Joseph P. Gone

Chief Illiniwek

Dignified or Damaging?[1]

The controversy at the University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign surrounding its use of Chief Illiniwek as a campus symbol continues to rage. At a recent meeting of the General University Policy Committee of the university's Senate Council (January 25, 1995), key representatives of pro-Chief constituencies recommended that the university withstand the protests of Chief detractors and continue its use of the embattled symbol. The Committee listened to Lou Liay and Don Dodds of the Alumni Association present information suggesting that the majority of university alumni support the continued use of the Chief. They mentioned that some alumni have threatened to halt their contributions to the university if the Chief is retired. In short, they clearly conveyed to the committee the heartfelt respect and pride which the Chief symbolically embodies for the majority of university alumni. As a result, any move to discard the Illiniwek tradition would be viewed with disfavor by this constituency.

Jean Edwards, representing the Citizens for Chief Illiniwek, likewise communicated a widespread support for the Chief among Champaign-Urbana area residents. She agreed that attempts to remove the Chief would stir public outcry for a symbol which has come to mean so much to so many local residents. She stated her support of wider efforts to honor Native Americans, such as providing money for scholarships which would enable us to attend the university. She noted regretfully that her attempts to provide such scholarships with money she has raised have been thwarted by university red tape. She concluded her remarks with an exasperated question: "What is it that they want, anyway?!" I think she deserves a response.

It is my purpose here to present a thoughtful rationale for why the

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Chief must be replaced as the university's symbol. I will organize these observations by first explaining in general terms why I find the Chief damaging to the interests of Native American people and to the interests of the university's largely non-Indian student body. I will then proceed to review and summarize the arguments advanced by Chief supporters. Finally, I will provide specific, cogent responses to each of the pro-Chief arguments in an effort to demonstrate their inadequacy.

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In the ongoing Chief debates at the university, it is not uncommon to hear heartfelt cries that "the Chief is dignified and honoring!" or, alternatively, that "the Chief is racist and damaging!" We must not forget, however, that these statements cannot meaningfully communicate information without first specifying to whom the Chief is honoring or damaging and for whom the Chief is racist or dignified. By his very symbolic nature, the Chief means different things to different people as well as different things to different groups of people. Inattention to these details has resulted in widespread misunderstanding and a genuine lack of communication. Let me begin by stating that I am willing to concede that Chief supporters, by and large, assign meanings to the Chief symbol which are generally positive and, furthermore, that many sincerely intend to honor "the Native American Culture" by use of the Chief. In this regard, I have absolutely no interest in condemning all Chief supporters as dyed- in-the-wool racists. Despite these concessions, however, I am also convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Chief does more harm than good to my own interests as a native person. Furthermore, I will argue that the Chief does more harm than good to the interests of other Indian persons who have attended this university and to native people more broadly. It is because of this conviction that I actively pursue the retirement of Chief Illiniwek.

Two contextual features are necessary for the comprehension of my argument. First, America's Indigenous Nations have suffered horribly at the hands of displaced Europeans over the centuries. In the continental United States alone, our population declined from at least five million inhabitants at the time of contact to roughly 250,000 by the end of the Indian wars. Since then, we have won large gains in our population, increasing to as many as two million persons in 1990. You are probably unfamiliar with the specifics of our current situations which are fraught with stresses unknown to mainstream Americans, including crippling poverty and its accompanying social problems, the struggle for political autonomy and cultural survival, and—here I will use the term—racism. I have written about the specifics of these burdens as they influence our contemporary situations elsewhere (See *The Contextual Evaluation of a Symbol*). Suffice it here to acknowledge that our troubles are far from over.

A second contextual detail necessary to my argument concerns the pur-

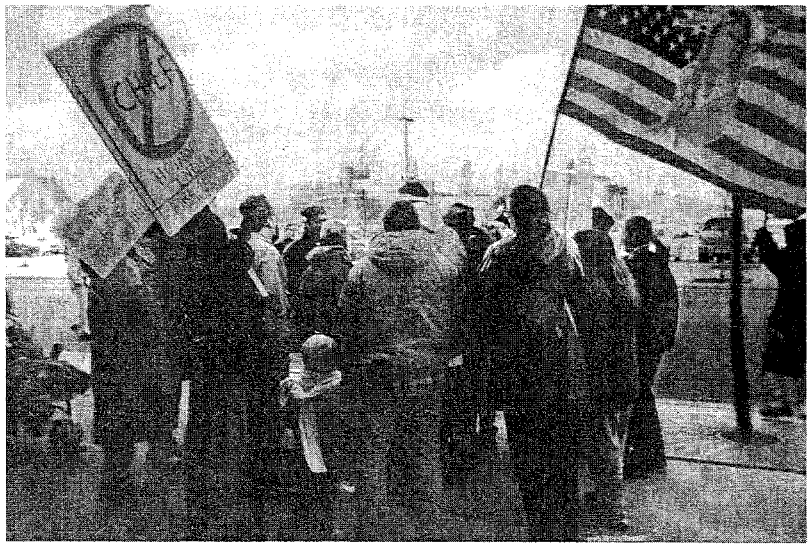
Chicago Indians protest The Chief. Photo by Terry Straus

pose of this university. The University of Illinois has a responsibility to educate its students, an endeavor that at least minimally involves the transmission of factual and accurate information which constitutes the wide variety in kinds of knowledge. Furthermore, because the university is a public institution which receives both state and federal funds, it also has a responsibility to provide equal opportunity for all of its students and potential students, regardless of race and creed. This assumption is consistent with proclamations by the university President which state that "increased opportunities for women and minorities lies in a renewed commitment, an improved campus climate, and the full utilization of the diverse talents of all members of the university community." Finally, I assume that the President's commitment to "increased opportunities" and "an improved campus climate" is necessary because many "women and minorities" have been historically excluded, overlooked, ignored or made unwelcome at this campus—I can think of no other framework in which to interpret the President's remarks.

Now that my assumptions are clear, we may proceed to the evidence which indicates that the current portrayal of Chief Illiniwek is problematic at best. I will not repeat in detail here what I have written elsewhere (See *The Contextualization of a Symbol*). Rather, I will provide an abbreviated sketch of my argument that is most conducive to this forum. First, the university's portrayal of the Chief is a clear misrepresentation, as manifested by several inaccuracies. The Illini were Woodlands people—not Plains people—and as a result evidenced an entirely different material culture than the Lakota people whose clothing the current Chief dons. The Chief's dance was reportedly derived from a Lakota ritual known as the Devil's Dance and taught to Lester Leutwiler by Sioux people in Colorado

as part of a scouting project. While it is difficult to factually assess these reports of the early Chief tradition, three things are very clear: (1) for decades the university promoted—and the students believed—that the Chief's dance was an authentic form of some Indian tribal celebration; (2) whether or not the Chief's dance was originally "derived" from a Lakota ritual, it was "adapted" early on for sports events and currently resembles no traditional or contemporary expression of dance known to native people, the Lakota included; and (3) even if the current Chief's dance were an accurate portrayal of any Lakota dance form, that form is Lakota and not native to the Illini. It is also worth noting that the music which accompanies the Chief's dance is completely foreign to any musical expression known to native people—in short, it is the creation of white America. Finally, I might add that none of these facts are in dispute. The official university statement regarding Chief Illiniwek was modified in 1990 because administrators recognized that any claim to authenticity of the Chief's portrayal was absurd. This revision and the reasons behind it have been documented and are presumably well-known.

If we acknowledge that Chief Illiniwek factually misrepresents the Illini (and Indians more generally), then we must examine a second premise: The nature of this particular misrepresentation follows well-worn grooves which qualify it as a racial stereotype. In short, it required no vigorous research or burst of wanton creativity to prescribe that the Chief would don the clothing of the pre-twentieth century Plains Lakota, stand stoically and dignified at the center of the sports arena, wear war paint, lead the "Fighting Illini" to victory, and dance wildly to a fanciful drumbeat during halftime. Each of these defining characteristics of the Indian stereotype have been spoon-fed to the American public for over a century through such media as newspapers, books, cartoons, and especially Hollywood westerns. These images have forever pervaded American perceptions of Indians by distilling literally hundreds of diverse native cultures to a "prototypic" Plains horse culture of a century ago and infecting the world with the hackneyed savage/noble warrior motif. Indeed, what else could Chief Illiniwek do, besides what every American "knows" that Indians do: we wear feathers and dance. In this regard, even a truly authentic native dance, imported from its cultural context and performed before sports fans, would be unacceptable given the centrality of dance to the stereotyped Indian in the popular mind. Furthermore, the Chief emerges from a long stereotypical tradition that suggests that all that was interesting or important about Indians occurred a hundred years ago. By and large, on the modern American cultural scene portrayals of contemporary Indians routinely exaggerate or emphasize our "plight" or simply don't exist. Thus, regardless of the intentions of the University trustees, administrators, faculty, students and alumni, Chief Illiniwek reinforces all of the stereotypical conceptions of native people so prevalent in the

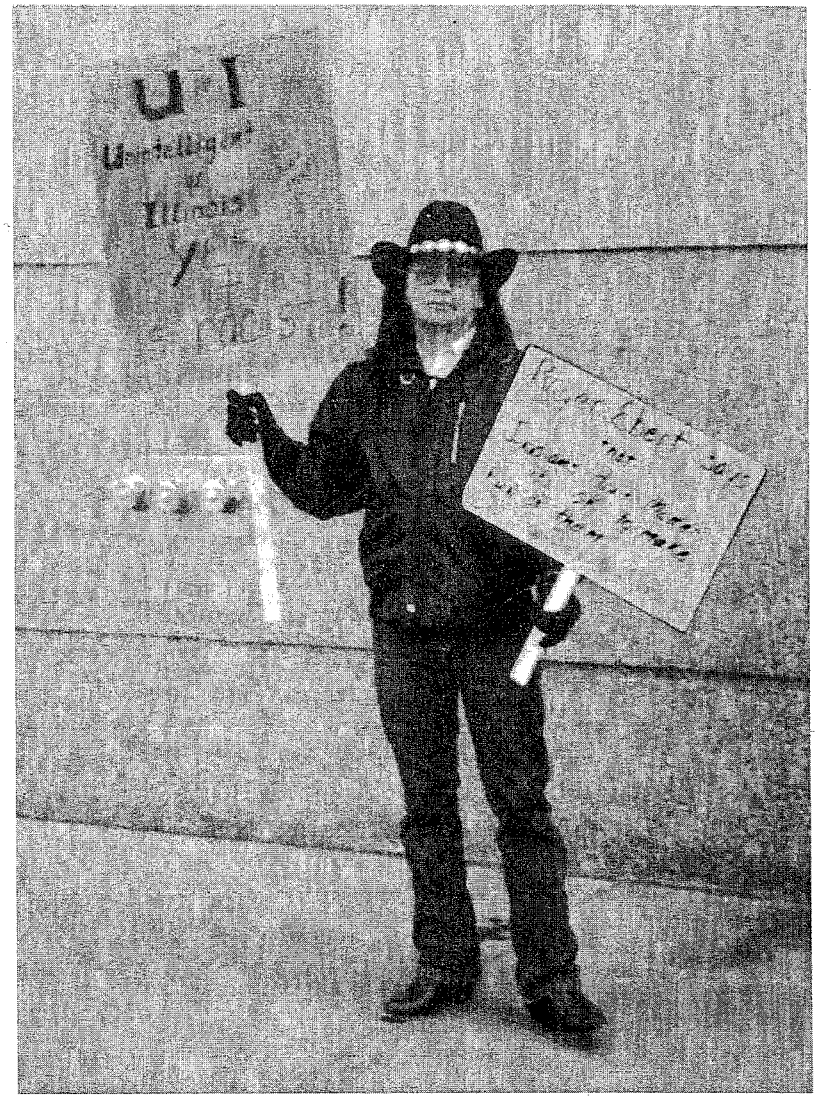


Chicago protest at the United Center. Photo by Terry Straus

American consciousness, effectively reducing the fullness of our humanity to a unidimensional farce.

Some might argue that if the Chief is a racial stereotype, then he is a positive racial stereotype and should be revered and retained. I believe that even so-called "positive" racial stereotypes interfere with reliable knowledge and true understanding, the consummate assets of any university. In addition, I maintain that world-class universities have a responsibility to foster more accurate perceptions of cultural minorities rather than perpetuating fallacies. My third premise is that the stereotyped portrayal of Chief Illiniwek is damaging to individual Native Americans affiliated with this university, damaging to the collective cause of Native Americans in this country more generally, and damaging to the non-native students who come here to be educated.

The best evidence that the Chief is damaging to Indians affiliated with the university is that many of us have said so. We have repeatedly expressed our sadness, frustration and anger about the Chief, but we have been largely ignored. Even Chief supporters routinely overlook our objections and concentrate instead on the charges and claims of white liberal protestors. As Indian people, we do not appreciate being stereotyped any more than other cultural groups here at the university and, frankly, it adds an unnecessary burden to our already stressful lives. Native students, staff and faculty are reminded of our "honored" status daily as we go about our business on campus: one simply cannot escape the feathered Indian profile, whether its likeness graces a sweatshirt, wallpaper, or a urinal deodorizer. It makes no difference which of these products the university



Leonard Malatare at the United Center. Photo by Terry Straus

actually licenses—all result from the influence of the Chief in the Urbana-Champaign community. This additional stress, which our mainstream counterparts and, to a lessor extent, other cultural minorities are not asked to shoulder, has led to a very narrow construal of what we as a native student organization might be about. In essence, we are somewhat obligated to protest our being stereotyped publicly and with official sanction, rather than focusing those energies on a wide range of alternate activities more central to our long term interests. And, perhaps more seriously,

some of our native brothers and sisters, after benefiting from active recruitment strategies by their departments, have withdrawn from the university prematurely under bitter circumstances which stem at least in part from the ubiquitous presence of the Chief.

I also contend that university sponsorship of the Chief is damaging to Indian people around the nation. A thorough explication of this claim would require more space than we have here, but I will touch on the basics. One primary obstacle to political and economic renewal and self-determination in Indian communities around the country is the appalling ignorance of most American citizens, including policy-makers at local, state and federal levels of government, regarding Native American histories and cultures. As multi-dimensional peoples engaged in complex struggles for autonomy and equality in the 1990's, Indians are virtually invisible to the American consciousness, which gleans any awareness of natives from caricatured Hollywood portrayals, tourist excursions and, yes, popular symbols like Chief Illiniwek. Thus, the continued prevalence of Indian stereotypes fortifies a wall of misunderstanding between our peoples, which ultimately leads to our (Indian) detriment. This is true in terms of politics and economics as well as in terms of cultural survival and the effective socialization of our young. This past November, around Thanksgiving, I tuned the television to TNT and viewed an unambiguous mockery of the dimwitted, hook-nosed, tomahawk- wielding, broken-English-speaking redskin who was the primitive foil for the antics of Bugs Bunny. At such moments, it sickens and saddens me to realize that it is over one hundred years since the close of the Indian wars, and yet my very own children will likely experience such slanderous depictions. It is within this national climate that tolerates, promotes and targets the young with the grossest of racial caricatures that the less appalling stereotype of Chief Illiniwek does its own damage.

Finally, I assert that the Chief has damaged generations of Illinois students by impressing upon them in a paltry and anemic manner all that most of them will ever know about the truly rich and diverse worldviews and practices of Indian people, including any informed appreciation of both our contributions to modern society and the thorny dilemmas we face in a changing world.

In the end, I can only condemn the hypocrisy of university officials who commit to "an improved campus climate" but ignore Indian objections to Chief Illiniwek. If our collective opinions about the Chief are of no consequence in this community by virtue of our being in the minority, then I would prefer to have that fact conveyed to me openly and unambiguously. If such is the case, perhaps the university should consider divesting itself of any public monetary support. Alternatively, if resistance to removing the Chief by university officials is based upon seasoned, thoughtful reflection, then I would prefer to hear a compelling rationale rather than

a flaccid evasion of responsibility ("The Board of Trustees has made its decision"). Ultimately, the burden of proof is squarely upon the shoulders of university officials and Chief supporters to articulate why this institution is justified in continuing its sponsorship and promotion of a racial stereotype which is offensive and damaging to at least some significant portion of Indian people at this university.

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It remains before me to review and evaluate the arguments most often cited by members of the university community in defense of Chief Illiniwek. In summary, the position tendered by Liay, Dodds and Edwards in their presentation to the General University Policy Committee appears to include the following propositions:

(1) Majority Rules—since most of their constituents are in favor of keeping the Chief, the democratic process has concluded that the Chief be retained;

(2) Worthiness of Intent—the Chief reflects a genuine desire of its supporters to honor and remember the "Native American Culture" and thus should be endorsed fervently by all; and

(3) Worthiness of Symbolic Content—the Chief represents pride, determination, excellence and affiliation for many Illinoisans, all of which are values that could hardly offend any reasonable person.

A final pro-Chief presentation to the Committee by graduate student Doug Wojcieszak did more to acknowledge the concerns of persons claiming to be affronted by the Chief. He posited several additional reasons for keeping the Chief beyond those tendered by Liay, Dodds and Edwards, including the following:

(4) Institutional Integrity—if the university capitulates to a minority of persons dissatisfied with the Chief, it will "discriminate against" and probably alienate the Illinoisans who most support the university (financially and otherwise);

(5) Potential Financial Loss Affecting Minorities—alienation of financial supporters could lead to increased tuition and cutbacks in "programs that help minority students";

(6) Divided Opinion Among Indians—letters supporting Chief Illiniwek from Native Americans cast "grave doubts on the claims of racism" by other Indians and their supporters;

(7) Potential Benefits to Indians—monies generated by the Chief could be employed on behalf of struggling Indian communities, especially descendants of the Illini, or invested in Indian scholarships; and

(8) Improved Educational Climate through Cultural Exchange—the presence of the Chief affords the university a unique opportunity to host Indian speakers and cultural events, thereby facilitating a flourishing learning environment.

In addition to these arguments advanced by Chief supporters to the Committee, I can think of at least three more with a significant presence in the ongoing community debate:

(9) Dignified Chief Portrayal—the Chief is not big-nosed or buck-toothed, wielding a tomahawk on the sidelines of sporting events, but rather carries himself with dignity and holds the respect of fans;

(10) Chief Necessary for Indian Awareness—without the Chief, Illinoisans are likely to forget the proud Indian heritage of their state, resulting in a loss of appropriate attention to Indian interests; and

(11) Limitations on Freedom of Expression—any effort by the university to abandon the Chief tradition in response to overly-sensitive protestors threatens the free exchange of ideas so crucial to the quality of a university.

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In the context of my own arguments delineated above, I will now respond briefly to the arguments proposed by Chief supporters in defense of the university symbol:

(1) Majority Rules—Official university-sponsorship of the Chief is not primarily a political issue, but a moral issue. As such, its merits must be assessed by means other than "counting heads" or any other method which might facilitate a "tyranny of the majority." I suspect the means appropriate for this discussion are clear and cogent arguments that justify why a position is held. I have tried to offer such an argument above, but I have yet to see a clear and cogent rationale for retaining the Chief which addresses these issues from a moral framework.

(2) Worthiness of Intent—I have conceded that most Chief supporters probably do mean to honor and respect Indian peoples and cultures in some limited but meaningful way. However, for the reasons stated above, I am incapable of receiving such goodwill through the medium of the Chief because all I can perceive is an image which does more damage to us than good. I would ask Chief supporters to find another way to honor and respect us in terms that we can appreciate. They can start by dropping all resistance to retiring the Chief.

(3) Worthiness of Symbolic Content—I have also conceded that most Chief supporters do sincerely assign genuinely positive meanings to the Chief symbol. However, for the reasons stated above, I am incapable of respecting such meanings through the medium of the Chief because all I can perceive is an image which does more damage to us than good for them. I would ask Chief supporters to find another symbol in which to invest their admirable values and feelings so that we too might join with them in expressing our pride in attending the university.

(4) Institutional Integrity—Chief supporters worry that retiring the symbol would initiate a new era of rampant liberal over-sensitivity within the university community. I do not advocate any policies which would hinder the

free exchange of ideas. It is my belief, however, that official sponsorship of Chief Illiniwek represents a fundamental disregard for the dignity of one cultural sub-community on campus. Such disregard transcends liberal or conservative interests, and one need not be "politically correct" to recognize that university-sponsored racial stereotypes are indefensible. Wojcieszak worries about "discrimination" against Chief supporters. He fails to recognize that the removal of a popular but damaging symbol is a different kind of "discrimination" than the active promotion of one. I also know that discriminating against Indians, whose history in this country has resulted in special disadvantages on top of life's routine ones, is a different kind of enterprise than "discriminating" against mostly white students and alumni, who typically do not face special disadvantages on the basis of their race, economic status or religious beliefs.

(5) Potential Financial Loss Affecting Minorities—I do not know whether retiring the Chief will result in a fiscal crisis. Wojcieszak reports that "monetary gifts dropped off significantly after the removal of Native American mascots" at Eastern Michigan University and Marquette University. On the other hand, Stanford and Dartmouth apparently experienced no such crises. If university donations did drop off after retiring the Chief, I would bet that they would not drop off for long. In fact, the marketing of new university apparel might more than make up for short-term reduced alumni donations if the Chief were retired. Furthermore, if in fact university income did drop off, there is no reason necessarily to conclude that minorities would suffer (maybe the sports teams would suffer—it is a policy decision), or that minorities would suffer more than majority students who depend on non-specific university "programs" as well. In addition, perhaps the alumni could be educated to view the Chief's retirement in a positive manner, thus preempting a fiscal crisis. In any event, because I believe this to be a fundamentally moral issue, the fiscal consequences are irrelevant. Money should never be allowed to determine what is morally acceptable.

(6) Divided Opinion Among Indians—Perhaps the most consistent argument advanced by Chief supporters is that at least some Indians support the Chief, and therefore the Chief must not be all that problematic. I have several responses to this line of reasoning. First, there is an implicit assumption in this reasoning that is required to make it intelligible. When Chief supporters use this argument they mean to suggest that those Indians who work to retire the Chief are unusual in some way, perhaps overly sensitive or insecure, and therefore not representative of most Indians. My question for those who advance this position is, "How many of us do you require to tell you that the Chief is damaging before you will act to eliminate him?" Given the university's stated commitment to "an improved campus climate," allow me to suggest that the university err on the side of retiring the Chief with fewer Indian complaints rather than more.

Second, the Native American outcry against Indian sports symbols is far from marginal in this country. The National Congress of American Indians, the official representative body of literally hundreds of federally-recognized tribal groups (of which there are some five hundred in total), passed a resolution in 1991 condemning the use of negative Indian images, including specific reference to Chief Illiniwek. The president of the National Indian Education Association, representing thousands of Indian educators throughout the country, wrote Chancellor Morton Weir in 1989 to demand that he "stop the practice of using an Indian mascot" here at the University of Illinois. The president of the Institute of American Indian Arts, where the university has recruited Indian students in the past, wrote President Ikenberry in 1989 requesting that the Chief be retired. Wilma Mankiller, the principal chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma (the second-largest tribe in the country, boasting almost 200,000 members), wrote about the Chief, "I do not have to tell you how truly offensive and ultimately racist this symbol is." Tim Giago, the founder and publisher of the nation's largest Indian newspaper, has devoted almost constant media attention to persuading sports teams to discontinue the use of Indian symbols and mascots. This list could go on and on.... Thus, while I do not know whether a majority of Indians object to Chief Illiniwek, I can prove that large numbers do.

Third, the Chief supporters almost always find Indian allies from outside the university. An exception might be Dave Powless, an Oneida man, who is an alumnus of the university, but he publicly recanted of his earlier support of the Chief in 1990(?). So, Chief supporters are forced to cite outside Indians who "see nothing wrong with the Chief." Yet, these people have not lived in Champaign-Urbana and some have never even watched the Chief perform, so it is hardly surprising that they "see nothing wrong" with him. Chief supporters are quick to point out that outside Indians say that "there are far more important issues worthy of our attention." This does not surprise me. Before I left the reservation to attend this university, I expressed the same conviction, and when I ultimately return to the reservation I will take up that conviction again: Priority is a function of context. I have never suggested that eliminating the Chief ought to be near the top of Indian country's priorities. And believe me, I resent being "informed" by Chief supporters that Indians face problems of greater consequence. I do believe, however, that the position of Indians within the university community forces the elimination of the Chief to be a top priority for us. Since the university has an express obligation to provide equal access to educational opportunity for Indians actually affiliated with this community (and not outside others), allow me to suggest that it concentrate its attention on what it's being told by the Indians in its own midst. By definition, an Indian who has never attended this university cannot really understand what it is like for us here.

Fourth, the university has heard from the seven or eight Indian people who gather routinely to pursue cultural interests and activities. These voices have unanimously condemned the Chief and asked that he be retired, all to no avail. Chief supporters may be tempted to argue that seven or eight Indians is only a small fraction of the Indians listed in official university student records. I will counter on the basis of personal research and experience that the number of Indians listed in university records is (a) inaccurately inflated, (b) not reflective of the actual (lower) number of culturally-identified Indians within the community, and (c) reveals nothing about how these other "invisible" Indians feel about the Chief. In fact, not one Indian at this university is ever cited for his or her support of the Chief. So, I will ask again, "How many of us do you require to tell you that the Chief is damaging before you will act to eliminate him?" In the end, the Chief presents the university with a moral dilemma which must be resolved based upon careful reflection and analysis of competing arguments, not on straw polls attempting to demonstrate that Chief supporters are in the majority and that some number of (outside) Indian people have joined them.

(7) Potential Benefits to Indians—I am frankly dubious about claims that monies earned by the university from Chief products or sporting events could be channeled towards Indian causes. The Chief has been making money for the university for decades without a single Indian scholarship being offered or a single Indian community benefiting. I see no reason why the university would suddenly add action to its rhetoric about "honoring" Indians. Nevertheless, I am willing to concede that some unforeseen shift in policy could in principle allow for Chief-generated income to be directed towards real Indians with the intent to somehow benefit them. If such a policy came into being, the recognition that the Chief is a damaging racial stereotype would not be altered or remedied by distributing financial benefits from the Chief to Indian people. I will reiterate that this is a moral issue which cannot be ignored or absolved through financial whitewash.

It is likely that Indians who have attended this university would be the least likely to accept Chief-generated financial benefits because we are more closely acquainted with the Chief than outsiders. Other Indians, perhaps in difficult circumstances, would likely accept such offers. If paid enough, they may even be willing to advocate for the university that the Chief is an acceptable representation of Indian people. Many other outside Indians would disagree with them. Regardless of outside Indian opinion, the university's primary responsibility to any identifiable Indian group is to the native students, staff and faculty in its own midst. Outside endorsements would do nothing to counter the moral charge by Indians at this university that the Chief is a damaging racial stereotype.

(8) Improved Educational Climate through Cultural Exchange—The Chief is neither necessary nor sufficient to facilitate beneficial cultural exchange

between Indian communities and the university. In fact, for the reasons delineated above, the Chief actually hinders such exchange in that many Indian people steer clear of communities who still find it appropriate to stereotype racial groups.

(9) Dignified Chief Portrayal—I have argued above that the Chief promulgates a damaging racial stereotype. Thus, it is irrelevant whether this portrayal is superficially "dignified" or "stately"—the noble and proud warrior in feathers and paint who dances is still stereotypical—and avoids the more unwholesome caricatured features. In fact, these qualities of the Chief make it especially difficult for people to recognize the more subtle but still insidious problems with the Chief as an Indian representation.

(10) Chief Necessary for Indian Awareness—The Chief is neither necessary nor sufficient for Illinoisans to remember the state's proud Indian heritage. In fact, I have argued that the Chief actually hinders any accurate appreciation of that heritage. Furthermore, there are almost 30,000 Indian citizens of Illinois who might benefit from a more direct, sustained and sincere interest in their current affairs.

(11) Limitations on Freedom of Expression—I am not arguing for any kind of proposal which would seek to limit the freedom of expression of individuals at the university. I would consider this to be inimical to the free exchange of ideas so crucial to a stimulating academic environment. In addition, I am acutely aware that limitations on freedom of expression are ultimately used against the very people they were most designed to protect. What I am arguing is that the university, as an educational institution that receives public monies (my monies), has no business officially sponsoring damaging racial stereotypes. This practice tramples underfoot any legislated policies for equal opportunity as well as pious statements in support of "an improved campus climate."

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It is my hope that these remarks will provide a genuine contribution to the ongoing debate surrounding Chief Illiniwek by stimulating a more thorough and reflective scrutiny of these contentious issues. In listening to these remarks, you might note that I initially journeyed to Illinois to receive a first-rate doctoral education in clinical psychology. I did not arrive here to engage in radical politics which target any and every existing university custom or convention. I thoroughly enjoy my studies in one of the best clinical programs in the country. Unfortunately, official university sponsorship of Chief Illiniwek tarnishes an otherwise superlative academic experience. It is with hope and faith that I petition the "One Above" for continued strength throughout the arduous process of persuading the university community to retire the Chief.

Statement of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on the Use of Native American Images and Nicknames as Sports Symbols

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights calls for an end to the use of Native American images and team names by non-Native schools. The Commission deeply respects the rights of all Americans to freedom of expression under the First Amendment and in no way would attempt to prescribe how people can express themselves. However, the Commission believes that the use of Native American images and nicknames in school is insensitive and should be avoided. In addition, some Native American and civil rights advocates maintain that these mascots may violate anti-discrimination laws. These references, whether mascots and their performances, logos, or names, are disrespectful and offensive to American Indians and others who are offended by such stereotyping. They are particularly inappropriate and insensitive in light of the long history of forced assimilation that American Indian people have endured in this country.

Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s many overtly derogatory symbols and images offensive to African-Americans have been eliminated. However, many secondary schools, post-secondary institutions, and a number of professional sports teams continue to use Native American nicknames and imagery. Since the 1970s, American Indian leaders and organizations have vigorously voiced their opposition to these mascots and team names because they mock and trivialize Native American religion and culture.

It is particularly disturbing that Native American references are still to be found in educational institutions, whether elementary, secondary or post-secondary. Schools are places where diverse groups of people come together to learn not only the "Three Rs," but also how to interact respectfully with people from different cultures. The use of stereotypical images of Native Americans by educational institutions has the potential to create a racially hostile educational environment that may be intimidating to Indian students. American Indians have the lowest high school graduation rates in the

NATIVE CHICAGO

SECOND EDITION

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