

Republican Perspective

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Crusaders and Indians

In 1969, Dartmouth College led off the race to rename sports teams. The school changed its mascot from Indians to Big Green. Ironically, Dartmouth was originally founded to educate American Indians.

Soon after, Stanford University abandoned its Indians, threw Chief Lightfoot under the bus and, after much debate, became a color. There followed an avalanche of lemming colleges racing to be next to shed their Indian identities.

Setting aside the U. C. Santa Cruz Banana Slugs, sports teams are generally named after icons of strength, bravery, power, heroism, and so on. So the offense claimed by, or in behalf of, American Indians is a bit hard to understand. Indians, Braves, Chiefs, Warriors, Aztecs seem honorific rather than derogatory. Would *you* be dishonored by having a sports team named after you? Probably not; most people would be proud. But let's move on.

American Indians (or those claiming to speak for them) are allegedly offended---apparently by having their identity, culture, tomahawks, or feathers appropriated by others. But now along comes a totally new reason to take offense: sports teams named after some group deemed to be, by its very nature or by its very existence, offensive to some *opposing* group. Thus: "I'm offended because you named your team after *them*." Example: The Crusaders.

Several schools have dropped their Crusader mascot because it was deemed offensive, not to Crusaders, but to Islam. Examples are The University of Incarnate Word (yes, they exist, and played Cal last December), Maranatha Baptist University, and Susquehanna University. As if to rebuke the school's administration, the majority of the Susquehanna student body voted for a squirrel as the replacement mascot. Northeast Nazarene University's Board of Trustees voted to keep the mascot but assembled a task force to find ways to disassociate it (I kid you not) from the actual Crusades. Incidentally, these universities were founded as religious schools.

To explain the decision to drop its Crusader mascot, Susquehanna President L. Jay Lemons addressed the student body in a video. He explained that the mascot connotes violence and warfare directed primarily against Islam. Well, yes, the Crusades' original goal was to recapture or at least reopen the Holy Land sites controlled by Muslim forces. Has it been ruled that this objective was somehow immoral, sinful, or shameful?

To the contrary, for most Christians the original Crusaders are seen as inspirational, devoted---willing to give all for a higher cause. And the label has now taken on a more general but still altruistic meaning. Thus there have been "crusades" against injustices such as slavery, and in favor of righteous causes such as civil rights and women's suffrage. Ralph Nader, for example, was

known as an auto safety crusader. Not shying away from the militaristic theme, the Salvation Army adopted the hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers," which was also the climactic war cry of the Academy Award World War II movie, "Mrs. Miniver."

Of course there are an abundance of other mascots which denote violence or warfare such as Buccaneers, Conquistadors, Gladiators, Knights, Lancers, Marauders, Minutemen, Pirates, Raiders, Spartans, Trojans, Vandals, Vikings, Warriors, and so on. Yet these are not seen as offensive. The Vikings, for example, burned, raped, and pillaged coastal Europe but no one is advocating the Viking mascot be banished.

So why abolish the Crusader mascot but not the others who also engaged in violence or warfare? Well, the first part of Lemons' explanation, that the mascot connotes "violence and warfare" obviously isn't the answer. But then there's the second part of his explanation: "primarily against Islam." Aha! It's not that the Crusaders were warriors, but that they made war on *Muslims*.

So it's likely we've found the explanation: Islamophobia-phobia---the fear of appearing to be Islamophobic. Why abolish "Crusaders"? Answer: the fear of offending the adherents of the Religion of Peace.