

Little Red

what is at issue?

By Val Pippy and Connie Burke Ruggles

1. In November 1969 members of the National Indian Youth Council's OU chapter delivered a petition signed by 32 members to Dr. J. Herbert Hollomon asking that the position of Little Red be abolished at OU.

2. Hollomon referred the petition to the Human Relations Committee for study and a recommendation. That committee had been established March 26, 1969, resulting from a recommendation by the Ohm Committee investigating charges of discrimination in the basketball program. The Ohm Committee report had been issued in February 1969 and specifically asked that a human relations committee be established. The function of the Human Relations Committee, as established by the president, was to "deal with complaints and charges of discrimination."

3. The Human Relations Committee began its study of the Little Red question and submitted its report to Hollomon on February 6, 1970. The report (see full text) contained two specific recommendations relative to Little Red: That the office of Little Red be discontinued and that individual Indian cheerleaders not be prevented from dance and dress "that reflect their unique heritage."

4. Hollomon studied the report until April 16 when he issued a statement accepting the committee's recommendations. In his statement he noted "If Indians are chosen as cheerleaders and if they wish to participate in such activities, they may, of course, do so in ways acceptable to them and their Indian community. We are removing only the official recognition of Little Red as the OU mascot."

5. Since it was no longer football season, the issue of Little Red faded somewhat until July when Hollomon resigned as president of OU. Immediately Little Red returned to the public eye. An Oklahoma City paper ran an editorial page cartoon of Little Red returning from hiding. The Governor in a speech before the DAR stated he would like to see Little Red

return. The letters started flowing in.

6. Prior to the first home football game with Wisconsin September 19 Randy Palmer, a freshman, let it be known that he intended to appear on the field as Little Red. At the request of the NIYC the student court issued a restraining order to prevent Palmer's appearance.

7. Palmer appeared at the game in Indian garments and danced in the tradition of Little Red. He subsequently was charged with contempt of court under the student constitution.

8. At the September 26 game against Oregon State Palmer did not appear but a former Little Red, Phil Waller, did appear. He was informed that he, too, was violating a student court order.

9. On September 30 a petition was filed in Cleveland County District Court against the NIYC, the American Indian Student Office and the Student Association General Court by Floyd Harjo, assistant chief of the Seminole Indians, seeking to prevent them from blocking the appearance of Little Red. In addition, Palmer's attorney, State Sen. John Young, filed a similar petition in the State Supreme Court.

10. On Monday October 5, the student court dropped its contempt charge against Palmer citing confusion surrounding court procedures and inadequacies of certain Student Association legislation. As a result of the student court action the District Court and Supreme Court petitions also were withdrawn.

11. In mid-October the Sooner Rally Council, which governs cheerleaders and pep activities, announced new positions as rally leaders. Such leaders, who would be men students, may dress in any manner they feel will help raise the spirit of the crowd. In tryouts October 22 Randy Palmer, dressed in Indian garments, and Brian Beachboard, a sophomore from Enid dressed in a 1920s outfit, were selected as rally leaders.

Editor's Note: A few days after Sooner magazine interviewed Dave Poolaw, Oklahoma City sophomore and president of the OU chapter of the National Indian Youth Council, the NIYC and the American Indian Student Office announced they would ask the student court to drop all charges against Randy Palmer, the freshman student who has attempted to appear as Little Red. In his statement Poolaw said, "Little Red has never been the major thrust of our activities. We are (dropping the charges) because Mr. Palmer has been subjected to an unreasonable amount of pressure from outside this institution and no man, especially an incoming freshman, should have to be placed in this kind of situation. We wanted to avoid the kind of circus situation which has arisen here . . ."

In a later press conference Poolaw acknowledged that Little Red had gotten away from the NIYC purpose of drawing attention to the problems of the American Indian.

Conceding that the argument over Little Red possibly had alienated some Indians around the state, Poolaw said, "they have very open minds, and I'm sure when we talk they will understand what we are trying to do. There is so much to do.

"Little Red is a minor and somewhat questionable part of the Indian heritage. We say now to the white people, you can have your mascot. All we want is an Indian studies program, our cultural lounge, scholarships and encouragement and help for Indian students . . . Little Red will never feed hungry Indian children; Little Red will never help more Indian students come to OU . . .

"We ask the chiefs of the Five Civilized Tribes, instead of being worried about Little Red to help pre-

serve the Indian cultural heritage on this campus and others around the state. To our Indian brothers who have opposed us, we ask only for moral and financial help to help other Indians. We want to preserve our ethnic identity, yet become economically and socially successful too."

After the NIYC dropped its charges, the student court officially dropped the contempt of court charge against Randy Palmer. Following suit, Palmer's attorney, State Sen. John Young of Sapulpa, also announced he was withdrawing two suits against the Student Association which had been pending in the State Supreme Court and in District Court.

About a year ago the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) moved to abolish Little Red as the University's official mascot. This was done primarily because people look on Little Red as a mere mascot, which is degrading to traditions of Indians across the state of Oklahoma and across the country. This is not an Indian professor or an Indian university president or an Indian doctor or some other honorable profession; this is just an Indian mascot, something that has only surface value.

Little Red has to do with people who love football. Not everyone loves football or loves mascots for that matter. So here we have this mascot for football people that is supposedly a symbol of all that is holy and all that Indian people are proud of from their ancestral heritage. That's what the white people say, and that's what some of the Indian people have been deluded

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Poolaw . . .

**'Not Everyone
Loves Mascots'**

Poolaw . . .

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to believe.

We're saying that a mere mascot could never symbolize our holy, proud ancestral heritage. A mascot is trivial; it exists for the entertainment of the white men.

If you want something authentic, why don't you have an Indian ceremony on the field. An Indian ceremony consists of more than just one Indian. But then the question arises—is the football field a proper place for an Indian ceremony? That would be like having a Baptist convention in a bar.

Mr. Bartlett has said Little Red will be part of preserving the history of Oklahoma. Now in effect he was saying that Little Red will not let the people of Oklahoma forget the Indian, that Little Red will be a symbolic representation of Indian culture in Oklahoma and a symbolic representation of the history of the coming of the white man to Oklahoma.

White people rationalize their position on Little Red to say that this mascot will symbolize Oklahoma's history. What we're saying is the history of the white man's dealings in Oklahoma is one of the most shameful things that history has ever recorded. Such tribes as the Cheyennes and the Arapahoes and the Kiowas and Comanches fought the encroaching white invaders to the end. They were defeated and taken as prisoners of war, forced onto reservations and acculturated to an agricultural way of life which they didn't want, didn't care for. They were hunters of the plains. The white men were trying to destroy the Indians, literally and culturally.

The Indian wars are over now, but you still have this literal and cultural genocide practice through bureaucratic means in the government. There are many instances. Take the Indian boarding schools. Some of the Navajo boarding schools have a standing policy that Indian students cannot speak their own language. If they want to speak, they have to get behind closed doors in dark rooms and talk

Navajo and sort of resocialize themselves into their Navajo identity.

I would say that the majority of American Indian students who identify as Indians back us on our stand. There are several Indian students on campus who get scholarships from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and get federal monies because they are one quarter Cherokee or one quarter Kiowa who don't identify, who don't know much about their own history. They don't hang around with Indians. They identify with white people and are in white fraternities. They don't do anything with Indians. They don't socialize with us. But the majority of ethnically identified Indians at the University of Oklahoma are against Little Red.

I don't think the students as a whole really care about the Little Red issue. I'm sure we could present our arguments in such a way, with logic and with reason, that we could win the majority of people to our side. But I don't care too much. They're not Indians, and they don't determine our lives. They're not going to help me stay alive in this country as an American Indian. So when you come to trivial issues like Little Red and how much support you have on a non-Indian campus, then I don't care. What I do care about is how many students back us in ethnically identifying. There we have the majority.

I thought the Human Relations Committee report was extremely fair. What the committee did was state that the University would not subject any ethnic minority, or anybody else, to anything degrading.

For example, we got the degrading caricatures of American Indians out of the University sponsored bookstores in logical and law abiding ways. These people are logical and law abiding people, and we presented our arguments in such a way that they just couldn't refuse us and be reasonable at the same time. So I would agree totally with the Human Relations Committee recommendations on the issue of Little Red.

Relative to the cheerleader portion of the committee report, what I am afraid of is that when Indians go into the cheerleader tryouts, instead of doing the traditional rah, rah stuff, they'll have their Indian

garments on—those who want to bring the Little Red issue back like Mr. Palmer has—and they'll try out by dancing around. This is not what a cheerleader is supposed to do. This sets up two different sets of criteria for judging cheerleaders.

Personally, I would care if an Indian dressed in Indian garments appeared on the field as a cheerleader. I am a Kiowa, and my family tradition goes back to a line of warriors. I doubt if you'll see anything comparable in Oklahoma to my people. When we first got the idea of wearing war bonnets from the Dakotas, we considered it very holy for a warrior to have a war bonnet.

Now, you have some young man from another tribe running around out there with this war bonnet on. That war bonnet means a lot to some people. It means a lot to many older Indians who have not forgotten the old ways. Those people don't want to see it prostituted and used as entertainment to the white man, beating to the white man's drum, the drum in the band.

This doesn't endear me to him very much, you see, because I'm very proud of my Indian heritage and consider some of it holy. It shames me to see an Indian prostituting himself in front of the white man. I am proud, so proud that I personally must try not to let this happen.

I think Little Red is the most trivial, disgusting issue that Indians have ever been split up about. They shouldn't be split up about issues like this. They should split up about Indian education, Indian welfare, Indian health and millions of other issues which pertain to social and economic uplifting of American Indians across the country rather than on just the trivial issue of Little Red—mascot.

If the people of this state are so up with Indians, so proud, why don't they have state supported Indian scholarships; why don't they contribute to an Indian culture house, which we just got. My organization, the National Indian Youth Council, has gotten us this office for the NIYC, the cultural house, some Indian tutors to help lower the attrition rate. The NIYC is the most active organization for American Indian students.

We think Little Red is already

dead. It's been solved already by Hollomon and the recommendations of the Human Relations Committee. Little Red is legally abolished. We see those who would want to bring the Little Red issue back for their own political gain as just more white men using the Indian for their own gain. When they get through using the Indian for their political needs, then they say, "Go on back, Indian, we don't need you any more. We know you're socially and economically deprived, but we use you for what we need, and right now we no longer need you. You can have Little Red, but you can't have Indian university professors; you can't have Indian university presidents; you can't have things that pertain to the true American Indian problems."

What they want is Little Red, something meaningless. If Mr. Bartlett was so concerned about Indians, why didn't he answer my plea to him to talk to him about Indian studies, Indian recruitment, cultural houses across the state, and broad programs to bring social and economic equality to the American Indian?

We are the true Americans, and yet we're the most deprived ethnic group in the United States. We think this is wrong. We were the first ones here. We should have first priority on everything.

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Timmons . . .

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image they wanted to appear out there on the football field. On the other hand they were trying to start the NIYC at OU where we had had an Indian club (Sequoyah Club) since 1914. They needed immediate publicity, and this was a neat gimmick to use to get it. They got state and national publicity on it.

The thing that has disturbed me most is the pressure. The Little Red of last year, Ron Benally, was so disturbed by the pressures that it actually had some effect on his health and his school. He didn't enroll the second semester. And the pressures have been pretty great this fall on Randy Palmer, both from the University students and from the outside.

To me it's a matter of individual choice. If an Indian student wants to do this sort of thing on the football field in costume as part of the cheerleading body of the students, part of the school spirit program of the institution, and there's no serious objection from the Indians of Oklahoma, I can't see why he shouldn't be allowed to do it.

The mistake that I think was made last year, and I told the NIYC students that it was a mistake, was they made themselves self-appointed Indian spokesmen for the Indians of Oklahoma without ever asking the Indians of Oklahoma anything about it.

The method in which this whole thing was done last year was similar to what has been done over the last 200 years in a sense. This is nothing against the integrity of the president of the University or some of the Indian students who worked on it. Some of them are sincere about it. I think the Human Relations Committee did everything it could to listen to both sides.

But here's what I'm trying to say. All through the Indian history in this country if the federal government couldn't get what it wanted through the legally constituted authority of an Indian tribe, it would send out a white commission to listen to the Indians' problems; the

commission could find Indian leaders who were sympathetic to what the government wanted done, and then the commission would recognize those leaders as the spokesmen for the tribe. Read through your Indian history. It's that way all the way through.

To me the sad thing was that here we had a man, a white man at the head of the administration who was not an Oklahoman. He appointed a committee with no Indians on it; the committee listened to self-appointed spokesmen for the Indians of Oklahoma and made a recommendation back to the president of the University.

I will say this, the committee left a loophole which has never been publicized. If you will read the recommendation, it says Little Red is abolished as a mascot, but there was no objection to an Indian in authentic costume doing an authentic Indian dance as part of the cheerleading group. The committee recognized there were two sides in this thing and left an out for it, which has never been publicized.

When this whole issue came up again this fall, the Indian students at the University are Indian enough they should have known the reaction of the older Indians in the state. Those Indians are real sensitive about having someone say, "I speak for the Indian people." Even within your own tribe, you speak for yourself, and you let others speak for themselves.

Last fall a group wanted to bring 50 adult Indians in full costume here to the football game to dance, and I recommended that they not do anything until the University had an opportunity to study the whole thing and make a decision. And they didn't. The adult Indian is not the type to demonstrate and cause a lot of trouble.

I'm not saying Little Red might not be degrading to some of these young Indian students, but what they tried to infer was that it was degrading and embarrassing and insulting to all the Indians of Oklahoma, which it wasn't.

I went to the registration of the NIYC convention in 1969. There were Indian students there from other states that were dressed in an imitation Indian fashion that to me looked exactly like early motion pictures of cowboys and Indians, of