



## KATHRYN M. BUDER CENTER FOR AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES

GEORGE WARREN BROWN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

### **Leadership Development and Evaluation in Indian Country I & II**

#### **Position Paper Opposing the Construction of a Stadium on the Site of the St. Louis Mounds**

##### **A. Problem Summary**

The site of a proposed new football stadium in St. Louis contains archaeological evidence of a sophisticated pre-Columbian American Indian civilization that thrived along the Mississippi river approximately 600 years prior to the founding of St. Louis. Construction of the stadium on this site would destroy the remaining archaeological evidence of this important, and still poorly understood, civilization and peoples. In addition, development of this site is regarded as a desecration of a sacred space by many American Indian peoples. This position paper argues that this site should be protected from stadium development because of its historic, cultural, and sacred value.

This position paper represents the views of a coalition of students, academics, and community members. The coalition includes members of the American Indian community of St. Louis; Master's-level American Indian students in the Brown School's Leadership & Evaluation in Indian Country course; faculty, staff, and students affiliated with the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies and Washington University's Brown School; and anthropology faculty at Washington University in St. Louis.

##### **B. Background on the site**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, St. Louis was known as "Mound City" because of its plethora of American Indian mounds similar to those preserved at the Cahokia Mounds State Historic and UNESCO World Heritage Site in Collinsville, Illinois. Archaeological evidence suggests that the mounds were part of a sophisticated urban civilization that thrived along the Mississippi river approximately 900 years ago. The mounds in the St. Louis region represent the beginnings of urban civilization in the eastern Woodlands. Included among the mounds in the region was a complex of mounds known as the St. Louis Mounds, located on the Mississippi just north of downtown St. Louis. Maps and drawings created by early European settlers to the region indicate that the ancient town of St. Louis contained a large plaza surrounded by about two dozen large earthen mounds and wooden architectural structures. Unfortunately, the St. Louis Mounds—along with similar mound groups in East St. Louis—were leveled in the 1800s to make way for development along the riverfront and to provide fill for area construction projects.

The proposed stadium site, located just north of Laclede's Landing, is currently occupied by vacant buildings and has been called "blighted" by Missouri Governor Jay Nixon (LaCapra, 2015). However, the site also happens to sit directly atop the remains of St. Louis Mounds. Despite the prior destruction of the mounds themselves, the area likely contains a wealth of ancient artifacts, including human remains. When one of the mounds was

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leveled in 1848, workers found “bones, jewelry and items made of shells from the Gulf of Mexico” (McClellan, 2015). Excavation at similar ancient towns in East St. Louis that once contained earthen mounds has uncovered evidence of over 1500 ancient structures that were part of a residential area, along with stone tools and pottery (Kelly, 1999). Moreover, apart from any artifacts or historical insight the site may yield, the earth that covers the ancient remains of the mounds has cultural and sacred significance to American Indians. The particular cultural and historic significance of this site warrants a preservation plan that honors this history and aligns with Native values.

### **C. Background on the stadium plan**

Concerns that Rams owner Stan Kroenke would move the NFL team back to Los Angeles spurred Governor Jay Nixon to develop plans for a new stadium that might keep the team in St. Louis. In November 2014, Nixon appointed a two-person task force—former Anheuser-Busch executive Dave Peacock and Edward Jones Dome attorney Bob Blitz—to draw up initial plans (Kilcoyne, 2014). (In January 2015, Peacock and Blitz presented their plans for an open-air, 64,000-seat stadium located on the riverfront just north of downtown. According to a summary of the plan by design firm HOK and 360 Architecture, the location was chosen because of its proximity to I-44 and the Edward Jones Dome, potential for retail development in adjacent neighborhoods that could contribute to revitalization, and its easy access to other riverfront attractions like the Great Rivers Greenway and CityArchRiver grounds (HOK, 2015).

The project has encountered numerous hurdles regarding location and financing. The historic and Native significance of the mounds has been the subject of some news stories (LaCapra, 2015; McClellan, 2015), and one story has suggested that the NFL would be loathe to endorse a project perceived as disrespectful to American Indians given the organization’s current struggle over the pejorative name of its Washington, DC team (McClellan, 2015). Other critics have noted that construction of the stadium on this site will necessitate the relocation of a major rail line, giant power lines, and a flood wall that protects two historic districts (Bryant, 2015). Owners of local businesses, including Shady Jack's, Hibdon Hardwood, and Al's Restaurant, have expressed concern that the development will force them out (Bryant, 2015). Others have challenged the notion that stadiums contribute to urban revitalization (Rosenbaum, 2015a).

The financing plans for the stadium, however, have proven particularly problematic. Initial plans projected a total cost of \$860-\$985 million to be financed by approximately \$450 million from the NFL and NFL team ownership, \$130 million in personal seat licenses and tax incentives, and \$350 million through an extension of the bonds on the Edward Jones Dome (Hunn, Patrick, & Pistor, 2015). These bonds currently cost the state \$12 million per year and the city and county \$6 million per year each (Hunn & Giegerich, 2015). St. Louis County Executive Steve Stenger refused to commit the county to continued bond financing without a public vote, and Governor Nixon’s office accordingly pulled the county out of the plan on April 1, 2015 but did not specify how this shortfall would be made up (Hunn & Giegerich, 2015). In St. Louis City, St. Louis University professor John Amman demanded a public vote on any St. Louis City public monies to be used for stadium construction (Hunn, 2015a), citing a 2002 city ordinance passed after the construction of the Edward Jones Dome that requires a public vote on new stadium funding (Hunn, Patrick, & Pistor, 2015). Two days after Amman issued his demand, the entity that owns the Edward Jones Dome filed a suit against St. Louis city to block a public vote on taxpayer financing of the stadium, calling the city ordinance “overly broad, vague and ambiguous” (Hunn, Patrick, & Pistor, 2015). The lawsuit reveals that St. Louis City is expected to contribute substantially to stadium financing, issuing new bonds to cover the debt on the Edward Jones Dome and new construction costs, providing tax-based incentives, and donating land (Hunn, Patrick, & Pistor, 2015). At the end of May, six Missouri lawmakers filed suit in Cole County Circuit Court to halt Nixon’s plans to extend stadium bonds without a public vote (Rosenbaum, 2015b).

Despite these issues, the stadium project appears to be moving forward. The NFL issued a marketing survey in St. Louis in March 2015 to gauge demand for the amenities offered by a new stadium (Thomas, 2015a). On April 20, 2015 the St. Louis Regional Convention and Sports Complex Authority announced the selection of a consortium of developers to manage stadium construction (Feldt, 2015). The consortium, known as HCKL Stadium Partners, is made up of Hunt Construction Group, Clayco Inc., Kennedy Associates, Inc., and Legacy Building Group (Feldt, 2015). On April 22, 2015, Dave Peacock traveled to New York to present the stadium plan to NFL officials (Thomas, 2015b).

#### **D. Recommendations**

*Honor the cultural, historical, and sacred nature of the site.*

This was an ancient town. A community of people were born here, lived here, worshipped here, celebrated here, and died here for an unknown period of time. The mounds may be gone, but much remains. Andrea Hunter, director of the Osage Nation's historic preservation office, has noted that for her people the mounds may no longer exist "but the importance of them still exists for us . . . and the fact that they were destroyed doesn't lessen that importance to us" (LaCapra, 2015).

*Development and preservation do not have to be fundamentally opposed.*

The more recent history of the area includes two historic districts and people who have invested time and money in rebuilding and reshaping the area without resorting to the desecration that will occur with the building of a new stadium and its amenities. It's not so much a question of if a stadium should be built, but where and how does it impact and benefit the community as a whole? How can this process be made transparent to the larger St. Louis area as a whole? And how can American Indian peoples be included in the decision-making process regarding this historic and sacred site?

The remains of the St. Louis Mounds cannot be relocated. And if those remains are destroyed, they cannot be recovered. The proposed stadium has not yet been built. Surely there are other possible sites where it could be constructed.

*The American Indian community must be at the table.*

There is no doubt that the human remains and cultural artifacts contained in the St. Louis Mounds belong to indigenous peoples. Furthermore, the human remains are part of an ancient burial site, designating the area as sacred according to indigenous beliefs. For both of these reasons the American Indian community must be part of decision-making regarding the future of the St. Louis Mounds site. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008) affirms this right, stating that indigenous peoples have the right:

- "to maintain, *protect* and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as *archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature*" (Article 11, italics added);
- "*to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains* (Article 12, italics added);
- "*to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use*" (Article 26, italics added);
- "*not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture*" (Article 8, italics added).

For their part, states are obligated under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008) to:

- “provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their *cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs*” (Article 11, italics added);
- “enable the access and/or repatriation of *ceremonial objects and human remains* in their possession *through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms* developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned (Article 12, italics added);
- “give legal recognition and *protection to these lands, territories and resources*” (Article 26, italics added)
- “provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for: . . . *any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources*” (Article 8)

*There are precedents for preserving historic indigenous sites in this region.*

The Cahokia Mounds Historic Mounds State Historic and UNESCO World Heritage Site is an example of a preservation effort that honors cultural concerns and advances understanding of the history of this extraordinary civilization. The East-West Gateway Council of Governments, the St. Louis area’s federally designated metropolitan planning organization, recognized the importance of preserving ancient mounds in the region with a 2014 Outstanding Achievement in Local Government (OLGA) award. The award was granted to The Mounds: America’s First Cities Feasibility Study, which documented the Cahokia Mounds site and recommended the site for designation as a national park or monument by the National Park Service (East-West Gateway, 2014).

In 2007, the Missouri Mound Adoption Project (MO-MAP) in Chesterfield organized volunteers to aid in preserving local mounds (Shapiro, 2015).

In 2008, Congressman Russ Carnahan created a task force that included the Osage Nation to preserve the Sugar Loaf Mound, located in St. Louis near Broadway and I-55. As a result of the task force's work, the Osage Nation purchased the land containing the mound in 2009 (Altman, n.d.).

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