

Land O'Lakes Drops the Iconic Logo of an Indigenous Woman From Its Branding

The story behind the image, and its removal, led to mixed reactions from the public, including native communities

A previous version of the Land O'Lakes logo, featuring Mia, an indigenous woman dubbed the "Butter Maiden" ([Mike Mozart via Flickr under CC BY 2.0](#))

By [Katherine J. Wu](#)

SMITHSONIANMAG.COM

APRIL 28, 2020



A previous version of the Land O'Lakes logo, featuring Mia, an indigenous woman dubbed the "Butter Maiden" ([Mike Mozart via Flickr under CC BY 2.0](#))

Just ahead of its 100th anniversary, Land O'Lakes has retired Mia, the indigenous woman who once featured prominently in its iconic logo, from all packaging. Many of the dairy company's popular butters, creams, cheeses and other products will now display a serene portrait of a tree-fringed lake under the Land O'Lakes name, which will appear adorned with the phrase "farmer-owned." The company expects to complete the phaseout by the end of 2020.

In a company [statement](#) released earlier this year, Land O'Lakes president and CEO Beth Ford described the move as realigning company packaging to reflect "the foundation and heart of our company culture—and nothing does that better than our farmer-owners whose milk is used to produce Land O'Lakes' dairy products."

Company representatives have shared similar declarations since February, when the new logo was first unveiled, in an apparent effort to draw publicity to Land O'Lakes' new farming-focused branding. But as Kayla Ruble reports for NBC News' [Today](#), Mia's disappearance has continued to command most of the attention around the switch.

Arriving on the heels of [universities](#), [sports teams](#) and other businesses making comparable moves to drop indigenous images, symbols and titles from their logos, the Land O'Lakes change has been noted by some as necessary and perhaps long overdue.

"Thank you to Land O'Lakes for making this important and needed change," Minnesota Lt. Governor and White Earth Band of Ojibwe member Peggy Flanagan [tweeted](#) last week. "Native people are not mascots or logos. We are very much still here."

Painted by Brown & Bigelow illustrator Arthur C. Hanson, Mia first appeared on labels in 1928, kneeling in stereotypical garb and clutching a Land O'Lakes container. The image and its "butter maiden" moniker have long drawn criticism, with detractors describing the branding as a racist objectification of indigenous people. As Hailey Waller reports for [Bloomberg News](#), the [American Psychological Association](#) previously found that the presence of such mascots on prominent advertisements may have "a negative impact on the self-esteem of American Indian children."

Speaking with Max Nesterak of the [Minnesota Reformer](#), Brown University's [Adrienne Keene](#), author of the [Native Appropriations](#) blog and a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, affirmed similar concerns.

“It’s a great move,” she says. “It makes me really happy to think that there’s now going to be an entire generation of folks that are growing up without having to see that every time they walk in the grocery store.”



For others, though, the change has proven more controversial. Some longtime customers have taken to social media, threatening to boycott Land O’Lakes products that don’t showcase Mia’s image, according to Matt Stopera of [Buzzfeed News](#).

Land O’Lakes didn’t address Mia’s departure directly in its rebranding announcements. Keene tells the *Minnesota Reformer* that she considers the company’s silence a missed chance to highlight a crucial discussion on indigenous representation in popular culture.

“It could have been a very strong and positive message to have publicly said, ‘We realized after a hundred years that our image was harmful and so we decided to remove it,’” she says.

Mia has remained in the public discourse since her debut. In the 1950s, she was reimagined by Ojibwe artist [Patrick DesJarlait](#), who hoped to foster “[a sense of Indian pride](#)” across the Midwest, according to the *Minnesota Reformer*. Keene notes that during this troubled era, when indigenous groups were being repeatedly silenced and

persecuted by governing bodies, national recognition of this sort may have been empowering.

DesJarlait's son Robert supports the image's removal but remains grateful for his father's contribution.

"It was a source of pride for people to have a Native artist doing that kind of work," DesJarlait tells the *Minnesota Reformer*. "He was breaking a lot of barriers."

In this light, Mia's unheralded exit from the Land O'Lakes' logo may feel anticlimactic, or even disappointing, particularly when cast against the backdrop of United States history, which has frequently [passed over opportunities](#) to recognize, celebrate, and teach indigenous stories—or even [record their presence](#).

"Not going to lie: I will miss her," writes [Paul Chaat Smith](#), associate curator at the Smithsonian Institution's [National Museum of the American Indian](#), via email.

Smith curated "[Americans](#)," a [2018 exhibition](#) detailing the manifest ways in which native Americans are tokenized, misrepresented or exploited in U.S. pop culture and history. A virtual version of the exhibition is available to view [online](#).

"Airbrushing Mia from the butter section is good, because this is straight up objectification of a Native woman," he adds. But it's also "bad, because she had so many fans (Indian and others), and because she is replaced with nothing. Just emptiness."

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/mia-land-olakes-iconic-indigenous-woman-departs-packaging-mixed-reactions-180974760/>