

Savannah Gregory

On *In Whose Honor?* Sadness and Discomfort

I watched the documentary *In Whose Honor?* as a part of my English class, but I became invested in the topic while watching. The movie is about the controversy surrounding the removal of the University of Illinois's mascot, Chief Illiniwek. I knew very little about the topic, so I was excited to watch the documentary. My knowledge on the issue greatly expanded but I was also exposed to a new perspective on issues regarding culturally based, or lack thereof, mascots. Being a white American, I haven't had to stand up for mockery of my own culture like Charlene Teters did for hers.

In the documentary, Charlene Teters explains her role in the movement to remove the Chief and the backlash she faced doing so (*In Whose Honor?*). She introduces her disappointment when describing her and her children's initial encounter with the chief when going to a U of I basketball game. To say the least, the halftime show provoked sorrow and embarrassment for her family. The documentary was certainly full of gut-wrenching situations even for someone who is not a part of the ethnic background being debated. I was alarmed by some of the horrors she endured on in such a recent time.

Being the catalyst for this change on the campus, Charlene Teters was a perfect fit for this documentary in regard to both the narrative and emotional plot. She was able to tell factual stories but also support her claims with personal experience. Her personal connection allowed her to stir emotions within viewers. **This does, of course, draw bias into the picture; I do believe this is the biggest limitation of the documentary.**

While I was deeply disturbed by some of the clips in the documentary, I sort of had an idea of how the situation would settle out. While my prior knowledge was limited, I did have an idea of what would happen because I am involved in campus life at U of I. Being an out of state student, I quickly met lots of friends, many of them from Illinois. Just listening to their discussion surrounding the chief made me more aware of the situation. Additionally, I have not seen anyone directly dress up as the chief, although people have worn chief-inspired shirts, suggesting that the university sponsorship of the chief had come to a close.

Including actual clips of some events that took place showed the validity in the claims Teters made. A lot of the sadness and discomfort I felt during the movie took place when clips containing racial slurs or stiff arguments were shown. Including these clips allowed viewers to feel some of what Teters endured as she advocated for change (In Whose Honor?). The tribal music that complemented the film carried a sad tone through the movie. The paradox of the authentic music and the fabricated mascot raised question to the appropriateness of the mascot; how does the chief represent people of American Indian background? The music showed that in reality, the chief disrespects aspects of American Indian heritage.

Why I Was Wrong: Opinion is Not a Limitation

In the actual Movie review, you will notice that I bolded one sentence: “This does, of course, draw bias into the picture; I do believe this is the biggest limitation of the documentary.” When I initially wrote this sentence, I truly did think that the one-sidedness of the documentary created a limitation; how can I trust Charlene Teters’ side of the story if other people’s opinions are not considered equally?

I think about my statement now and read Professor Mary’s comments and consider the weight my comment carried. Her whole life, I’m sure people have told Mrs. Teters that her opinion shouldn’t be considered more than another’s. I know she will probably never lay eyes on my review of the movie, but I would like to comment that even I disagree with myself on the matter of this statement. Regarding her life as a limitation to justice is quite an inconsiderate comment to make. My thoughts have definitely shifted since writing this. On this topic, I believe her opinion on the disparity she suffers from does matter and actually adds to the documentary’s validity. Revising this forced me to be self-reflective and notice my own implicit objectiveness.

I chose to leave this statement in so that I can show my change of mind. To account for my poor choice of thought, I now believe the biggest limitation to be the fact that I cannot understand what Charlene has experienced. I can understand her experiences, but I will never be able to experience them myself.

Works Cited

In Whose Honor?. Jay Rosenstein. Perf. Charlene Teters. New Day Films, 1997. DVD.