

NOTES FROM THE HEARINGS OF
NESHAMINY vs. PENNSYLVANIA HUMAN
RELATIONS COMMISSION (PHRC)
January 10, 2019

The hearings at Bucks County Community College went on for five days. I was able to attend on the fourth day when Donna Fann-Boyle was questioned. I asked Donna how she felt now that it was over. She said, *“I felt more empowered by the amount of support I received. I feel like I can breathe now and that the hard part is over. The public is now more aware. I feel good about what happened during the hearings but it is still up in the air. Nothing is set in stone.”*

One of the lawyers for PHRC is about to give birth and is taking maternity leave. This means that the findings will be delayed until July 1st. It will be an 11-member panel who makes the final decision.

I watched the testimony of two Neshaminy HS teachers and a community member before Donna’s testimony. The community member was a lawyer, father of students in Neshaminy Schools and also a coach in the community who said he knows lots of young people. He supported the greatness of the school district, saw no problems with the mascot and its effect. When asked if he was aware of the meaning of “redsk*ns” he said he never did any research into the subject and saw no negative effects in the schools. I followed him into the hall as he left and handed him a copy of the Spencer Phips Proclamation of 1755, which spells out the details of the bounties-money paid for “redsk*ns” or scalps.

A teacher who advises the Student Council talked about the students coming up with the Mr. Redsk*ns event and didn’t say anything to them about the deeper meaning of the name. All three adult men proclaimed that they saw nothing wrong with the R-word, that they didn’t consider it a racial slur and when learning that some found it offensive did no further research about why.

Judge Carl Somerson asked the teacher if he agreed that the people about whom the derogatory remark or name is being made, had more weight in how it makes them feel than those saying the name?

I learned that on Tuesday Neshaminy School District hired as its expert witness Andre Billeaudeau, a self-proclaimed amateur historian who wrote a children’s fictional book about how the Washington r skins got their name. He is also the executive director of NAGA a 95% non-native organization that supports the use of native mascotry and promotes harassment of natives and allies who work on changing harmful mascotry in their schools. He travels the country trying to convince school districts with Native mascots that it is to honor them. (NAGA) <http://www.naguardians.org/> All the leading Native American tribal organizations condemn the use of Native mascots and many studies have shown the negative impact. The negative impact is also on the non-native students increasing divisions, attitudes of superiority and racism.

Research led by psychology professor Chu Kim-Prieto (The College of New Jersey) showed that exposure to Native American team mascots, increases a person's negative stereotyping of other races. When society condones stereotypes, youth and adults think it is okay to use other stereotypes - which ultimately leads to more bias and discrimination

One of the more disturbing reports from the hearings was the testimony on day 5 by Stephen Pirritano, a school board member. When asked if he felt the information about scalp bounties to be true--his answer: "I'm sure it happened you know-- just like any other races through history you know [have] been eradicated. My parents came from Italy. When the Africans came over went to Sicily and Italy and killed all the men and impregnated all the women, the world's full of that."

The lawyer asked Pirritano, "Did you learn about Native Americans being scalped or a bounty on their heads while in school?"

Pirritano answered, "Did we ever learn about scalping in school? I can't remember if we learned about that but you know, knowing the nuns they may have taught that to us."

There is a great deal of evidence about the cyberbullying and backlash on Donna over the years: death threat phone calls and a great deal of nasty social media attacks. None of this evidence was brought up at the hearings, as it was up to the Neshaminy lawyers to bring it up, which they wouldn't do given the negative light it would shine on the community. I understand that it is part of what the judge and the PHRC panel have to examine.

It is remarkable that the school district is willing to spend precious educational monies to defend, such an indefensible mascot. And ironic that the most vehement Euro-American community members, who say the mascot is an honor to Native peoples, are the most disrespectful to actual living Native peoples. I contend that this fierce connection between symbol and identity has its roots in our Euro-American loss of ancestral territories. On a cellular level many of us long for our tribal identity and connection, long lost through early migration and or intense cultural mixing. Tragically, Native culture is very compelling to appropriate when you long for tribal identity.

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission
<https://www.phrc.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

Thank you for reading this,
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