

**Newberry College: A Case Study on Native Mascots**

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## **Introduction**

In 2007, Newberry College's Board of Trustees voted to stop using the mascot the "Newberry Indians". The mascot had been a source of debate and contention for quite some time. However, the issue became pressing in 2005 when Newberry College was listed by the NCAA as one of eighteen colleges with particularly racially offensive mascots (2018, "NEWBERRY COLLEGE NICKNAME HISTORY"). This paper aims to be a single resource answering questions as to how and why Newberry College ultimately changed their mascots.

While these topics have been addressed in many thoughtful sources that will be cited within this piece, there is very little published on the "Newberry Indian" specifically. The decision was a source of heavy debate inside the institutional community. As such, many people only tangentially aware of the decision are under false impressions on how it came about. There is a common misconception that Newberry College was forced to change mascots. This was not the case.

### **A Brief history of Native Caricature**

The following history of Native American costume and caricature draws heavily from the work of academic Rayna Green. Green is a member of the Cherokee Nation and a Curator Emerita at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History (Belanus 1999, 33). In particular, this paper will reference her 1988 article, “The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe”. Green examines the appropriation of Native American aesthetics and culture across a variety of demographics and continents, including the use of these stolen aesthetics in American sports and entertainment.

Native American culture has been subject to appropriation since Europeans first landed on American shores. Individual Native people became commodities to be exploited. The Powhatan woman Matoaka, better known as Pocahontas, is one of the most famous examples (Mansky 2017). The specifics of her interactions with settler John Smith are murky. What is known is that she was taken from her family and brought to England, where she toured and shortly after died (Green 1988, 34). This will become a trend in stories about individual Native people who became objects of fascination to Europeans and Americans alike. This is not a coincidence. When aesthetics related to being Native were fashionable, they were generally the ones related to people who were either dead or considered dead by the dominant white culture. To quote Green,

“For, I would insist now, the living performance of 'playing Indian' by non-Indian peoples depends upon the physical and psychological removal, even the death, of real Indians. In that sense, the performance, purportedly often done out of a stated and implicit love for Indians, is really the obverse of another well-known cultural

phenomenon, 'Indian hating,' as most often expressed in another, deadly performance genre called 'genocide.'" (Green 1988, 32)

Death in this sense does not necessarily mean physically deceased. People considered defeated were treated the same as the dead, to be looted with impunity. Green goes on to discuss another example of the situation, which this essay ventures to consider the first modern commercialization of Native Culture. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows were staffed by people from the Plains Nations, including briefly Chief Sitting Bull. They became a reference point for exploitative media of the time period and are still referenced contemporarily in works such as Arthur Kopit's *Indians* (Green 1988, 38).

This paper posits that the modern Native American mascot can be considered a direct descendent of Buffalo Bill-style wild west shows. The fixation on Plains Nation based symbolism such as feather headdresses is an undeniable and recurrent theme in locations where the actual indigenous population would never have been so dressed (Green 1988, 38).

All this noted, Native scholarship is a thriving body of work. An excellent source is Norman K. Denzin's *Indians on Display*. It covers much of the same history and theory Green did with further findings what it now means for non-Native people to "play indian". Denzin takes a particularly close eye to the way Native aesthetics were commodified for entertainment purposes and the impact it continues to have on the image of Native peoples as a part of the past rather than a current culture. A particularly striking section is as follows,

"The power of reenactment, which deploys and depends upon the logic of aesthetic realism, cannot be underestimated. It is the machine that keeps racist history alive. It does so through logic that says, "If it looks real, it is authentic, and if it is authentic then it is true, and if it is true, then all actions we took in the

past have been correct, including killing indians and sending them to reservations.” (Denzin 2016, 29)

In this passage we see the circular way this behavior reaffirms itself. When Native people are turned into hollow warrior costumes and credited only with either acts of graphic violence or a sense of prehistoric mythicism, it takes away any guilt that might be felt in the act of appropriating a living people’s culture. Denzin speaks to a truth found frequently in Native scholarship, that for white audiences to successfully wear redface, they must believe they are stepping into a gap left behind by actual Native people vacating the historical record.

### Modern Mascots

When discussing the modern appropriation of Native American culture, no singular institution carries more blame than professional and collegiate sports. Native peoples are grouped along with animals and, perhaps more importantly, extinct warrior cultures to be called on as abstract representations of strength for athletes to channel. There is no other modern, living culture that is used in such a way. Native Americans are lumped with vikings and trojans as faceless, mythological warriors.

The use of caricature as sports mascots was a longstanding point of contention for the Native Rights Movement, but it came into the public consciousness in a big way in 2009 when the National Collegiate Athletics Association publicly condemned nineteen teams who used imagery surrounding Native Americans to promote their sports teams. The *University of Maryland Law Journal of Race, Religion, Gender, and Class* published the article “Wide Right: Why the NCAA’s Policy on the American Indian Mascot Issue Misses the Mark” where Andre Cummings and Seth Harper discuss the positive impacts and failings of this ruling. The NCAA tries to have it both ways, condemning the use of racist mascots while not actually banning their use during the sort of athletic events during which they are most visible.

“In its policy promulgation, the NCAA declared that schools with offensive mascots and imagery could not display their logos on the court or field or on a uniform, nor could they allow students to don the mascot costumes on the sidelines during any postseason play.

“However, this policy only prohibited hostile or abusive imagery in mascots during postseason play, meaning that these specific colleges and universities

could continue to use these offensive mascots throughout the entire regular season.” (Cummings, Harper 2009, 138)

This stance allows the NCAA to act as if they have taken tangible steps against the mascotting of Native peoples while still profiting from schools doing so. While not having offensive imagery on clothing or turf is a good step, refusing to ban students from dressing in redface makes all else moot. Colleges are allowed to have students dress in full racial caricature so long as it is only during the actual sports season. This is to say, they are allowed to do it during the time when they stand to financially gain the most from booster club donors and attendees at sporting events.

The University of North Dakota was one of the institutions criticized in the NCAA’s statement. Their mascot was the “Fighting Sioux”, a reference to the Dakota and Lakota tribes present in the state of North Dakota (Williams 2006, 325). Dana M. Williams wrote the article “Patriarchy and the “Fighting Sioux”: A Gendered Look at Racial College Sports Nicknames” in the the journal *Race, Ethnicity and Education*. He spells out how American universities make money off the racial exploitation of Native peoples.

“White UND students pay homage to unrealistic, romanticized, dated and irrelevant interpretations of Native people as if they were the norm. Whites—who can purchase baby clothes that say ‘Fighting Sioux Forever’ or sweatpants with ‘Sioux’ written across the butt—have turned Native people into objects to be enjoyed and consumed. The objectification of Native Americans and their culture as products is a practice rampant throughout the city of Grand Forks, and also throughout the entire country.” (Williams 2006, 334)

The use of Native mascots is directly financially motivated. Institutions and fans might attempt to argue they are showing respect for any individual tribe they claim their mascot is meant to

represent, but Williams goes on to make it clear that is not the case. The mascotting of Native Americans is perpetrated by white Americans for their fellow white Americans. The dialog speaks to Native people as well. Williams puts it as follows, “When successfully objectified, Native people are properly ‘Fighting’, they are obedient representatives of White preconceptions and they are ‘good sports’ about it.” (Williams 2006, 334) In this framework, Native people are allowed to exist only for white consumption. It reinforces the colonial hegemony that white Americans can freely take from Native Americans and the only acceptable response from those exploited Nations is to go along with it.

College and Universities receive financial rewards from the exploitation of Native Aesthetics, but that is not the only way they benefit. The use of Native Americans as mascots reinforce the eurocentric hegemony that primarily white institutions were founded on. It gives the message that bodies of color can still be appropriated to the institution’s ends, by force if necessary. Native people who oppose mascots are not simply subject to social pressure, but to clearly outlined threats. Dr. C. Richard King of Washington State University and Dr. Charles Springwood of Illinois Wesleyan University are both academics who have written extensively about the use of Native American mascots in collegiate sports. They collaborated on the article “Playing Indian: Why Native American Mascots Must End”, where they went through several examples of pushback against Native Mascots that directly led to Native students on campus being subject to threats. “Some 10 years ago at Urbana-Champaign, several Fighting Illini boosters responded to American Indian students who were protesting Chief Illiniwek by erecting a sign that read "Kill the Indians, Save the Chief."” (Springwood, King 2001, 5). The argument these mascots come from a place of respect for Native culture immediately falls apart. When

white supporters of Native mascots are challenged on the subject, they frequently value their desire to wear redface costumes over the safety of actual native people.

Dr. King's further takes apart the circular logic used in claiming that these mascots are in any way coming from a place of respect in his book *The Native American Mascot Controversy: A Handbook*. In it, he discusses the more subtle ways that these mascots reinforce the sense that Native opinions are less valuable even without active violent threats being spouted at any given time.

“[The] institutional defense of mascots reinforces the anti-Indianism of the symbols. Although these arguments and initiatives are meant to give the impression of respect and responsiveness, of sensitivity and support, they work against indigenous peoples, their perspectives, and their presence in public life, revealing the institutional foundations and continuing vitality of anti-Indianism.”

(King 2010, 158)

It is impossible for Native mascots to be respectful when any protest is met with hostility. The controversy surrounding these mascots has raged for decades. The longer institutions stand by their racist mascots the more it proves they silently stand by the violent supporters of those mascots. There is no way to claim the choice to use them is innocent. They are inherently charged.

The final word in this section goes to Rayna Green. Her work in “The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe” inspired a great deal of other writers within the field. The previous points all circle back to her assertion that for non-natives to appropriate Native culture, the real Native American must be either literally or symbolically killed. Native dissent has to be silenced and their iconography reassigned to white audiences. “In order for

anyone to play Indian successfully, real Indians have to be dead. Americans have to believe them dead or kill them off.” (Green 1988, 49). This stays true whether one is speaking about wild west shows, the appropriation of Native spiritualism, or in modern mascots. For white Americans to put on these costumes, Native people either have to stay voluntarily silent or be violently silenced.

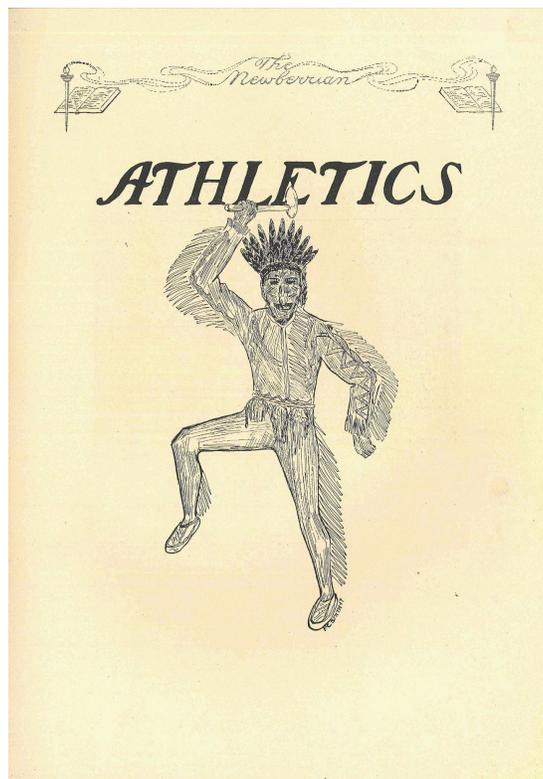
### **The Newberry College Indians**

The following portion of the essay will heavily reference the work of Newberry College's Head Archivist Tracy Power. He wrote the article "From the Newberry Indians to the Newberry Wolves, 1909-2010", for the 2018 Annual Meeting and Conference of the South Carolina Historical Association. However, it will be built upon with context drawn from contemporary scholarship by Native academics who have written about the history of non-Native individuals turning the Native identity into a costume.

Newberry College did not adopt a mascot until over fifty years after it was founded. The college had a baseball team that played against the local textile mill and city teams as well as teams from nearby Christian colleges, but these games were not part of any official season. The Intercollegiate Athletic Conference of South Carolina formed in 1901. Only then were there officially sanctioned games. In preparation, Newberry College ordered its first official team uniform. They bought them in their newly adopted school colors, scarlet and gray.

Newberry College's use of the term "Indian" as a mascot comes from these uniforms. To quote Dr. Power's article, "Sportswriters covering their games began calling Newberry players 'the Red Men' for their bright red uniforms. The students soon adopted this nickname for themselves, turning 'Red Men' into 'Indians'" (Power 2018, 2). The Newberry College Indians did not come from a reference to any nearby native tribe. They came from a racist joke on the part of students. It was racialized from the very first time the name came into print. The college's literary journal, *The Newberry Stylus*, is the first printed record of the names being used in a student publication. It came in a 1909 article they ran about the year's baseball season that included references to both scalping and tomahawks.

Newberry's mascot was first visually depicted in the 1916 yearbook. It can be seen below and depicts a native caricature, including feathered headdress and tomahawk, drawn by a student to mark the beginning of the yearbook section on school athletics.



(“NEWBERRIAN 1916, ATHLETICS”, 1916, Newberry College Archive. Courtesy of Newberry College.)

The college yearbook *The Newberrian* provides some of the best preserved examples of cultural appropriation in the context of Newberry's Native mascots. Not all will be included, on the grounds that some are too extreme to be reprinted in this article. These include a photograph of a school mascot in a feathered headdress hoisting a confederate flag. That said, they are all available for viewing at the Newberry College archives. Newberry College continued to use their mascot until the turn of the millennium. At no point prior to the controversy was there any reference to a particular tribe.

Previously, this article mentioned a NCAA policy regarding the use of racialized mascots during the college athletic season. It was written in the context of eighteen colleges or universities that were considered particularly egregious offenders. Newberry was among these eighteen. As noted, they were not being told to stop using the mascot altogether. They were only being prevented from using the mascot during post-season NCAA competitions.

Mitchell “Mick” Zais briefly served as the United States Secretary of Education after the 2021 resignation of Betsy DeVos. Prior to that, he held the position of South Carolina’s Superintendent of Education. Before that, he was the President of Newberry College from 2000 to 2010. These roles are worth mentioning in the context of Zais’s legacy within education. His role in the Newberry College Indian mascot controversy is not mentioned in his biography in the local newspaper *The Newberry Observer*, where all these previous facts are drawn from (Husk 2021). It is not mentioned in any prominent biography of Zais, despite being one of the most fundamental changes to the college under his tenure.

When the NCAA took their stance against the use of racialized mascots in collegiate sports, Zais began public and private campaigns defending Newberry’s use of Native American mascots. This included articles in both state newspapers and in the school magazine, *Dimensions*. Zais also attempted to form an official alliance with the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation under the argument that official ties would allow Newberry College to be granted an NCAA exemption. As the public face of the college, Zais made it the institution's official stance that he saw no issue with the mascot (Power 2018, 4-5).

Zais’s public and private comments did not reflect the actual opinions held by faculty and staff at Newberry. When faculty held a vote in 2007 on whether or not they supported a resolution changing the name, it came back unanimous. Not a single faculty member voted to

retain the mascot. Every single one voted to change it, forty seven votes to zero (Power 2018, 5).

To quote Dr. Power's article, the resolution contained,

“A series of carefully constructed historical, theological, and ethical arguments for retiring the Indian nickname, mascot, and symbol, citing Newberry's institutional ‘obligation to model practices and behavior that reflect our history, mission and values’ -- in the context of its origins and identity as a Lutheran institution of higher learning.” (Power 2018, 5-6)

Despite representing the feelings of Newberry College's community far more than the words of their president, this resolution received far less press. Zais worked for over two years to allow Newberry to keep the Indians name and that remains the most prominent public statement on the college's behalf.

In 2009, the Newberry Board of Trustees voted to officially retire the Indian mascot. They cited faculty support and long term concerns about the name as reasons why. Zais's attempts to portray the Newberry College Indian as a respectful invocation of any particular tribe fell flat to those actually involved with the college community. Pictured below is a student wearing memorabilia parched from the college bookstore labeling sports fans as “Rowdy Reds” and a feathered headdress of unknown origin. Alongside it is a photo of a sign that sat on the fence surrounding the football field. It reads “WELCOME TO NEWBERRY COLLEGE - ‘Home of the Indians’”. It features a drawing of a native caricature turned in profile. The face is red and the empty spaces are white.



(“Newberry College ‘Rowdy Reds’”, 2007-2009, Box 10, *Newberry College Indian History*, Newberry College Archives. Courtesy of Newberry College.)

(“WELCOME TO NEWBERRY COLLEGE, Home of the Indians Sign”, 1997-2008, Box 9, *Newberry College Indian History*, Newberry College Archives. Courtesy of Newberry College.)

Neither of these can be read in good faith as attempts to connect with a particular Native Nation. However, when one considers the history of the Newberry Indian, neither of them can come as a surprise. The Newberry Indian’s deepest roots come from a slur. It is only reasonable to expect to see this slur echoed either explicitly or implicitly in Newberry’s logos and fan culture.

It is here that Dana M. Williams’ work becomes particularly pressing. Newberry benefitted not only from the appropriation of Native peoples, but in the commodification of them. Newberry College sells fans a claim to Native America in the most basic fashion. Wearing a shirt that proclaims its owner a “Rowdy Red” is similar in nature to the previously mentioned “Fighting Sioux” baby onesie (Williams 2006, 334). It treats a Native identity as something to be donned for a specific purpose, then discarded and inherently links this identity with fighting for the cause of the white person appropriating it.

Even after the college decided to stop using this mascot, they continued to make money off of it. There was an official retirement ceremony for the “Newberry Indian”. Dr. Power described memorabilia from the event,

“The Office of Alumni Affairs, in a souvenir program featuring pictorial depictions and textual references to Newberry Indians throughout the twentieth century, thanked “all those ‘Indians’ who wore the paint, did the chop, and dressed as the Indian.” (Power 2018, 7)

If the college was ending their use of this mascot on the basis of racial insensitivity, it comes across oddly for them to thank all the fans who participated in the act. The retirement ceremony acted as a celebration of all the problematic history contained within this mascot and as a final chance for the college to openly profit off of it.

## Newberry Wolves

Newberry went without a mascot for approximately two years. Administrators and staff searched for an appropriate replacement, but such a thing did not turn out to be hard to find. Newberry College was founded by the renowned naturalist Reverend John Bachman. Bachman worked alongside John Audubon to produce *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*, a large collection of paintings studying aforementioned viviparous quadrupeds of North America. Newberry College had tangible ties to the discovery of several large North American animals. This included the red wolf.

That said, it was not a simple decision to reach. Newberry went from 2008 to 2010 without a mascot, simply wearing uniforms emblazoned with the letter “N”. It was not until 2009 that the Board of Trustees even began narrowing down potential names. According to the college’s website’s official history of the nickname change, they approached the decision based on three factors:

- “1. The new nickname and accompanying mascot must allow continued use of the school colors, scarlet and gray.
  2. The new nickname and accompanying mascot must be something indigenous to the Newberry area or consistent with the College's history.
  3. The new nickname and accompanying mascot must be easily marketable.”
- (2018, “NEWBERRY COLLEGE NICKNAME HISTORY”)

As seen above, public response to the nickname was a source of much concern. Profit was a primary motive in selecting a new mascot, just as it was in the way they removed the prior mascot. The conversation surrounding Newberry College’s mascot has always been one about

the college's financial bottom line. When it became less financially viable to exploit Native Americans, they moved on.

Pictured below is a sculpture of Newberry's new mascot, the gray wolf. It is currently located in the middle of a semicircular driveway that serves as the official entrance to Newberry College's campus.



(“Wolf Statue at Entrance”, Tracy Power, 2014, Box 2, *Newberry College Indian History*, Newberry College Archives. Courtesy of Newberry College.)

### **Possible Concerns Moving Forward**

The research in this paper was performed with the express intent of one day creating a museum-style exhibit in the Newberry Archive. As such, it should be held to the same standards any curator would be expected to reach. The following section will consider the Newberry College Archives in the context of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation act. It will also look at the local community and consider what sort of message this exhibit might be designed to get across.

As mentioned previously, a great deal of Newberry College Indians memorabilia remains in the Newberry College Archive. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Archive is not able to assist in person visitors or hold tours. However, long term goals for the Archive include a display on the Newberry College Indian. Displays designed by white academics about Native American history do not come without risks. As the Archive contains donations from the local community, not everything has a clear chain of custody and repatriation should be a concern of anyone planning to organize this collection for display. Pictured below, there are several boxes within the Archive with the vague label of “Indian Artifacts” and no clear records about their origin.



(“Indian Artifacts Boxes 1 (Closed)”, Tracy Power, 2018, *Newberry College Indian History*, Newberry College Archives. Courtesy of Newberry College.)

A much more recent example of this discourse comes from Dr. Chip Colwell, founder and editor-in-chief of the anthropology magazine *SAPIENS*, a journal cited repeatedly in this study. His book, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits*, was published by the University of Chicago Press in 2021. It discusses his personal experience as the professional in charge of NAGPRA repatriation claims brought to the Denver Museum of Nature & Science and the history of Native remains and artifacts in Colorado’s museums. Chapter 4, “Tribal Resolution”, discusses a notable controversy between the Denver Art Museum and the Zuni Nation. Colwell describes the time,

“In 1978 the U.S. Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. Although the law would come to lack teeth, it was evidence of history’s pendulum swinging towards Indian rights. As one legal observer wrote at the close of the

decade, ‘The 1970s proved a time of transition in central attitudes about Indian culture on the part of the federal government.’” (Colwell 2021, 42)

While the specifics of the actual repatriation claim can be found in Colwell’s book, it is notable as a moment when the national conscience began turning towards the return of Native culture artifacts to their source communities. The Denver Art Museum first attempted to keep certain artifacts they claimed were of particular monetary value, but became the subject of unexpected anger from Coloradians as a whole. They received numerous letters and phone calls from concerned citizens who felt that the museum’s decision was preventing the Zuni from practicing their long established religious traditions (Colwell 2021, 43).

Dr. Colwell has written at length on modern repatriation issues. Another piece from him comes in the form of a collaboration with another curator at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, Stephen Nash. "NAGPRA at 30: the effects of repatriation" is a retrospective on the long term effects created by this piece of legislation on the museum field. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act has had far-reaching consequences, but the subject of interest for this article lies in its impact on museum collections. Colwell writes,

“Reflections on NAGPRA show that many archaeologists, particularly in academia, consider it complicated, difficult, burdensome, or even worse (Meighan 1992) ... It has led museums to acknowledge the “appalling fact” that not all museum collections were properly cataloged (see Isaac 2002, p. 164). In fact, archaeologists recognized this so-called “curation crisis” in print as early as 1982.” (Colwell, Nash 2020, 229)

Curators often take the sanctity of their collections for granted and assume that the museum specialists who came before them held the same rigorous standards that they do now. They take

their predecessors in good faith. NAGPRA and those who use it to make repatriation claims force museums to take the first step of acknowledging their own dubious history. Until an institution admits this basic fact, there is no avenue through which it can improve. He continues to emphasize this point, “Other studies turn the lens back on the museum itself. Colwell( 2015) argues through a historical analysis of repatriation claims that museums have nimbly used secrecy as a way to reassert colonial power relations.” (Colwell, Nash 2020, 231) NAGPRA has not created a system without bias. Native people making repatriation claims must prove their connection to remains and sacred objects using inherently westernized, imperial concepts. The balance of power still tilts towards museums, which are not forced by any actual consequences to make their collections accessible to the vast majority who have no idea what hides within them.

Circling back to the community around Newberry College, the decision to retire the Native American mascot continues to be met with pushback. As head archivist, Dr. Power has had the opportunity to speak with many alumni on the issue. To quote his paper,

“Many alumni who graduated before 2009, however, accept the Wolves as the nickname for Newberry’s athletes only because they have no other alternative. They express that view, often with complaints about “political correctness,” both in conversation and by collecting and displaying Newberry Indian items from the mid-twentieth century to the early twenty-first century... One prominent Newberry Indian logo, a profile bust of an Indian in full headdress created during World War II, has been reproduced with the slogan ‘I Am And Will Always Be a Newberry Indian.’” (Power 2018, 7)

Until Newberry College takes steps to make their decision process more transparent, there will always be the issue of alumni who believe the college was forced into changing mascots. While

these opinions may not seem highly impactful, every alumni speaking on it helps shape the narrative. Newberry College's history is written out loud by the people who attended and live in the campus's shadow. If the truth, that the faculty voted unanimously to change the mascot, is to become well known then alumni understanding is paramount.

### **Conclusion**

Newberry College is a case study. It was a single institution out of many that was called to task but the NCAA for its use of racially offensive mascots. While other colleges and universities may have had different paths to dealing with their problematic mascots, Newberry College is in the unique position of having detailed records surrounding the decision making process. The fact that these records were preserved at all speaks to the fact that while the administration may have spoken in defense of the use of Native Americans as mascots, the rest of the college community cared that their dissenting opinion be heard. If one only followed the news it might appear that the college was forced into changing mascots. In reality, the choice came by unanimous vote.

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