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**Some colleges have lot to learn about racism**

**By Jon Saraceno**

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The decorated halls of higher education sometimes aren't always so high-minded. In fact, they look downright dumb in some cases. Two schools that immediately come to mind are a pair of otherwise fine academic institutions marred by their leadership's intransigence over an issue many schools long ago resolved with a few fast-disappearing traits in our nation: common sense, appropriateness and decency.

Haven't Native Americans, one of the most brutalized and exploited groups to inhabit our soil, had enough of Caucasian tormentors? We took their land, culture and hope. Apparently, we must also trivialize their sacred rituals and possess their souls.

All in the name of tradition, glory and the granddaddy of 'em all — money.

But times change. Sensibilities, too. Or they should.

It is 2005, isn't it? Universities like Florida State, Illinois and Utah act as if it's 1965. Welcome to Tallahassee, Urbana-Champaign and Salt Lake City — and at least 15 other college campuses — where the phrase "higher education" does not apply. At least when it comes to racist imagery in the form of nicknames and mascots, so says the NCAA.

"If Florida State wants to honor the Seminoles, then change the name ... to Florida Seminole University — that has dignity," says Suzan Shown Harjo, president of an Indian rights organization in Washington, D.C. "It's something very different than a mascot or belittled entity. People honor their institutions. But the first thing (pro-mascot supporters) do is skip species. They say, 'Next, PETA will tell us not to use bears.' Then they go off on leprechauns, insects, mythical beings — all non-human entities. That's the point: Natives are dehumanized, turned into larger-than-life, or smaller-than-life, non-human beings."

The hue and cry continues from the NCAA's decision last week to ban racially or ethnically derogatory imagery from postseason events. Many alumni are angry. Some schools on the hit list balk, including Florida State, which considers legal action.

The NCAA is guilty of many things, chief among them greed, hypocrisy and a choking bureaucracy. And, in this instance, it is embarrassingly tardy to the civil rights revolution and light in its first salvo, taking on its membership only at tournament time. How can a school's imagery be sometimes, or partially, racist?

The aforementioned schools are among the last major conference holdouts clinging to the outdated belief that there's no racial bigotry involved in the promulgating of offensive

Native American nicknames, mascots and logos. Four years ago, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights recommended all non-Native American schools stop using Native American imagery because of inherent stereotyping that encourages "false portrayals that encourage biases and prejudices that have a negative effect on contemporary Indian people."

Real reform took effect in the 1970s: Oklahoma long ago put an end to its patently racist "Little Red" mascot. Marquette retired its "Willie Wampum" logo. Other visionary schools, including Stanford, Dartmouth and Syracuse, discontinued Indian mascots.

FSU remains mired in the mucky swamp of racism.

Want a flaming spear fired into the gridiron turf from your favorite war-painted Indian riding an appaloosa? Come to FSU, kid. Meet Chief Osceola. Enjoy a pseudo-Indian war dance on your home court, performed by a bare-footed student in a colorful headdress? There's Chief Illiniwek at U of I.

At a most basic level, anti-reformists are upset at what they claim is a continuing erosion of their rights by what they term a whiny, politically correct movement spearheaded by minorities, intellectual eggheads and, yes, some media.

My electronic mailbox runneth over with common themes, chief among them: What harm could there be with honoring Native Americans by using mascots like Indians, Braves and Warriors? It should be a badge of honor to have such nicknames that connote courage and ferocity. What will happen to their history if we don't trot out an Indian dance during halftime?

And we have so-called "educators" like FSU President T.K. Wetherell. He stands behind a fortress of paternalistic acts of do-gooderism — a few scholarships here, a museum of Seminole heritage and culture there — while Seminole leaders act as co-conspirators in the denigration of an already-damaged self-image.

I wonder how many millions in merchandising, tickets and tuition FSU has reaped marketing the Seminole image. Max B. Osceola Jr., Seminole Tribe of Florida council rep, is cozy with FSU's administration. His group approves of the imagery; other Seminoles don't.

I wonder if Max attends FSU football games. Or goes to Bobby Bowden's home for barbecues. He wouldn't sell out an entire nation of his own people, would he?

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