

# THE POST STAR Est. 1904

## **Blog: Spartans, Horde, Burghers and ... C-SPAN**

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So I'm sitting at home on Sunday watching C-SPAN3, because I needed a break from sports.

A man named Tom Palmer, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, is giving a presentation on law, liberty and freedom. Along the way, there are references to Spartans, the Golden Horde and burghers.

You can guess what I'm thinking. What a strange intersection between the world of history and justice and my world of high school sports coverage.

It was a fascinating program on the development of law and liberty in various times and places. And all I could think about was how this relates to local schools and their mascots. Perhaps I've been doing this job for too long?

I did take one important thing out of it. If you like your favorite school's nickname — and most of us do — maybe it's best not to think about it too much.

At one point, Palmer compared contributions of the ancient Greek city-states of Athens and Sparta. Citing the work of former colleague Andrew Coulson, he noted that Athens gave us drama, comedy, poetry, astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, architecture and metaphysics, among other things.

"And from the Spartans," he said, with a long pause for effect, "we get the names of a lot of American high school football teams."

Ouch.

Well, when people were coming up with school nicknames, they probably weren't thinking much about architecture or astronomy. And you have to admit, the ancient Spartans were pretty good at winning. So there you go, Queensbury.

The Golden Horde came up as part of the discussion about the conquest of Russia and collection of taxes in the aftermath, which, I'm guessing, did not figure into Granville's decision to choose it as a mascot. There was only a passing reference to burghers (no capital letter in the slide they showed) as "men of peace," which should be agreeable if you're from Warrensburg.

A good deal of creativity went into school nicknames in this area. We've got Flying Forts and Black Horses. Generals and Railroaders. Blue Streaks and Tanagers. There's nothing wrong with

Lions and Tigers and Bears, but clearly, some of our mascot-pickers were willing to delve into history.

I'm not getting into the debate over the Indians nickname here. That's a whole nother discussion. I will say that I'm suspicious of claims that the nickname was chosen to "honor the Indians." It may say that in the minutes of the meeting, but I suspect getting fans to whoop and holler was a bigger part of the equation.

I wonder if the people who invented our nicknames understood how long-lasting their decisions would be. Did they foresee the marketing of products? Did they expect the influence of nicknames to extend beyond the sports teams, as in, "I'll always be a (fill in the blank)" when referring to your alma mater?

Who knows. School nicknames are something that give us a shared identity, and for those who have graduated, a connection to our past. I think we're fond of our mascots not so much because of the name, but because of the bond they give us with others. Hey, I'm proud to be a Purple Tiger, which is an animal that doesn't even exist.

School nicknames inspire passion, too. I fully expect to get an email from somebody in Queensbury, Granville or Warrensburg, and I'm fine with that. I'd love to hear more about the history behind these nicknames.