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A Tribune Feature Story

English faculty condemn 'Warriors'

Dr. Milton J. Bates, Dr. Amy Blair, Dr. M.C. Bodden, Dr. John Boly, Dr. Virginia Chappell, Dr. John Curran, Dr. Ed Duffy, Dr. Michael Patrick Gillespie, Dr. Paula Gillespie, Dr. Heather Hathaway, Dr. C.J. Hribal, Dr. Stephen Karian, Dr. Steven Hartman Keiser, Dr. Christine L. Krueger, Dr. Jodi Melamed, Dr. Rebecca Nowacek, Dr. Krista Ratcliffe, Dr. Angela Sorby, Dr. R. Clifton Spargo, Dr. John Su, Dr. Sarah Wadsworth & Dr. Amelia Zurcher

The above English Department faculty believe we have a responsibility to comment on the issues of language and representation involved in the current debate over what it would mean for Marquette's athletic teams to call themselves the "Warriors" once again. Some have proposed that so long as no American Indian mascot or logo accompanies the Warriors nickname, its return would not conflict with the university's commitment to respect the dignity of all human beings. We strongly disagree.

Words accrue meaning — both literal and connotative — only through historical usage and in real human communities. In the United States, the word "warriors" connotes first and formatively American Indians. Certainly here at Marquette, the word has been and remains explicitly linked with American Indians. Whether this linkage ascribes to American Indians traits that seem negative or positive, it denies them the dignity and right of self-representation. In the case of sports, it appropriates and misuses American Indian experience. These long-standing connections between name and image are not easily or quickly erased, especially for American Indians. As one of the panelists at last week's American Indian forum on this issue said, "It has only been 10 years (since Marquette dropped the "Warriors" nickname). ... Let's table this issue for 100 years."

In 1994, Marquette decided that not only the mascot, but also the name Warriors violated the university's mission. This earlier decision is now part of the history of what Warriors means in our community. In the 10 years since, our sports teams and the university have developed a proud, new tradition

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as the Golden Eagles. Whatever the intentions of the Board of Trustees in considering reversing this name change, there can be no doubt that the wider community of Marquette, Milwaukee and the nation, would perceive the return of the Warriors as a return to an era of racial insensitivity.

The Board of Trustees now has a wonderful opportunity to reassert Marquette's unwavering commitment to its mission: to work for the common benefit of all members of the human community. Keep the Golden Eagles.

Bates et. al. are faculty members in the Department of English.

This article appeared in The Marquette Tribune on Dec. 9 2004.

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