



Aug. 5, 2014

Mr. Dick Costolo, CEO
Twitter, Inc.
1355 Market Street
Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Costolo,

As a social network of 271 million accounts around the globe, your rules very clearly prohibit users from “engag(ing) in targeted abuse or harassment.” In light of those laudable rules, we hereby request that you remove the Twitter handle @redskins, because the name is a dictionary- and U.S.-government-defined slur targeting Native Americans.

This is particularly pressing considering the Twitter company’s decision to specially verify the account. Because the verification process is a proactive move by the company, it appears to be a formal corporate endorsement of the use of this slur. This is especially the case because this is not a matter of a single tweet - this is an entire user account, constantly tweeting out a slur to hundreds of thousands of users every day.

At a time when serious questions are being raised about Silicon Valley’s commitment to diversity and its respect for minority groups, Twitter has an obligation to respect its own rules and take a strong stand against this slur.

As has been widely reported over the last year, every major English language dictionary defines the term “redskins” as a derogatory racial insult targeting Native Americans. Additionally, the United States Patent Office recently ruled that the term is “disparaging to Native Americans.”

That is entirely accurate - as National Public Radio reported in 2013, the term for more than a century has been an epithet widely used with “a negative, increasingly violent connotation” and has been used as a “derogatory slur” throughout American politics and popular culture.

This is, no doubt, why Washington football franchise owner George Preston Marshall decided to use the term as his team’s name. Marshall was one of contemporary American history’s most famous segregationists. A virulent racist, Marshall helped engineer the NFL’s ban on African Americans and was the last owner to integrate his team (and only did so under threat of federal sanctions).

Most Native Americans today recognize this term as the epithet screamed at their ancestors as they were dragged at gunpoint off their sacred homelands. Consequently, a recent poll by the Center for Indigenous Peoples Studies at California State University found more than two thirds of Native Americans say the Washington team's name “is a racial or racist word and symbol.”

According to an extensive report by Dr. Michael Friedman that reviews decades of social science research, the promotion of this term by the Washington team - and by extension, Twitter - has severe negative cultural, social and psychological consequences for Native Americans. We have attached this report for your perusal.

Because of this, Native American organizations, civil rights groups, religious leaders, sports icons have all called on the Washington team to stop using this name. Additionally, in just the last year, the President of the United States, the United Nations and Members of Congress of both parties - including 50 United States senators - have all called on the team to stop using this slur. Meanwhile, a large and ever-growing list of media organizations have this year made the decision to stop using the term, understanding that promoting the term in any context promotes its message of targeted hate against Native Americans.

We, of course, understand the need for Twitter to be a platform that respects freedom of speech and an open exchange of ideas. However, just as the First Amendment does not protect speech designed to be obscene or violent, Twitter should not be in the business of protecting and promoting a racial slur targeting Native Americans for cultural harassment and persecution based on the alleged color of our skin.

Your company’s aforementioned rules of conduct referenced in its Terms of Service clearly recognize this truism, and your willingness to enforce those rules in the past against other racial slurs is encouraging. Now we are asking you to once again enforce those rules.

By doing so, you will not only be showing that you are serious about your own Terms of Service, but also that you are proudly standing on the right side of history - the side that says companies like Twitter should not be in the business of helping anyone target a demographic group with racial slurs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ray Halbritter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Ray Halbritter
Oneida Indian Nation Representative

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqueline Pata". The signature is cursive and elegant, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, flowing underline.

Jacqueline Pata
Executive Director, National Congress of American Indians

cc:
Gabriel Stricker
Chief Communications Officer, Twitter, Inc