

The "Wednesday Word"

October 27, 2021

"What's In A Name...and More"

As I write this I find myself watching a sporting event that perhaps holds limited interest for many of you. No, I'm not watching the National Hockey League (even though I am enjoying a pretty cool book about the history of Black players in the NHL, Breaking The Ice, by Cecil Harris). During this last week in October there are NFL games and NBA contests, as well. But what has my interest tonight and for the next week is Major League Baseball's World Series. Hear me out before you "change the channel" to something with a faster pace. Baseball is an amazing metaphor for life with its twists and turns, strategy and game management, and its ability to find heroes in unlikely places. There's more that could be said here but the focus of this message is in the combatants in this year's fall classic.



The Houston Astros (who many are still upset with following a cheating scandal two years ago) are taking on the Atlanta Baseball Club. That's correct, the Atlanta Baseball Club. It is past time for the Atlanta team to follow the lead of the Washington Football Team and the Cleveland Baseball Club who have recently retired offensive Native American sports mascots. Both teams have had decades of loyal fans who have grown accustomed to the teams' monikers. But tradition alone is never adequate enough to continue a practice. To be clear, the Atlanta team is referred to as the "Braves", a term many do not find offensive, including a number of Native Americans and even a few Tribal leaders. Nonetheless, now seems to be a good time to move on. Hey, Kansas City Football Team, you too. Some of you may still say, 'what's the big deal?' You might better understand if the team were called the "Atlanta African Americans" or the "Atlanta Coloreds". These names are not far-fetched. Negro League Baseball fans will well remember the incredibly awkward, "Atlanta Black Crackers" baseball team.

As a small boy my favorite MLB team quickly became the Atlanta team. I was a fan of the team when Hank Aaron (whom AABHE honored last year) had not yet hit 500 home runs, much less the MLB record 755 that he

would go on to hit. I used to listen to games on the radio, years later we would watch every game on TBS. My grandmother in Louisiana and folks from all over became fans as the team grew to have a national following because of nationally televised games. Grandma and I would often have weekly updates. That was special indeed. So, now I am being critical of my team. It is a criticism that is further fueled by the team's unscrupulous move from downtown Atlanta to a new suburban location in what was deemed as "a move to be closer to our fan base". Not exactly. It was a move "away" from folks who look like many of us. So, this team has to reckon with its relationship with people of color on a number of fronts. All of major sport does, as well. Team nicknames, failure to hire black head coaches, failure to hire women coaches (even in women's sports), and the list goes on of the varied challenges that can readily be changed to opportunities. Here's hoping that the change we need is the change that we will see. And by the way, I still like the Atlanta Baseball Club to win the World Series...and then turn around and do what's right.

Stay well, stay safe, stay COVID smart, and continue to do good work,

AABHE Notes:

- We are looking for **New AABHE Board Members**. *Board Membership Eligibility:* "...those who have demonstrated commitment to the mission of AABHE with active involvement in the life of the association. All nominees must be a member for at least two years." For more info contact: Dr. Roland B. Smith, Jr., Chair, Governance and Nominations Committee: rbsmith@rice.edu
- Coming today and in early November...



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November 12, 2021
10am - 6pm EST

Join us for the AABHE Career Expo on Friday, Nov. 12 from 10am to 6pm EST. This is the first AABHE Career Expo, and we're excited to bring leaders, professionals, graduate students, and constituents together to learn, connect and engage.

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