

## V101 - Chiefs Traditions - AL

### **\*theme up\***

Anyone who looks around metro phoenix can tell: The Super Bowl is coming to town.

This Sunday, the Philadelphia Eagles and the Kansas City Chiefs kick off in Glendale at State Farm Stadium for the big game. The winning team takes home the championship and the Lombardi Trophy.

The Valley is dressed to the nines with Super Bowl 57 logos plastered on buildings, street signs, and billboards.

The "L V I I" representing 57 showcases the desert's red rocks against a teal sky, and sunbeams reminiscent of the Arizona state flag.

And while that logo feels symbolic of where the tournament is taking place, not all of the logos connected with the game are admired.

Welcome to Valley 101, an Arizona Republic podcast about metro-Phoenix and beyond. I'm producer Amanda Luberto and today I'm joined by Debra Krol. She's an indigenous affairs reporter for the Arizona Republic and she's going to tell us why there are calls for the Chiefs to change.

### **\*theme up to fade\***

This situation isn't new for the NFL.

After decades of protests, the Washington Commanders dropped the **former** racist name and logo from their franchise. But it wasn't easy. Starting in the early 1990s, groups like the National Congress of American Indians tried to get the team to rebrand.

After the George Floyd murder in the summer of 2020, racial injustice **was on everyone's mind**. Team and league sponsors threatened to withdraw if the team did not change.

As a result, they were the Washington Football Team for a whole year before becoming the Commanders.

Similarly, the MLB team, the Cleveland Guardians, were formerly the Cleveland Indians until 2021. This came years after they changed their logo to a block C and got rid of the well-known caricature of the Indian that was cartoonishly red.

While to many, it feels like progress, the work is not done. And with the Kansas City Chiefs coming to Arizona, that ~~necessary work~~ will be front and center in Glendale.

[00:20:01] **Debra:** I've heard from the Kansas City Indian Center that they plan to be on hand and alongside some of the local long-time native activists, such as Amanda Blackhorse, who had the longstanding lawsuit against the Washington team. They'll all be down there with their signs. And the theme of their signs is Love the team, hate the name. [00:20:22][21.1]

**\*music beat\***

The team name is rooted in racism, even dating back to the 1960s when the team first came to Kansas City from Dallas.

Originally, they were the Dallas Texans, but they were having very little luck against the Dallas Cowboys when it came to attendance. So in 1963, Kansas City Mayor H. Roe Bartle invited Lamar Hunt to move the team to Missouri.

[00:01:42] **Debra:** Now, the thing you have to understand about Mayor Bartel was he was known as Chief Bartle because he was the former Boy Scout executive who had founded this Boy Scout Honor Society known as the Mic-O-Say Tribe. [00:01:59][17.2]

Just to clarify, this isn't a real Indigenous tribe.

[00:02:26] **Debra:** It's a fake tribe. But the Boy Scouts have always been been one of the worst offenders when it comes to appropriating native culture. And the Mic-O-Say Tribe is the worst of the Boy Scout lot. They have a reservation, several reservations. They have bands, they have societies, they have bundle holders. They use dances. And one of the native activists I talked to is extremely offended that they're doing the Eagle dance, which is a very sacred dance that's only supposed to be done by certain initiated people within the Pueblo and communities of which Hopis are one.

So the Mayor of Kansas City at the time was the founder of a Boy Scout society that pulled from Native motifs and culture, without any connection to the Native peoples. I checked their website and this is still the prevalent tone of the society.

[00:03:30] **Debra:** And so his nickname was Chief Lone Bear. And so everyone just started calling him Chief. So when he got Lamar Hunt to bring the team to Kansas City, they decided they were going to call it the Chiefs, because obviously you can't call the Kansas City Texans. [00:03:47][17.7]

The team was named in honor of the non-Native Mayor who brought the team to Kansas City.

The first Chiefs logo was similar to the first Cleveland Indians and Washington football team's logos: cartoonish and racist.

The Chiefs hired the same newspaper cartoonist, Bob Taylor, who created the logo back when they were the Dallas Texans.

[00:04:18] **Debra:** which was this this six shooter waving, football toting cowboy with big boots and a B and super superimposed on the state of Texas. So Taylor took that motif and changed it to a really, really buff native man, shirtless, no less washboard abs, buckskin leggings, moccasins, a loincloth in a big, humongous address, waving the tomahawk in the air and holding the football. [00:04:53][35.6]

With the new logo and name, came new traditions, also ripped from Native cultures.

[00:05:25] **Debra:** When the team would score, they had this big drum and they would pound on the drum and the fans would chant something that you would normally a tune you would normally find in a 1950s Hollywood Western. Any time you heard that music, you would know the Indians were coming. [00:05:45][20.3]

In 2014, the Kansas City Chiefs set a Guinness World Record for loudest crowd roar at a sports stadium. It was a game against the New England Patriots and the crowd reached 142.2 decibels.

I won't play it that loud, but here's what it sounded like. In this clip, you can hear the tune that Debra is referring to.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4P6z\\_DTHf8&ab\\_channel=JordanD](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4P6z_DTHf8&ab_channel=JordanD)

While chanting, the fans are doing the famed Tomahawk chop, where you put your arm straight out in front of you then bend it at the elbow bringing your thumb to your shoulder, then back down again. Like you're using an ax to chop.

[00:05:50] **Debra:** They wore their feather chicken headdresses. They painted themselves up in Warpaint. They did all sorts of other things that are today would be considered extremely inappropriate. And then some of the marketing materials. I found some old ads for a 1963 game with the New England Patriots were playing the Chiefs. And so it depicted this Revolutionary War soldier holding a rifle behind his back, holding out this bundle of beads to this Indian chief who looks

really excited that, oh, someone's giving me some beads.

[00:06:31][41.8]

Even in games between teams with inappropriate names and logos, there was disrespect beyond sports banter.

[00:06:34] **Debra:** And then there was one where the Washington team was playing the Chiefs and they said they were going to scalp the chiefs and send them back to the reservation. So, you know, this you know, it just was totally all open that that that type of

appropriation [00:06:56][22.0]

### **\*music change\***

In 1972, the logo changed. The image of the Indian running in a loincloth wielding a tomahawk was retired and the logo we know now was instated.

It's a rough edged black outline of an arrowhead with the interlocking K-C letters inside. The symbol still uses Native American motifs, but to some, is less offensive.

The behaviors and traditions of the fans did not change, and some still go on today.

The fight for dismantling racist appropriation was inspired by the movements of other marginalized groups.

[00:07:33] **Debra:** if you begin at the end of the civil rights struggle where African-Americans were struggling to gain their their equal rights, then native people saw that and they they started their own cultural and political renaissance, starting with the with the showdown in Alcatraz in 1969. And out of this grew a group of activists who were bound and determined that that anything that that was derogatory, offensive, disrespectful they were going to get rid of because they had already seen african-American people, getting rid of Little Black Sambo. They had seen Latino people, you know, throwing Frito Bandito into the dustbin. And they said, well, why don't we? Why don't they do the same for us? Yeah. So they've started this campaign and it's been going on and on for several years.

[00:08:32][58.9]

By several years, Debra means several decades. Since the logo change in 1972, the Kansas City Chiefs didn't push for adjustment until 2014.

[00:08:38] **Debra:** They formed a group of native, local, native people as advisers. They had several talks with them. And at the end of the day, this group said, well, we don't really care about the word chiefs, but we think you should get rid of all the rest.  
[00:08:53][15.8]

**But was this group representative of the Native tribes of this area?**

[00:09:03] **Debra:** So here's the thing is that is that some of the native activists I've been speaking with for this story say what what these teams will do is they will just go out and find some native people and not necessarily the leaders of tribal communities or people with particular standing in their tribal community. Although I did notice that one of the current members was the former president of Haskell Indian Nations University. He's former president, by the way. So they'll fight. They'll they'll get this group and they'll say, we've worked with the community, when in reality it's this small, tiny group and they haven't gone out and talked to the community at large. And this, according to the activists I have talked with, seems to be the case here. [00:10:01][57.2]

**It's an effort, but it's a small sample size.**

[00:10:05] **Debra:** For instance, the Kansas City Indian Center, which started its formal protest in 2019, told me that the Chiefs have never come to them even before they started for form their formal protests outside the stadium because they said they knew we would tell them that not only do they have to, you know, they have to do everything, including get rid of the word chiefs. [00:10:32][27.4]

**\*music\***

**It's certainly not all for nothing though. Some progressive changes are being made.**

[00:10:32] **Debra:** But one of the outcomes of of the small group that they met with was in 2020, they they put out some statements saying they were going to ban the fake headdresses, they were going to ban the native, the warpaint. And there were a few other things they were going to do, but they weren't going to get rid of the word chiefs.  
[00:10:55][23.6]

**Some of the Native activists that Debra spoke to said that while this is the rule, it's not necessarily enforced. The drum, the chop and the chant are all still traditions.**

[00:11:20] **Debra:** But according to the team's website, it's blessed each time by some local native practitioners and it's it. From what they said, it's treated with more respect than what it used to be, which was, you know, some fake drum that. [00:11:38][18.3]

In light of the Washington Commanders and Cleveland Guardians, there has been pressure put on the Chiefs to follow, but some feel like it's not that easy.

[00:13:16] **Debra:** Even the editorial board of the Kansas City Star, the local major daily, has urged them to dump the name. And we'll have to just see what what happens in the meantime. One of their arguments is that there are some teams that have not gotten rid of some of these names and some of them are in tribal communities. Yes. So it's not just the black and white issue in particular. A team in the Navajo Nation doesn't want to get rid of its offensive team name because they don't see it as offensive, Of course. You know, again, we have the nuance of if a tribe uses this word, is it offensive versus if a non-Indian uses this word, is it offensive? The anti-mask activists would like to see everybody quit using the R word, which is the equivalent to an African American being called the N-word. [00:14:21][64.9]

There is certainly a way forward if the team doesn't want to lose the name. Some other sports teams are working with the Indigenous tribes of their community to make sure that the name and traditions are treated with respect.

[00:15:01] **Debra:** Now, on the other hand, we have the the Florida Seminoles and there were some people saying, well, why are they getting rid of the name? Now, here's the other side of the coin. Is that is that the Florida Seminoles have a close relationship with the Seminoles tribes? Well, I should say the Seminole tribe. And they work together and they work to ensure anything that they do is culturally appropriate and relevant and respectful. So that is a success story. Why can't some of these teams say, let's go to the local tribes and let's let's figure out some way that we can do this together? That's that reflects the local tribal culture, that's respectful, and to dissuade our fans from doing things that that if it happened to them, they would find it offensive for their own culture. [00:15:59][57.8]

She noted that some of the teams in Arizona have a good relationship with the local tribes. The Phoenix Suns have a longstanding connection to the different communities. This year, they debuted a special edition jersey that represents the 22 tribes and was made by a Navajo designer.

The governor of the Gila River Indian Community said that a major sports franchise recognizing the first peoples like this felt historic.

Debra said there are ways to do it, and to do it respectfully.

Gaylene Crouser is the executive director of the Kansas City Indian Center and a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. When she spoke with Debra, she said fans who say they're honoring Native Americans pass by Natives holding signs that say "there's no honor in this" while going into the stadium.

She told Debra that Kansas deserves better.

**\*theme music up\***

Thanks so much for listening to this week's episode of Valley 101. To read more of Debra Krol's reporting, please subscribe to the Arizona Republic. You can find Debra on twitter at deb krol. That's d-e-b k-r-o-l.

If you enjoyed today's episode, subscribe wherever you get your podcasts and please share it with a friend!

You can stay up to date on Valley 101 and all other Arizona Republic podcasts on twitter at a-z-c-podcasts. You can also follow us on instagram at a-z-c-podcast.

If you'd like to follow me, I'm at Amanda luberto. That's l-u-b-e-r-t-o.

**\*music beat\***

This has been Valley 101. I'm producer Amanda Luberto, we'll see you next week.