

05/20/09

Courtesy of I Resist

On May 20, 2009, three items from the Beyond the Chief art exhibit, created by the renowned Cheyenne-Arapaho artist HOCK E AYE VI Edgar Heap of Birds, were vandalized for the fifth time. The attacks appear to have taken place in broad daylight sometime between the hours of 8:30 am and 1:30 pm on Wednesday, May 20th. The vandalized art include signs located in front of the Native American House, the Asian American Studies building, and adjacent to the Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center. An officer arrived at 2:00 pm to complete a report but no statements were released by the Campus Police.

The damaged signs include those representing the Wea, Meskwaki, and Peoria tribes of Illinois. These series of attacks now make it plain that those perpetrating this vandalism are specifically targeting the Native American community - thus falling into the definition of a "Hate Crime" as described by the United States Department of Justice (DOJ).

"Hate crimes are intended to hurt and intimidate individuals, because they are perceived to be different with respect to their race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender or disability. The purveyors of hate use physical violence, verbal threats of violence, vandalism, and in some cases weapons, explosives, and arson, to instill fear in their victims, leaving them vulnerable to subsequent attacks and feeling alienated, helpless, suspicious and fearful. These acts of hatred can leave lasting emotional impressions upon their victims as well as entire communities."

Students at the Native House on Wednesday, disturbed by these latest attacks, openly expressed frustration with the UIUC Chancellor, Richard Herman for his lack of action in addressing these series of incidents against the Native American community. "Yes, he sent out a mass email on this issue, but obviously that's not enough. The attacks continue and the campus climate remains unsafe for us and anyone who wants to see the campus move Beyond the Chief." The student making this statement asked to remain anonymous out of fear for her safety. Another student, who also preferred not to identify himself, attributed the attacks directly to the lack of action in ending Chief Illiniwek's presence on campus. "I refuse to attend any of the basketball or football games because the band still plays the Chief music during half-time. Yeah they retired the dance, but the music plays on. They're a cult and they are dangerous."

Although the University of Illinois' Board of Trustees voted to end the use of the Chief Illiniwek name, image and regalia, they also handed over all decision-making powers on the remaining issues to the UIUC Chancellor, Richard Herman. However, Herman refuses to end the use of the half-time music, known as the "Three-in-One," to which the mascot would perform his "crazy dance." Thus, since its retirement, the UIUC marching band continues to play the mascot's music while many in the crowd perform their homage to "The Chief."

Apparently, the latest pro-Chief ritual embraces a new tradition of destroying Native American art located on Nevada Street in Urbana.

Also, please consider signing the petition to pressure the Chancellor into taking action on this issue.