

The Committee Report

The issue which bears the popular title "Little Red" has ramifications which reach far and wide. To treat it as an isolated, local concern would minimize its importance and take it out of proper focus, causing its significance to be lost. During its deliberations, the Human Relations Committee was exposed to three distinct group reactions to "Little Red":

1. Indian reactions
2. White-Indian (individuals stating that they had a small amount of Indian "blood") reactions
3. White reactions

In all instances, feelings were polarized within and between groups. Spokesmen were either unalterably in favor of discontinuing the role of "Little Red" or unalterably in favor of continuing it. There was no middle ground. Generally, those representing white-Indian and white groups failed to see or appreciate the psychological and cultural concerns implicit in the request to discontinue "Little Red." On the other hand, most of the Indian spokesmen—despite their inability to agree on a just resolution of the issue—were cognizant of current conditions which make "Little Red" a **cause celebre**. As examples:

1. The mortality rate among Indians is higher than that of other groups within the society at large. Infant mortality is one and half times greater, and the mortality rate of infants between one month and one year of age is three times greater than the rest of the population.
2. In spite of this high mortality rate, the American Indian population is growing and it is young. Indians on or adjacent to reservations have a median age of 17 compared to a median age of approximately 30 for the rest of the population.
3. The birth rate among Indians is twice that of all other groups in the United States.
4. The median school years completed by Indians is about 8. In New Mexico it is 4.3, and in Arizona, 2.7. Exact information is not available for Indians in Oklahoma, but this information is at hand: one-fourth of those Indian children who start school drop out, and the drop out rate is higher than that among blacks. By contrast the median school years completed by all persons in the State of Oklahoma is 10.4; in Oklahoma County it is 12.0; in Norman, 12.3.
5. The median annual income of reservation families is between \$1500 and \$1700. By contrast, median annual income of all Oklahoma families is \$4,620; in Oklahoma County it is \$5,708; in Tulsa it is \$6,229.

The University of Oklahoma, as do all institutions, has a responsibility—perhaps a special one in terms of Oklahoma history as it relates to the Indian—to face up to and develop improved opportunities for the increased well-being of the Indian population. To do this, the Committee recommends that the University of Oklahoma should:

1. Assume a more vigorous program for recruiting Indian students and employees.
2. Initiate special courses for those who lack adequate preparation for university work.
3. Provide additional scholarship assistance for low-income Indian students.
4. Expand curriculum offerings in Indian culture and studies.
5. Provide opportunities for cultural expression on campus.
6. Expand opportunity for Indians to participate in campus life and structure.

In the context of the preceding facts, it is easier to understand why the position of "Little Red" is a symbol of great opportunity and extreme frustration. To some people, it is the most prestigious position that can be achieved by an American Indian student at the University of Oklahoma; to others, it is the most degrading role that can be played within the university community. At a time when Indians—and other minority groups—throughout the nation are seeking self-determination, it is imperative that we do not make recommendations that would block access to this goal.

Therefore, the Human Relations Committee recommends:

1. That the office of "Little Red" be discontinued because it is viewed by Indians as degrading to Indians.
2. That individual Indian cheerleaders, if they choose, not be precluded from dance and dress that reflect their unique heritage.

NOTE:

Sources of statistical information incorporated:

1. Civil Rights Digest
Vol. 2, No. 4, Fall, 1969
2. County and City Data Book, 1967
Published by U.S. Department of Commerce
Bureau of Census
3. Anthropology Department
University of Oklahoma