the government’s attempt to revoke the *Redskin*’s trademark.

With some considerably mixed feelings, I admit to having first gone along with the public sentiment against the logo, believing the slang reference offensive in itself. The term “Redskin” does have strongly negative associations accumulated from a history of derogatory use. Think cavalry officers, wagon train members & settlers on the frontier, along with the films portraying frontier life. The term was almost always used with a sense of “those others,” usually with a tonally expressed sense of hostility.

But is there anything inherently negative in the term itself? Okay, that’s a trick question. One can say there’s nothing inherently negative in the words apart from how they’re used, the attitude embodied in the use. As in calling people *white*, *pale-skinned*, *brown*, or *black*, such use can sometimes be considered primarily descriptive.

Where such a term refers to a group of “others,” a category of people to which the speaker & receiver *do not belong*, use will invariably reflect the users’ attitude toward that group, with some negative potential inherently residing in the sense of “otherness.” Thus the sense of negativity often communicated when a speaker addresses an audience as “you people.” It lumps everyone together from outside, often in a single stereotype.

There’s some offensive potential in labeling any group other than one’s own, therefore, especially with a term that has accumulated some history of hostile relationship. The term can’t be separated from the history of its use & associations. And there’s the rub, because such associations (& the attitudes reflected) have their own meaning in the sports context.

Note that those defending use of *Redskins*, *Braves*, *Indians*, etc. as logos do so as used for *their own* group, not applying it to others. There is a significant difference. The affection felt for a favorite team goes with the territory, whether it’s called—Blue Jays, Tigers, Pirates, Giants, Red Sox, Braves, Indians. . . . To members & fans of the organization, a caricature like the Indians’ Chief Wahoo can be beloved all the more for being threatening to rivals, in the serious game of play-war.

Except where the atmosphere is corrupted by hooliganism, the fierceness of on-field competition is balanced by the sense of sportsmanship after, a love of the game. We smile, even shaking our fists at rivals. I may “hate the Yankees,” but it’s a happy hate, after all, with good will, love of the game deeper in. The enmity, no matter how passionate, is an attenuated version, not the same as what people in violent conflict feel when loved ones are hurt or threatened. It functions more like a vaccine than as a flu.

The positive emotion felt for “one’s own team,” though still somewhat ‘attenuated,’ is no less real than those associated with other bonded relationships, involving some of the same chemicals, like oxytocin. The sense of shared identity may be more dispersed, but this is one of its strengths, part of its ability to cultivate a sense of unity among otherwise diverse fans. I may be X. You may be Y. But, heck, we’re both Sox fans—or Indians.

For better and for worse, however, there’s little transfer between use of terms in sports and in all other contexts. Being a Red Sox fan will only get me so far in some neighborhoods, where divisions between groups prevail. Similarly, the negativity associated with rival sports teams doesn’t tend to carry over to real-life, even when using the same terms is involved. How you feel about the Patriots doesn’t have much bearing on how you feel about Paul Revere, Patrick Henry or George Washington, for example.

I doubt if you like or don’t like real-world giants, sea-hawks, pirates, or lions any more or less for being fans &/or rivals of teams with such names either. Maybe—but only, I contend, in the *positive direction*, where a sense of bonding can carry over. .

In the case of the Redskins or Indians, I suspect rivals transfer little if any negativity toward real-world people and tribes any more than they do with Padres, Tigers, Giants, Twins, Jazz, or Warriors. *Fans* of Redskins, Indians, Tigers and Braves are, on the whole, more likely to transfer some positive association to real-world groups represented, however, including a sense of kinship and positive qualities.

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## 2. ***WAHOO—CHIEF OF THE LOGOS*** (Nov. 2, 2016)

I learned the positive side of such identification first-hand in my boyhood as an “*Indian*,” wearing (& loving) that grinning logo for two years in Little League baseball. Later on, I more or less understood intellectually why others found the caricature offensive, while noting that it evoked only warmth, affection and sense of connection in me personally, including for Native Americans as well as for logo & team.

Still, there's no denying that the grinning *Indian of the logo* has some characteristics in common with WWII American propaganda portrayals of maniac Japanese kamikaze pilots & Nazi propaganda of Jews. They are all caricatures, after all, grossly exaggerating stereotypical generic features for dramatic or humorous effect. Out of context, they might not seem that different, yet the apparent similarity is entirely superficial.

Unlike the propaganda posters, inherently offensive for the attitude represented, grinning Chief Wahoo is not really a racist caricature. First off, note that a caricature can be *positive* as well as negative, evoking affectionate humor rather than fear, disgust and loathing, as show-biz portraits by any admired sketch artist may attest.

The form itself is cartoonish, deliberately exaggerating features for humorous effect, but in its positive use, laughing *with*, not *at*, being imbued with the respect of recognition in its acknowledgment of *personality*. A lot depends on the attitude behind the hand doing the sketching, one thing for a Broadway sketch-artist, another for an editorial cartoonist.

Use in logos is a class of its own. When it is used for "one's own team," it becomes too positive an identification to mean anything negative, let alone racist. As reported on Wikipedia, Chief Wahoo has been called a 'Red Sambo,' and repeatedly attacked by a variety of progressive &/or native groups. I'm old enough to have eaten in a few Sambo's when it was a popular pancake restaurant, eventually rebranded.

It's not as simplistic an issue as some particular campaigns make out, however, tarring a positive use of the genre with the same brush as a negative one. Must we lump Uncle Ben & Aunt Jemima in with racist stereotypes just because of their race? How do they differ from Kentucky's "fried colonel," or other white brand-characters?

Does that mean you can't have a stupid white-guy as portrayed by a Jim Carey or Steve Martin lest you be considered anti-honky? If Richard Pryor or Eddie Murphy play whacky black fellows, must the script also be written & directed by black fellows to avoid being considered racist, reinforcing negative stereotypes, etc.

The territory is inherently twisted. For one thing, we more or less properly allow greater satirical freedom to members of the group made fun of, making the humor self-deprecating rather than potentially hostile. Put a group of comedians together, however, and they'll eventually transcend those limits, able to joke with each as tribe-members. Whether superficially combative or not, the criteria will be, *is it funny?*

Anyone who breaks you up can't be all bad, even if the humor is superficially "at your group's expense." That laughter reinforces what makes us human, ultimately more basic than clan, sect or tribe, whatever anyone says. Of course, breaking you up means what did it wasn't *mean*. *Mean* is an entirely different kind of thing than humor, even if they sometimes get mixed.

No doubt there's often a grey area, where things aren't black & white, and an edge can cut both ways. One person looks at the logo & sees Bob Feller, Herb Score, Al Rosen, Larry Doby, Bobby Avila, & a host of other happy warriors, etc. Others look & (think they) see a racial stereotype heaping ridicule on a people. Which is right? Neither.

The real character is beyond team & beyond race, & more than both put together. He (though it could just as easily be a *she*) is the same grinning fool who shows up at the leaned on end of a broomstick in zen sketches, or at the wet end of Twain's cigar. Wherever the humorous end of an upside world comes through, the grinning fool is at home. He is not someone *else's* grinning fool, but always our own. (All the better if he/she/it's a member of the Bod Library's More On Club.)

It is a non-sectarian society by nature, as well as constitution, and accepts nobody with too high an opinion of themselves, the most reliable sign of idiocy yet discovered. Certainly, the Indians of yore, like the Red Sox, rarely had reason to think too highly of themselves. I inherited that tradition as a little leaguer, and most witnesses would agree I kept up my end of the bargain in strike-outs & errors.

I can appreciate why some indigenous people may feel that no one else should have the right to appropriate the images symbolic of association or membership, no matter how positive it makes them feel. Who gave the Cleveland baseball team the right to make themselves "Indians," even symbolically, honorarily?

The modern team has claimed the name taken in 1914 was in honor of having the first Native American player, \_\_\_\_\_, who may or may not have been treated well at the time. Those who say the team doesn't have a right to call itself *Indians*, which might also mean that Indiana (& countless other places) might need a new moniker. It's not as if *Indian* were an indigenous word, being just one of the things Columbus missed.

The intricacies of trademark & logo law are beyond the current scope. Judges, lawyers, linguists, and other scholars may argue the differences between Braves, Indians and Redskins, compared with Pirates, Padres, Mariners, Raiders, Packers, etc.. There are presumably significant differences between general terms never the property of

indigenous groups (like “Indians”) and what may be considered local tribal property, like the Zia logo, the Zuni Shalako, or so-&-so’s mudhead.

The difference between fair borrowing & plagiarism may not always be obvious, but there are (or ought to be) fair intellectual property rights to individuals & other entities, whether party to a formal trademark-copyright code or not.

As for the *Shtetl Rabbis*, the Flatbush *Jew-boys*, & the *Stratford-on-Avon Shylox*, I suppose *it depends*. Shakespeare’s play probably doomed the last of these, but either of the either could work with Adam Sandler singing its anthem, or other Jewish engagement. Nor would or should it be exclusively Jewish, just enough good feeling to appreciate the association—in either direction. You shouldn’t have to be Jewish to play for the *Jew-boys*—if you can hit (or pitch, or catch).

Let’s face it, a little humor can go a long way, especially for groups that have known serious persecution, where in-group humor is part of the healing. Just ask Black comics, Latino comics, Navaho comics, Zuni comics, women comics, fat comics, nerdy comics, any of whom may also be Jewish comics, so long as they are willing to be roasted. Sometimes, you have to lighten up in order to heal. (Or in some cases, light up.)

All you need is to feel *related* to root for such a team, to feel *these are my totem-people*. This core feature makes them radically different from racist use of similar iconography, meant to promote just the opposite reaction—to *point at the other, the outsider*. Nazis weren’t about to root for a team with Jewish identity, even one represented by a caricature. Similarly, few, if any, Americans rooted for the *Kamikaze Pilots* during WW II—now the *Kamikazi Pirates* in the Osaka Softball League, doing their best to beat Americans at their own game, adding sushi & sake’ to their weapons of good will.

Reacting to the negative use of a propaganda caricature feels nothing like the response to a positive use for a team logo—except where wires get crossed. Beauty is not all that may be traced to “the eye of the beholder,” in other words. Even where the root uses are as opposite as night & day, the beholder may not see it that way.

Even if there’s a world of difference (at least 180 degrees) between “those dirty Redskins” & “*our noble Redskins*,” some indigenous people may not like be totemized at all, lumped in with the lions, tigers, eagles & bears, as well as with pirates, raiders, & buccaneers. Given principles of what might be called “common law trademark rights,” the Black Hawk people might have a legitimate claim that simply would not translate to more generic terms like *Indians*, *Redskins* or *Warriors*.

*Until & unless they have some legitimate trademark rights attached*, such terms do not belong to anyone or any group. Others have the right to adopt & use them as they see fit, however un-tastefully at times. Others have the right not to like the taste, or lack thereof, but not to restrict those with other standards of taste. That's just how it is—& should be.

A logo is neither base nor noble in itself, but for what it stands for, its true inner spirit, which others may be free not to get, but not to interfere with. Many logos start out neutral, developing associations of affection or rivalry from their context, like Orioles, Cardinals, Red Sox, or Mariners. Many others start as totemic symbols representing entities of power, like the *Lions, Tigers, Bears, & Diamondbacks*, as well as *Giants, Warriors, & Pirates*.

Other take on potentially totemic associations from use, e.g., the *Banana Slugs, Ducks* or *Cubbies*. With a good spirit, you can name your team anything—from the *Ferrets & Weasels*, to the *Prairie Chickens, Mongrels, Fishmongers, Sharpshooters, Seersuckers & Mishugunah Maniacs*. As long as there's good-natured humor, your logo can go a long way.

Good nature is one thing; humor is another. Put them together, you have a winning combination, or at least a more or less happy one. Just ask the *Mishuganahs, the Maggots, & the Roaches*, or fans of the *Ball-Breakers & Cock-eyed Optometrists*.

All kidding aside, meaning is & isn't just “in the eye of the beholder.” Sometimes it's in the tone of voice, intent & actual attitude of the user; sometimes it's a pointed finger in the eye of the beholder; on the other hand, sometimes it's not. We shouldn't rush to a negative opinion where the use is emphatically positive, & deeply affectionate, therefore.

That puts some responsibility on the users, not just to be positive unto themselves, but to share their good will with the groups from which they've drawn positive associations. I think it's just the right move, and worth some serious investment in good will, for professional teams drawing even symbolically & indirectly from native imagery, to court indigenous fans. Teams like the *Indians, Redskins, & Braves* should be reaching out to include actual Native Americans in their fan-base. As long as they succeed in that, they ought to be able to keep their logos, & even their trademarks.

Maybe teams representing *Tigers, Panthers, Seahawks, etc.*, ought to support conservation efforts directed toward their totem species. Who the Pittsburgh Pirates, Oakland Raiders, Seattle Mariners, Buccaneers, Mavericks, Oilers, Rangers, Cowboys & Freaking Maniacs reach out to is another matter.

Maybe the *Indians* organization will reach out to fellow Indians, whether Lakota, Sioux or Hindu, Choctaw, Chickasaw, or Ohio, Zuni, Hopi, Navaho, or motorcycle, from Bangalore, Bombay or Indianapolis, saying, prove you're an Indian, too, & we'll give you a cut on Chief Wahoo merchandise &/or ticket stubs. If they do so with an ounce of the generosity of spirit Al Lopez showed a goofy 7th grader, Chief Wahoo will gain a heap more fans, & a few pounds of the respect his good-will deserves.

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PS: According to some studies, exposure to Chief Wahoo imagery can lower the self-esteem & test performance of native children, through a process called *priming*. A similar phenomenon was found in lowered performance when African-American students were asked to identify "race" before starting the test. These are legitimately held up as "real effects" of negative stereotyping, but the source of that isn't appropriately laid on either the student's lineage (genetic or cultural, identification by race) or on anything inherently negative or demeaning in the Chief Wahoo image itself.

The negative stereotyping is not inherent in the "race," but neither is it necessarily inherent in the image. If it reminds native children that they're "Indians," and that reminder has negative associations, that's the same situation as with the "black" students, and the remedy comes from changing the self-images associated with the category. That may involve better schools, as well as countless individual role-models. Such "perceptions" clearly do change, however bumpy the route.