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OPINION

Racial Slurs Have No Place in Football

Our rights still aren't fully recognized

BY JUDITH LeBLANC

The leaves are changing. The scent of pumpkin spice lattes is in the air. In short, it's football season. And like millions of my fellow Americans, I love football.

But I'm also American Indian.

So for me, football season also means hearing a racial slur all the time. It's used by sports teams around the country — and by Washington, D.C.'s National Football League team in particular.

You may know that franchise as the Redskins. I refer to it as the R-word.

Natives have been calling on

sports teams to do away with the slur for 50 years, along with other mocking mascots and racist caricatures of Natives employed by

teams of all kinds. Professional outfits should know better, but so should schools and communities.

So I celebrated recently, along with much of Indian Country, when California Gov. Jerry

Brown signed the California Racial Mascots Act into law. It banned the state's public schools from using the R-word to name sports teams. Schools in four California counties will soon have to rebrand their buildings, logos, uniforms, and mascots.

We cannot change history or erase the past," said Dakota Kicking Bear Brown, president of Native Education Raising Dedicated Students. "But today,

as Native students, we shall celebrate this step in the right direction of improving our educational experiences."

I agree. Now if we can just convince our nation's leaders to do the same.

My hope faded, though, when I heard Republican presidential candidate Jeb Bush use the R-word not once, not twice, but three times during an interview in October. Then there's GOP candidate Donald Trump, who proclaimed that Indians are "extremely proud" of the term.

Wrong.

For Native children, the R-word and its associated mascots are demeaning and disparaging, eroding their self-confidence and self-image. Unsurprisingly, peer-reviewed studies have suggested that racist mascots can hurt the performance of Native students.

It's an additional mockery for

an already suffering group of young people whose second-leading cause of death is suicide. And it's an added insult to people whose treaty rights are still being violated, even today.

Native Americans are regularly confronted with attempts to turn our sacred religious lands over to corporations for profit. In Oak Flat, Ariz., some 2,400 acres of national forest land — protected since 1955 as Apache sacred land — is being handed over to Resolution Copper, a British-Australian mining conglomerate.

Meanwhile Natives continue to protest the Keystone XL pipeline, which would funnel oil mined from tar sands nearly 1,800 miles from Alberta, Canada to the Gulf of Mexico through multiple sovereign Indian territories. The U.S. government never negotiated with the tribes when charting the pipeline, despite the

impact it will have on their lands.

And in spite of long-standing poverty, gross health disparities between Natives and non-Natives, and ongoing discrimination, federal funding for Indian health care, housing, and education programs remains paltry.

Most people have the good sense not to use the R-word to our faces. So why would you plaster it across a stadium?

Dropping the R-word alone won't solve these deep crises in Indian country. But it's a crucial step toward restoring the equity, dignity, and democracy taken from the first people of this land.

At the very least, it'll let us all get back to enjoying football — without the nasty reminder that the rights of American Indians still aren't fully recognized.

Judith Le Blanc is the director of the Native Organizers Alliance and member of the Caddo Tribe of Oklahoma.

Contributing to the Crisis Our Children Face

The need to break our silence

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

It is time for adults of every race and income group to break our silence about the pervasive breakdown of moral, family, and community values, to place our children first in our lives, and to struggle to model the behavior we want our children to learn.

School children don't need one more "Officer Slam" as some students referred to the white South Carolina school resource officer who recently shamed the nation with his violent ejection of a 16-year-old black female from her classroom for a nonviolent offense.

The last thing children need is violent assaults in schools which ought to be safe havens, and a suspension, expulsion and arrest to blot their school records and push them closer to the prison pipeline. And the very last thing children need is out-of-control adults using violence as a way of resolving differences.

I am often asked what's wrong with our children and I almost always answer, adults are what's wrong. We tell our children to control themselves while slapping and spanking and ejecting them violently in our homes, child care centers, schools, detention

facilities and prisons. Adults tell children to be honest while lying and cheating and not to be violent while marketing and glorifying violence.

I urge every parent, adult, educator, faith and public leader to conduct a personal audit to determine whether we are contributing to the crisis our children face or to the solutions they urgently need. And if we are not a part of the solution, we are a part of the problem and need to do better.

Our children don't need or expect us to be perfect. They do need and expect us to be honest, to admit and correct our mistakes, and to share our struggles about the mean-

ings and responsibilities of faith, parenthood, citizenship, and life. Before we can pull up the moral weeds of violence, materialism, and greed in our society that are strangling so many of our young, we must pull up the moral weeds in our own backyards and educational institutions. So many children are confused about what is right and wrong because so many adults talk right and do wrong in our personal, professional, and public lives.

If we are not supporting a child we brought into the world as a father or mother with attention, time, love, discipline, and the teaching

of values, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to the family breakdown today that is leaving so many children at risk.

If we are abusing tobacco, alcohol or other drugs while telling our children not to, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution in our overly addicted society.

If we have unlocked and loaded guns in our home and cars, and rely on them to feel safe and powerful, and don't stand up to those

who market guns to our children and to those who kill our children with guns, or glamorize violence as fun, entertaining, and normal, then we are part of the problem rather than the

solution to the escalating war of American against American, family member against family member, and children against adults and adults against children that is tearing us apart.

If we profess to be people of faith and send rather than take our children to worship and religious education services, and believe that the Sermon on the Mount, Ten Commandments, the Koran, or whatever religious beliefs we hold, pertain only to one-day worship but not to Monday through Sunday home, professional, and political life, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solu-

tion to the spiritual famine and hypocrisy plaguing America today.

If we tell, snicker, or wink at racial, gender, religious, or ethnic jokes or engage in or acquiesce in any practices intended to diminish rather than enhance other human beings, then we are contributing to the proliferating voices of racial and ethnic division and intolerance staining our land again. Let's not fight the civil war or repeat the worst lessons of our past. Let's prepare for the future in an irreversibly interconnected world that is majority non-white and poor.

If we think being American is about how much we can get rather than about how much we can give and share to help all our children get a healthy, fair, and safe start in life, and successful transition to college and productive work in our boastfully wealthy nation and are unable and unwilling to support the poor among us then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.

If we or our organizations are spending more money on alcohol and entertainment than on scholarships, books, tutoring, rites of passage, and mentoring programs for youths, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to ensuring positive alternatives to the streets and drug dealers for children.

If we'd rather talk the talk

than walk the walk to the voting booths, school board meetings, political forums, PTA, congregation and community meetings to organize community and political support on all sides of the aisle for our children, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.

If we are not voting and holding political leaders at every level and in every party accountable for investing relative pennies in quality early childhood opportunities, education, housing for homeless children and jobs — jobs with dignity and decent wages — and billions in the military budget, and for cutting investments for poor mothers and children while protecting massive government welfare for rich farmers and over-paid corporate executives, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to the undemocratic unjust and growing gap between rich and poor.

And if we think we have ours and don't owe any time or money or effort to lend a hand to voteless, voiceless, hungry, homeless, miseducated, neglected and abused children, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to the fraying social fabric and violence and uncertainty that threatens all Americans.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

