

# *Orlando Sentinel*

## OPINION COLUMNISTS

### **Taylor Swift, Travis Kelce can help retire 'Tomahawk Chop' | Commentary**



Donna Kelce, left, and Taylor Swift are seen during the first half of a game between the Chicago Bears and the Kansas City Chiefs at GEHA Field at Arrowhead Stadium on Sept. 24, 2023, in Kansas City, Missouri. (Jason Hanna/Getty Images/TNS) \*\* OUTS – ELSSENT, FPG, TCN – OUTS \*\*

By **DAVID MCGRATH** |

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Whether they're referred to as Traylor, Tayvis, or Swelce, the romantic pairing of pop music star Taylor Swift and Kansas City Chiefs All-Pro tight end Travis Kelce continues to excite both football fans and Swifties, including everyone in attendance for the Chiefs 34-17 win over the Broncos at Arrowhead Stadium last Thursday, as Swift, arm in arm with Kelce's mom, cheered from a premium suite.

And why not? For a national TV audience to see the pretty, musically gifted, and, arguably, most popular celebrity on the planet, gushing over the athletic feats of her handsome, telegenic, and charismatic 6-foot-5, 250-pound football superstar from her seat in a premium suite at Arrowhead, provides a welcome, romantic escape for a weary nation.

But a more important benefit, and what some five million Native Americans in this country may be rooting for, is that Kansas City's team may finally have an avid fan with both the values and the influence to bring to an end the embarrassing chant and derisive tomahawk chop of KC Nation.

Minutes before the television camera honed in on Swift, it panned the stadium crowd enacting its buffoonish pre-kickoff routine, as 76,000 of them mimicked the act of their "Chiefs" braining and scalping their opponents by thrusting, in unison, with an invisible tomahawk, in a historically twisted Hollywood stereotype hurtful and offensive to Native Americans. Which is why a total ban of the charade, along with native names, logos, and mascots in all sports, has been called for by the American Psychological Association,

American Sociological Association, National Education Association, the National Congress of American Indians, and hundreds of other tribal nations and organizations.

Worse, while repeating the violent gesture — with many non-natives wearing headdresses and warpaint in team colors — the crowd hummed or chanted “Massacre,” a song popularized by the Florida State University Seminoles marching band, later adapted by the University of Illinois Fighting Illini band, but which was originally appropriated from a 1950’s theme song for a cartoon called “Pow-wow the Indian Boy.”

A watcher of the “Captain Kangaroo” show when I was a kid, I easily recognized the tune, which has nothing to do with the culture or history of indigenous people. Nor would you expect it to, since it was written and performed for children by white adults. But the irony and the insult are not lost on living, breathing Native people, who would just as soon remain invisible than be perceived as a cartoon.

The fact that the fans believe there is no one they are offending, is itself revealing.

Therefore, what they need to be told is that their thoughtless behavior is not just offensive, but downright lethal. Psychologist Dr. Stephanie Fryberg of the University of Washington completed four scientific studies in 2008 finding that sports teams’ use of native symbols can be deadly, leading Native children and teenagers to see the rest of the country viewing them in a way that has no relationship to them or to reality. This very public mortification exacerbates their sense of confused identity, poor self-esteem, invisibility and community isolation, while increasing their already epidemic rates of depression and suicide.

Fans of hockey (Chicago Blackhawks), baseball (Atlanta Braves) and football (Chiefs) have been told all of this before but remain unmoved.

But what if, suddenly, Kansas City fans were asked to stop by Taylor Swift, their newly crowned Princess of the Gridiron?

Or better yet, what if the internationally popular Swift, who has exerted her considerable influence in support of LGBTQ causes, mental-health awareness, gun control, environmental protection and voting rights, were to suddenly and publicly tell her all-star, pro-vax tight end love interest, that she cannot in good conscience attend any more of his games until the fans give a rest to the tomahawk chop, described by one Native group as “synchronized racism”?

Though I lack the press credentials to cover sports at Arrowhead, there will be plenty of reporters on hand for their next game who might ask her that question.

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