

NBE 3E

## STEREOTYPES + MEDIA

① Read through "Images of Aboriginal People in Contemporary Media".

Answer ASSIGNMENT 3.3, WRITING RESPONSE  
(It is out of "15" so answer accordingly.)

② Read through "Sports Logos: An Insult".

Answer ASSIGNMENT 3.4, Q # 1-10

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### Images of Aboriginal People in Contemporary Media

There are hundreds of different aboriginal nations across Canada and the United States. Inuit, Cree, Anishinaubae, Carrier, Shushwap, Blood, Hopi, Navajo, Dene, Mi'kmaq, Seneca, just to name few. All have different languages and different traditions. They have different territories and different histories. A national gathering of aboriginal peoples is as diverse as a meeting of the United Nations.

Despite this diversity of histories and cultures, the most common image of aboriginal people is that of one nation, in one particular period of time: the late nineteenth century Sioux warrior. This "imaginary Indian" is most often on a horse, with a bow and arrow, wearing buskskin, and a full headdress of eagle feathers. He is endowed with all the "Indian" qualities: nature-lover, warrior, mystical shaman. He is angry and defiant, yet ultimately he is resigned to his fate. His spouse is nowhere to be seen; if she is in the picture, she is quiet and subservient. The "imaginary Indian," adorning post cards and ever popular in airport gift shops, has reduced the multiplicity of experiences of aboriginal people to one powerful and pervasive image.

The Hollywood movie industry helped create and perpetuate Indian stereotypes and some continue to affect attitudes today. These stereotypes reflected, in part, societal attitudes in the days of the Western dime novel and the Wild West Show, two popular entertainment forms during the frontier days of North America that stereotyped aboriginal people as savage and ignorant. As the movie industry developed decades later, it capitalized on these stereotypes to heighten the drama of films and to create suspense for its audience. Aboriginal people were regularly portrayed in ways that were historically inaccurate.

For example, the religious ceremonies of aboriginal people were often misinterpreted. The peace pipe has been freely used by authors and producers to convey their own simplistic interpretation of a revered and sacred object and traditional dances were portrayed as pagan rituals. Also, aboriginal languages were treated in a way that portrayed aboriginal people as silent, monosyllabic, and simple-minded. Sometimes the actors spoke a series of meaningless gibberish, that sounded the way Hollywood wanted the audience to think Indians sounded. Other times they used vocabulary popularized phrases that stereotyped aboriginal people's use of English, e.g., "How!" and "White man speak with forked tongue."

The stereotyping of aboriginal people in movies continues today. Many Canadians do not know much about Indians except what they see on television or at the movies. As a result, false images continue to be perpetuated. Filmmakers have also missed the opportunity to learn from the rich diversity of aboriginal cultures. Aboriginal people have been hurt by Hollywood stereotyping because they face the resulting prejudice every day and because these images inevitably become part of the way they see themselves. As well as stereotyping aboriginal people, many films misrepresented their ways of life, portrayed a one-sided view of history and ignored the important contributions they made to North American life.

It is not only the movie industry which has perpetuated stereotypes of aboriginal people. When covering aboriginal issues, newspaper and TV journalists often reduce the complexity of aboriginal histories into "problems" – the "Indian land" problem, the "unemployed Indian" problem, the "Indian self-government" problem. These problems, more often than not, have little reference to aboriginal perspectives on the issue. Even environmental groups stereotype aboriginal people. They expect them to be allies in the fight for the environment when often aboriginal people are equally as concerned about sustaining their communities.

Aboriginal peoples are beginning to combat the stereotypes which reduced their cultures to postcard images of buckskin and feathers. Increasing numbers of aboriginal historians, authors, academics, playwrights, and politicians are ensuring that the histories

of aboriginal nations are told accurately, from their own perspective. In doing so, the culture and history of both aboriginal peoples and Canada are revitalized and restored.

### Assignment 3.3

A few years ago, a sociologist performed an experiment to test discrimination against Aboriginal people. To approximately one hundred Canadian holiday resorts, he wrote two letters, signing one with the name Mr. Smith and one with the name of Mr. Little Bear. The two letters were mailed on the same day and asked for rooms on the same dates. About 95% of the resorts answered Mr. Smith's letters and 93% offered him a room in their motel or hotel. But only 52% of the resorts answered Mr. Little Bear's letters, and only 20% of the resorts offered him a room.

It would be difficult to prove legally that the resort managers did not offer a room to Mr. Little Bear because of their prejudices about Aboriginal people. Yet it is fairly obvious that this is one conclusion, since the resorts must have had vacancies. While most provinces have human rights legislation aimed at preventing discrimination, these laws do not try to change people's attitudes. They only try to stop people with these attitudes from hurting others. It is still very difficult to prove that the hotel managers were breaking the law.

Have you ever encountered any stereotypes of Indians? Write a one page autobiographical account which begins: "*My personal experiences with Aboriginal stereotypes occurred when . . . .*" (15 marks)

Read the following selection and answer the questions that follow.

#### Sports Logos: An Insult By Noah Augustine

Last Thursday evening, I watched rather helplessly as nine Indians were thrashed and battered about by just as many men in blue and white uniforms. Normally, I would have done something about it – called for backup, at least. Instead, I cheered with each stinging tag and swinging blow delivered by this bunch of big-bat-swinging bullies.

There were the Toronto Blue Jays, of course, beating up on the celebrated Cleveland Indians. And, although I am an Indian (Mi'kmaq, I prefer) hailing from the Maritimes, I remain a big fan of the Indian-swatting Jays. One might assume that because Cleveland proudly displays an image of some misshapen Indian that all people of Indian descent must be Cleveland fans. Not true. In fact, the use of imagery is insulting to most aboriginal people.

The issue of professional sports teams using Indian symbols is one that may not concern most Canadians, although it can be argued that Canadians have less tolerance

for racism – and are less blatant in its exercise – than our neighbours in the U.S. We are, as they say, politically correct, at most times.

Nonetheless, for me, as an aboriginal person, the use of these religious symbols and caricatures of Indian chiefs or spiritual leaders as sports logos is an offensive to my cultural heritage as it would be for an African Canadian to observe the “Boston Blacks” – or for religious people to see the image of a rabbi, an archbishop or the Dalai Lama stitched into the shoulder patches of professional sports teams.

If a television image of thousands of baseball fans screaming “war chants” and waving fake tomahawks in support of the Atlanta Braves is baffling me and my understanding of society, I can only wonder how such acceptance of less-than-subtle racism is affecting our younger generations. Who said it was okay for professional sports teams – and their millions of adoring fans – to adopt our cultural icons and images for mass ridicule?

One American youth, in a 1997 Grade 8 writing assignment on his school’s use of an Indian symbol, explained it this way: “We simply chose an Indian as the emblem. We could have just as easily chosen any uncivilized animal.” Is the education system the most effective tool we have in our fight against racism? I sometimes wonder.

With baseball’s Atlanta Braves and Cleveland Indians, football’s Kansas City Chiefs and Washington Redskins, and hockey’s Chicago Blackhawks, professional sports organizations are turning a blind eye to racism in professional sports.

Professional athletes within these organizations serve as role models for all youth, including aboriginal youth. With this comes a certain responsibility.

Like so many Canadian kids, it is the dream of many aboriginal youth to someday lace up a pair of skates and face off against hockey’s best. When Everett Sanipass, a Mi’kmaq from Big Cove First Nation, was drafted by the Chicago Blackhawks in the 1986 NHL draft, almost every aboriginal youth in Atlantic Canada proudly displayed the team logo – an Indian face with war paint – on everything from jerseys to lunch pails. Sanipass was the Wayne Gretzky of aboriginal hockey. It didn’t matter which team he played for; what mattered was that he played in the big league. And if Sanipass said it was good, then it was great. The logo he wore could have just as easily been any “uncivilized animal.” Kids do not recognize such symbols of racism but do become victims of the assault.

With dreams and aspirations comes sacrifice. It is admirable for sacrifice to be recognized as hard work and dedication, but let it not be admirable to accept tolerance of racism as just one more sacrifice.

Many feel that aboriginal people should be honoured that Indian imagery is the logo of some sports communities. But what honour lies in ridicule and mockery? Take, for example, a 1998 *Washington Post* sports headline, referring to a Dallas football victory over Washington, which read: “Cowboys finish off Redskins.”

At the root of this issue is the trademark business. It’s a multi-million-dollar industry. However, change is in the air. Last year, the Washington Redskins had seven trademarks, including their logo, cancelled for federal registration based on a complaint from several tribes. The Trademark Trial and Appeal Board found “Redskins” to be “disparaging” to native Americans. The ruling is under appeal.

Even though, as it is said, money makes the world go 'round, court actions can change that. Perhaps, someday, respect will have a greater value than the almighty dollar.

#### Assignment 3.4

- 1 In one paragraph, summarize Noah Augustine's arguments in the essay. (5 marks)
- 2 Do you agree with Noah Augustine? Give reasons for your opinion. (5 marks)
- 3 Discuss the images or stereotypes that are associated with terms such as "Eskimos", "Indians", "Redskins", and "Braves". Why do you think Aboriginal people would be offended by these terms? (5 marks)
- 4 How does Noah Augustine feel about the statement "We could have just as easily chosen any uncivilized animal"? (2 marks)
- 5 What do you think would be a fair solution to the problem of Aboriginal sports logos? (3 marks)
- 6 As a concerned citizen, write a letter to the Canadian Football League arguing that the city of Edmonton should change the name of its football team (Edmonton Eskimos). Make sure to include reasonable arguments for changing the name as well as alternate names for the team. Have a partner proofread your work to help eliminate any grammatical and usage errors. (10 marks)

