

# The SHOSHONE-BANNOCK TRIBES

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## Shoshone-Bannock Tribes

### Position paper on Racism and Mascots in Idaho schools

The Fort Hall Business Council, the governing body for the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes (Tribes) officially oppose the use of racial misappropriation of terms referring to Native Americans, including "Indians" "Savages" and "Redskins" as a part of any school mascots in Idaho. It is disheartening to see that in 2019 the racial controversy continues. The Tribes request to the Idaho State Board of Education and the Idaho Governor and Legislature to take a stand and establish state policy to prohibit public schools from using these types of names as school mascots.

State-wide, here is the list of schools who use offensive names and mascots:

1. Salmon Savages, Salmon Idaho
2. Salmon River Savages, Riggins Idaho
3. Teton High School Redskins, Driggs Idaho
4. Pocatello High School Indians, Pocatello Idaho
5. Shoshone Indians, Shoshone Idaho
6. Preston Indians, Preston Idaho
7. Buhl Indians, Buhl Idaho
8. Boise High School Braves, Boise Idaho

*The use of names perpetuates inaccurate depictions of tribes, tribal history, and interaction with whites and non-Indians.* It is common to see public school curriculum teaching a single-sided Euro-American version of tribal history, and emphasizing the frontier mentality of conquering the wilderness. The historical reality is that our people, the Shoshone and Bannock bands, were removed from these lands throughout Idaho, and forced to live on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. Our people were denied their right to hunt off-reservation to prevent starvation, while white outfitters, guides and settlers profited off of the wildlife that had provided subsistence for our people. Extensive ranches, roads and towns were constructed on our lands, on our trails, on our campsites.

*The non-Indian Euro-American rationale of public schools and communities that using mascots such as savages, redskins, or Indians "honors" Indian people is grossly inaccurate.* The continued use of these names would only honor the non-Indian ideology created by dominant mainstream society, whose ancestors directly or indirectly killed, sold, removed, or demoralized the original Indian residents. The people, the schools and institutions who developed these names *savage, redskins, braves, Indians* are

perpetuating racism and stereotyping. Further, the Shoshone and Bannock Tribes have not been asked to be part of something that directly impacts our people so historically and so personally.

*As the high school racism and cultural misappropriation debates continue to be waged across Idaho and the nation, the direct impacts continue to resonate to our Tribal membership.* More importantly, these types of school labels, both names and images, propagate harmful attitudes and perceptions to and about Indian people, leading to past, current and future misperceptions about tribes and of Indian people. Every day the expression of racial misunderstandings, of lack of education of mainstream society of Shoshone and Bannock people and history, is seen on social media postings. It is absolutely harmful to retain these names, mascots and to continue the misappropriation of American Indians.

*Unauthorized or inappropriate use of Tribal sacred or religious items for commercial or promotional use of a school institution must stop.* For example, the use of headdresses or war bonnets by the Pocatello Indians cheerleaders or flag teams has always been antagonizing for the Tribes. War bonnets have traditionally been an item worn by men who have earned that unique privilege of wearing it by acts of bravery in battles, wars, or as an esteemed tribal leader. Women usually do not wear war bonnets except under specific Tribal dances and ceremonies. When non-Indian girls or men, wear these sacred and unique cultural items without understanding the significance and meaning and/or used in an inappropriate manner is inappropriate and perpetuates racism and stereotyping.

*The national problem of bullying and harassment to Native American students at both the middle and high schools is a real problem to our local Shoshone and Bannock students.* From other schools, just last week, we received a report from a tribal member about an incident of racial bullying and harassment to one of our young boys who has long hair, who was threatened with verbal and physical threats; or our young women who are called "Pocahontas" or "Sacajawea," – all comments that are stated in a derogatory and hateful manner. At this year's State girls' basketball tournament game in Boise, our Sho-Ban High School athletes were taunted with racist, hateful and derogatory comments from the opposing teams' parents and basketball players.

*The Tribes urge local school districts to avoid the degradation of race relations between the local off reservation communities but instead, the Shoshone-Bannock people encourage open communication and educational opportunities for the Idaho community and students.* The negative and harmful stereotypical images used by various arms of the local school district and high schools illustrate the misunderstanding of "Indian chiefs" and "Home of the Redskins." We have an opportunity to come together as community members who have a shared regard for our region and the state, and to emphasize bullying and racism have no place in Idaho. This can only happen when we stand up and stop old stereotypes and have open and honest conversations.

*The Tribes note that the State history requirements fails to offer Tribal history to high schools as a part of the approved curriculum.* The Tribes request that the State require a mandatory class for high school students, and diversity training for the local School District teachers, and administrative staff, on

Idaho Tribal Government and History, to better understand the Native American people. We willingly offer our Tribal Education and Tribal Cultural staff assistance to you in the development of an acceptable and accurate curriculum for this class and training. We hope that other Tribes in Idaho would provide the same support.

***The Tribes believe that this policy change can provide an educational and learning opportunities for Idaho citizens to better understand and value a diverse citizenship and cultures.*** Learning objectives for what we are trying to accomplish include:

- To help students, school districts, and athletic programs better work together
- To better understand who American Indian people are, their history in Idaho and other tribes
- To acknowledge the differences between people and cultures
- To be tolerant of other people who may have different identities, beliefs and backgrounds.

***It is the intent of the Tribes to seek redress at the State level, to go beyond the local misunderstandings of towns and communities in Idaho*** Recognizing the state-wide organization of providing local control of local school boards, the Tribes believe the Idaho state school system fails to consider the full impact of racist and inappropriate names, mascots and use of Native American images. However, it is the State Board of Education that sets educational policy from kindergarten through postsecondary, and in their efforts to create a more synchronous system, they have an opportunity to make a difference, to set an example and say no to bullying and racism at a state level. It is time that they no longer remain silent on this issue. The Tribes will submit a copy of this statement to the Idaho State Board of Education, the Idaho Indian Education Committee, the Idaho Indian Affairs Council and the Governor's Office. In submitting this statement, we request that action be taken. That the State Board of Education address this matter at either its June or August 2019 State Board of Education meeting.

***Public schools should not be the hotbeds of teaching bullying through the continued use of racial and stereotyping, but rather a place where all cultures and values are respected and represented with honest and open dialogue.*** We encourage you to take appropriate action to remove all racist names and mascot caricatures in Idaho high schools and require schools replace them with more appropriate and positive names. It would be to the benefit of Idaho, local communities and economic benefit to be known as the community who made the ethical decision to change their school names and avoid the label of racism.