

Erika Plascencia

Professor Mary

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Movie Review: The “Chief” of U of I

Chief Illiniwek was a symbol to the University of Illinois: a representation of the Native American culture that once inhabited Illinois. For various reasons, as explored in the documentary *In Whose Honor?*, directed by Jay Rosenstein, the Chief of U of I was banned as a mascot. There are two sides to the Chief's representation as a mascot. We are told the Chief was not an accurate representation of the Native Americans that once lived in Illinois (*In Whose Honor?*). The viewers also see how students, staff, and families of the U of I felt about their Chief. However, Jay Rosenstein seemed to focus more on the reasons of why it was right to ban Chief Illiniwek as the U of I's mascot.

The beginning of the documentary shows a woman who appears to be having a breakdown over Chief Illiniwek (*In Whose Honor?*). The scene that was taken is shaky and blurry, but the director may have chosen to record it that way to add a dramatic effect: adding perspective to how supporters of the Chief felt about his ban. The scene made me wonder, “What is going on?” With that, my attention was grabbed and I wanted to know more about the controversy over Chief Illiniwek. The documentary then shifts from people yelling to a more calm yet solemn tune (*In Whose Honor?*). From the tune's transition, we know viewers will begin to be informed about Chief Illiniwek. This transition happens a lot throughout the film, and it serves as a great indicator to which perspective of the controversy is being discussed.

I felt like the Native Americans' opinions were being supported more in the film than the U of I's tradition. There was minimal narration, but the interviews were pieced together, making it seem as though the people being interviewed were responding to each other. Director Rosenstien included an

interview with a staff member of U of I, in which he stated that Chief Illiniwek represents the Native American culture and serves as a tradition to the school, therefore, the Natives should be happy their culture is being acknowledged (*In Whose Honor?*). The clip was immediately followed by an interview with Charlene Teeters, where she says the Chief is an inaccurate representation of the Peoria tribe and is a chief loved by the U of I because he was manufactured by the school (*In Whose Honor?*). Including a counter argument between interviews enhanced my view point on Chief Illiniwek. It was like looking at a debate, but this debate was pieced together by the director. The end of the documentary was edited to include the progress over the banning of Illiniwek, where viewers read that the controversy continued well past 1997, and see what events lead up to Illiniwek's ban (*In Whose Honor?*). I found myself delighted for the Native Americans near the end of the documentary. The edit and extra events included show a clearer conclusion to the controversy.

Being informed on the sacred traditions Native Americans have really displays Chief Illiniwek under controversial beliefs. We learn that a chief is a highly respected member of a tribe, and Illiniwek is a chief whose dance is made up and loved by many individuals at the U of I (*In Whose Honor?*). The information presented to viewers should challenge their thinking whether or not they believed having Chief Illiniwek as a mascot was right. Including the Native Americans' perspective really makes us rethink the meaning behind Chief Illiniwek.

Works Cited

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