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About 450

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A Mockery of Native American History: A Movie Review

In Whose Honor addresses the underlying controversial issues in regards to the University of Illinois' former mascot for 70 years, Chief Illiniwek. As the mascot, Chief Illiniwek performed traditional Native American dances at the sporting events at U of I and other events that represented the school. According to the film *In Whose Honor*, The mascot was viewed by supporters to be a testimony to Native American culture and a tribute to their struggles and sacrifices. In fact, former Chief Illiniwek, Tom Livingston believed the performances and the costume to be majestic, inspirational, and moving (Jay Rosenstein).

Despite the creators' intentions, the Native American community soon took offense to the mascot and his actions. In introducing Charlene Teters, a graduate of U of I and a member of the Native American community, traditional tribal music played in the background, which provided a sample of traditional Native American culture (Jay Rosenstein). The tone of the song gave me a sense of appreciation and understanding of Charlene's argument and why their music and traditions should be used in a respectful manner. I also thought that when Charlene began to cry and show how emotionally invested she was in protecting the sacred being of her culture, it illustrated how serious this mockery had affected her life as well as others (Jay Rosenstein). Including Charlene in the film introduced a new perspective and proposed

challenges to the arguments of the supporters. Her perspectives emphasized her emotional episodes and the addition of traditional tribal music.

Teter's interview and story played a significant role in educating people on the concerns of the Native American community in regards to Chief Illiniwek in the film. Charlene Teter's efforts to remove the mascot weren't immediately carried out. Instead, administration attempted to change the opinions of the Native American community by making Chief Illiniwek's costume more authentic. They tried to accomplish this by removing inaccuracies throughout the costume like removing the roman numeral I on the Chief's chin (Jay Rosenstein). Recently, the University has decided to remove Chief Illiniwek as the mascot, but you can still see his presence on t-shirts and other apparel around campus.

The film, *In Whose Honor*, was effective in presenting both sides of the argument surrounding Chief Illiniwek's controversial presence. The narrator of the documentary spoke with a tone of neutrality rather than persuasiveness, allowing the audience to cast their own opinions (Jay Rosenstein). Although Chief Illiniwek's presence is still seen on campus, the efforts of the Native Americans and their voice has also adopted a presence on campus. Only time will show the ending results of this longstanding battle, but it certainly is a battle worth fighting for the respect and honor of everyone at U of I.

Works Cited

Jay Rosenstein. *In Whose Honor?*, New Day Films, 1997.