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King Kaufman's Sports Daily

### **Three cheers for Illinois not bringing its outdated, racist mascot to the Final Four.**

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Chief Illiniwek, the native American "symbol" of the University of Illinois, won't be attending the Final Four. Let's hear a cheer for that.

The university was sued earlier this month by the Illinois Native American Bar Association and two individuals in an attempt to have the mascot banned for violating the Illinois Civil Rights Act, though he'd been grounded before that. The university says the chief only appears at home football games, though he does accompany the team to St. Louis when Illinois plays Missouri.

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Gee, I wonder why he doesn't travel. Could it be that the university -- whose board of trustees has been hemming and hawing on this issue for years -- understands that the days when such insulting mascots were acceptable have long passed?

The chief is not a mascot, the university says. He's the official "symbol" of the university, one that honors the native American culture of the school's region.

That's some symbol they got there in Champaign-Urbana. They're afraid to let it out of its box. How's the alma mater go? "We proudly hide your banner/Our Alma Mater dear/We're embarrassed as we whisper your name/Whene'er others can hear!"

If the chief honors Indian culture, or anything else, why does the university keep him under wraps?

Supporters of the chief like to point to the fact that students overwhelmingly support his continued existence. A referendum last year found 70 percent of students supporting the chief, according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Listen: There is no more reactionary force on earth than a student body when it comes to the traditions of its school.

If somebody had decided in the '30s that the school mascot would be a jack-booted, marching Nazi storm trooper, a majority of students would fight any attempt to get rid of him even today. They'd come up with some kind of convoluted logic to explain how the storm trooper doesn't really represent Nazism, the same way people make tortured arguments to explain how the Confederate flag doesn't represent racism and slavery.

Supporters also sometimes argue that surveys of native Americans show the majority are fine with Indian mascots and team names, and arguments like mine are nothing more than paternalism.

That's one way to look at it. Here's another: Even if it's true that a majority are OK with Indian mascots, there's a significant minority deeply insulted by them. They deserve protection from the tyranny, or apathy, of the majority. If reasonable people are insulted, it's wrong.

I've seen Chief Illiniwek's act in person several times. It never fails to put a knot in my stomach to watch a white kid bouncing around, imitating an Indian dance. Imagine a school having a Little Black Sambo for a mascot, or a dancing Hasidic Jew. He'd be counting money as he danced, of course. Or controlling the media. He could have a remote control. Hey, this is fun.

This is one of those arguments that's marching inexorably toward its end. Time is running out on mascots like Chief Illiniwek. The NCAA has asked Illinois and 30 other member schools to submit results of a "self-study" about their native American nicknames and mascots.

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The schools are supposed to talk to students, area residents and leaders from neighboring Indian tribes and turn in their report by May 1. The NCAA will then move the results up a chain of subcommittees and says it will make some kind of decision by midsummer.