In a move that was hailed by the anthropological community, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office announced on Wednesday morning that it had canceled six federal trademark registrations for the name “Washington Redskins” citing testimony and evidence that the Washington, DC-based football team’s name is “disparaging to Native Americans” and thus in violation of federal trademark laws banning offensive terms and language.

While the decision today means that the team can continue to use the term, the phrase is no longer owned by the organization, meaning it will be difficult to stop others from using the term, and thus limiting its financial benefit to the club.

Dr. Bernard C. Perley, a Native American and anthropologist, released the following statement in the wake of the government’s decision:

Today, I am celebrating the US Patent and Trademark Office’s decision to cancel the six trademark registrations of the NFL Washington professional football team. The Patent and Trademark Office made their decision based on evidence and concluded that the trademark (the “r word”) is “disparaging to Native Americans at the respective times they were registered”.

This decision represents the best values of the American people as established in the founding documents of the United States. It also echoes the work of generations of anthropologists who have worked and continue to work with Native American communities to promote social justice for the first peoples of the Americas.

Unfortunately, there are many Americans who will make any excuse to support the NFL and the Washington team in their defense of the disrespectful name. The ruling does not prevent the team from continuing to use the derogatory term and it is likely the team will appeal the decision.

The US Patent and Trademark decision is good news but there is still much work to be done. The public debate over the “r word” has contributed to the growing awareness of the American public regarding the derogatory aspect of the term to many Native Americans. Anthropology can support and enhance that awareness by making public the ongoing work of anthropologists and Native American community leaders in promoting respect and understanding. We can accomplish this by disseminating the inspiring stories of Native American resilience and their contributions to the American experience.”

Dr. Perley is also a member of the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 17, 2014

Anthropologist Welcomes Football Team Name Trademark Cancellation

Patent Office Revokes Registration of Racist Term

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Founded in 1902, the American Anthropological Association is the world’s largest professional organization of anthropologists and others interested in anthropology, with nearly 12,000 members. The Association represents all specialties within anthropology – cultural anthropology, biological (or physical) anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and applied anthropology.