



Aboriginal Student Centre says alumni cheer is racist

BY KRISHNA LALBIHARIE

WINNIPEG (CUP) — An old school cheer resurrected by the University of Manitoba's alumni association and has given rise to concerns on campus about its depiction of Aboriginal peoples.

The cheer, which originated in the 1920's, was to be used by the alumni association to promote homecoming celebrations.

But the U of M Aboriginal Student Centre says the cheer characterizes Aboriginals negatively and elicits racial stereotypes. In particular, it raised concerns about phrases "rip, rip, rip" and "raw, raw, raw," which it says reinforce stereotypes of Aboriginals as savage and barbaric.

The centre also said it was worried the cheer mocked Aboriginal languages including Ojibway, Cree and Sioux.

"The words and phrases are somewhat recognizable as being aboriginal in origin but are, I think, recklessly pieced together," said Florence Bruyere, a co-ordinator with the centre. "It sounds aboriginal, but it doesn't really make sense."

The centre requested that students on campus be educated about the history of the cheer and the issues surrounding it, and petitioned the U of M to reconsider using it.

The alumni association says it was unaware of any racist implications in the cheer and has apologized to the Aboriginal Student Centre.

"We thank the Aboriginal Student Centre for making us aware," said Iris Chrol, a homecoming co-ordinator with the alumni association. "Certainly we never intended to offend any group...and we're making every effort to make sure that we maintain ties with that cultural group and not to offend them."

The association has since redesigned posters and other promotional material that contained the chant.

The cheer appears in a

song entitled "The Brown and Gold," which was commissioned by the U of M's student union in 1940 and is considered the union's official theme song.

The student union agreed with the concerns raised by the Aboriginal Student Centre.

"[The student council is] concerned with students being hurt and offended by a move on the part of the alumni association that, while not malicious, was certainly ill

thought out," said Kelly Friesen, director of public relations with the union.

The union was considering disowning the "Brown

and Gold" as its official theme song, said Andrea Pratt, the union's director of student relations.

Bruce Miller, a student advisor with the Aboriginal Student Centre, says the use of such cheers is a barrier to Aboriginal participation in sports.

"The sports section of almost every newspaper covers subtle but continuing racism," Miller said, referring to team names which appropriate Aboriginal culture, such as the Washington Redskins, Atlanta Braves and Kansas City Chiefs.

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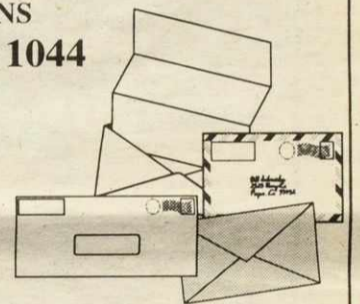
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