

September 29, 2009

Chancellor Herman,

As you are aware, on October 2nd the 'Students for Chief Illiniwek' plan to hold the second of their annual tributes to the former mascot titled: 'The Next Dance.' As you are probably also aware, various student groups are planning to protest this event.

Last year's protest was a highly charged situation fraught with tension and threats of violence. One of our camera persons was shoved, intimidating gestures and racial epithets were common in amongst a whole barrage of taunts and verbal abuse. At one point, a small group of protestors were forced off the sidewalk and into traffic by a very aggressive crowd; they ultimately had to retreat back to the larger group for their own safety.

Police at the scene however, were few and far between. Those who were there did little but stand around and joke with the fans coming out of the building. Why, you might ask, would anyone knowingly put themselves in a situation where such a possibility of violence exists?

The answer is simple: We're there, because you aren't.

Students, faculty and local community members will protest to call attention to what can only be described as an arrogant display of privilege and bigotry because you, as the voice and face of the University administration, have failed to do so.

When 'the chief' was retired in 2007, you had the opportunity to completely end that racist practice. The 'chief' is a remnant of a period when Native peoples of this country couldn't even legally perform their own dances -- dances which are an integral part of their fundamental spiritual expression -- and yet some blond-haired kid in Illinois could fire up the fans at a football game doing his own exaggerated parody thereof, and the University thought that was perfectly acceptable.

Anyone with even a moderately good education and grasp of history knows this and can see the racism inherent in this so-called 'tradition', yet because a lot of powerful, influential and wealthy interests like to indulge in the sort of imperialist nostalgia 'the chief' represents, you apparently accept their spin on things and fall right in line using as justification their woefully transparent excuses about its 'tradition' and 'honor.'

Your bogus references to 'free speech' may satisfy the NCAA and avoid sanctions, but they do nothing to disrupt the long and troubled history of racism on this campus and you know it.

You had a chance to end this thing once and for all, and in the time you have left as

chancellor you can still do that, but instead you tinker around the edges, trying to 'manage' the situation. In so doing, you force students on this campus to fend for themselves and take whatever moral lessons they can from your lack of leadership.

Chancellor Herman, is this the legacy you want to leave behind? In the final analysis your name will be attached to this issue and what you do or don't do about the 'chief' is how you will be remembered.

Be a bold leader and take a definitive stand, or be remembered as the Chancellor who balked at moral obligation and let influential outside interests dictate his every move.

Sincerely,

The IRESIST Coalition.