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January 27, 2013

Campus Alliance Wants Northwestern U. to Acknowledge a Founder's Controversial Past

By Ann Schnoebelen

Controversy over the role of one of Northwestern University's founders in an attack on American Indians in 1864 has led the university to rename its Founder's Day festivities, scheduled for Monday, a "birthday celebration."

Whatever the name, members of Northwestern's Native American and Indigenous Student Alliance say they plan to use the event to present a petition outlining concerns about the possible involvement of John Evans in the Sand Creek Massacre, in which members of the Colorado Territory Militia killed more than 130 people, mostly women and children, in a Cheyenne and Arapaho camp.

The campus alliance alleges that Evans, as territorial governor of Colorado, played a "political and moral role" in the assault. Although not present, he later faced public outrage over accusations of a cover-up. He was forced to resign his gubernatorial post in 1874 but remained on Northwestern's Board of Trustees.

In a letter published in the campus newspaper this month, several student members of the alliance, known as Naisa, and Gary Alan Fine, a professor of sociology, took a stand. "In order to grow, institutions must remember their past," they wrote, "but this university has chosen amnesia."

Northwestern's administration has not issued an official statement on the issue but is "working on determining the best course of action forward," said Alan K. Cabbage, vice president for university relations.

Adam Mendel, a senior and member of Naisa, said he thinks a deeper examination of the institution's history could make it

stronger. He worries about the repercussions of avoiding a sensitive topic, he said.

"When you're not forthcoming, it really hurts the university," Mr. Mendel said. "It says there are certain things that shouldn't be talked about, that aren't important, that shouldn't be examined. And that doesn't have a place in higher education."

Mr. Fine, whose endowed professorship is one of several named for Evans at the university, likens the situation to Brown University's [recent investigation into its history with the slave trade](#). "People at Brown—the students, faculty, administrators—came to recognize, with the leadership of President Ruth Simmons, that they needed to confront their past," he said.

Brown's Steering Committee for Slavery and Justice, which [released a report](#) in 2007, made meaningful discoveries and recommendations for reparations, said Mr. Fine, calling the process "a successful model." (In response to the report, Brown committed, among other things, to strengthen and expand its department of Africana studies and partnership with Tougaloo College, establish a Fund for the Education of the Children of Providence, and provide free tuition to up to 10 graduate students a year who agreed to serve in local schools.)

Along with a request for formal recognition of Evans's role in the Sand Creek Massacre, Naisa's petition asks Northwestern to establish a commission to "examine the role of the university and Evans in Sand Creek and the erasure of its history." The document, which Mr. Mendel estimated had more than 200 signatures, also calls for establishing a Native American-studies program; building a memorial to honor those killed at Sand Creek; and creating a scholarship fund for Cheyenne and Arapaho students, in conjunction with more active recruitment of American Indian students.

Mr. Mendel said the students were hopeful about their requests. "I have faith in the university," he said. "If Northwestern wants to, Northwestern can do this."

Students in Naisa have met with Patricia Telles-Irvin, vice president for student affairs, to discuss their ideas, Mr. Cubbage said. They are examining ways to "continue the conversation," he said.

For now, the Founders' Feast scheduled for Monday has been rechristened a Birthday Bash. But Naisa plans to press on, Mr. Mendel said. "I understand how long it takes things to actually get to the president's office," he said. "Hopefully it'll come soon. We'll wait."


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wclibrary 1 month ago

"Le secret des grandes fortunes sans cause apparente est un crime oublié, parce qu' il a été proprement fait."The same for the founding of a lot of colleges and universities, and for all of the big college and university endowments.

2 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)


gvenerable 1 month ago in reply to wclibrary

Why do you say "done properly"? Explain (in English, French is rusty).
G

[Like](#) [Reply](#)


wclibrary 1 month ago in reply to gvenerable

No me: Balzac.
Usually loosely translated as behind every great fortune is a great crime.
The trick for B. is to have hidden the crime ("proprement fait"); apropos, no?

[Like](#) [Reply](#)


Antsy Kuhnwisse 1 month ago in reply to wclibrary

A *forgotten* crime, less loosely. But not everyone forgets.

Like Reply



11134078 1 month ago in reply to Antsy Kuhnwise

No. I think "forgotten" doesn't do it. The idea is the perpetrator has worked so well that the crime has remained hidden.

Like Reply



12029355 1 month ago in reply to wclibrary

Enlighten me about the crimes behind the great fortunes of, say, Bill Gates, George Soros or Michael Bloomberg.

Like Reply



Antsy Kuhnwise 1 month ago in reply to 12029355

How could you have forgotten Warren Buffet (since you're apparently only interested in the answer for those rich people who are American citizens and have some political leanings in common)?

3 people liked this. Like Reply



12029355 1 month ago in reply to Antsy Kuhnwise

No, I'd happily throw Buffet into the mix as well. ...And Steven Spielberg and Oprah Winfrey and Tiger Woods. My comment wasn't about their political leanings, but about the wealth they have legally amassed purportedly through some criminal action.

1 person liked this. Like Reply



Antsy Kuhnwise 1 month ago in reply to 12029355

Your comment may not have been about *their* political leanings, but it spoke volumes about yours.

2 people liked this. Like Reply



bnmoore 1 month ago

Sigh. And what would all this do to the 21st Century challenges of keeping a lid on an ever-expanding cauldron of about half the world wanting what the other half has? History very important, yes, but unless it has a direct impact upon actions being taken today...outside of interesting, what purpose does this sort of confrontation do in dredging up stuff from generations and generations ago? Really. I recently saw another of these historical "studies" intended to "set things right" regarding the active role native black African tribes took in supporting

the European initiated, and North, Central and South American slave trade for about four hundred years. OK. That took place. It was terrible part of history, but this is now and that was then. What did it prove and what is it seeking to do? Hmm.... And the Muslim slave trade that's still going on today in much of the Islamic world, what's the history to this?

(Edited by author 1 month ago)

7 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



11134078 1 month ago in reply to bnmoore

The point is that past injustices can usually not be undone, nor do "reparations" to the descendants of those to whom injustice was done change this unhappy fact. What one tries for is a greater degree of justice in the present and in the future. Yes, of course; lotsa luck with that, but still one must try.

4 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



13_echo_40 1 month ago

While they're investigating maybe they can also identify and name all the professors who were previously associated with the weather underground, the black panthers, or other terrorist organizations.

8 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



22293837 1 month ago

Sand Creek hardly represents "erasure of history". It is well-documented and was widely condemned when it happened. Naisa and Fine are engaging in symbolic politics in its least productive form. Following the protesters' logic to its conclusion, there should be a special scholarship fund for white students to memorialize the innocent settlers massacred by the Cheyenne and Arapaho at Fort Caspar.

7 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



jffoster 1 month ago

While the Sand Creek Massacre is well known to historians and anthropologists who have studied Western and Plains North America, Northwestern University's connexion to or association with it is so tenuous and tangential as to be all but nonexistent. This is a blatant attempt at a shakedown of what the downshakers perceive as another institution run by and for liberals whose guilty conscience typically exceeds their good sense. I hope they are wrong in this appraisal of their targeted pigeon in this case and that NU will have the good sense and guts to tell the Campus Alliance to shove it.

5 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



bnmoore 1 month ago in reply to jffoster

I am one-half Irish and the other half Scottish. Can trace my roots with full certifications back to the 13th century in Scotland and the 11th century in Ireland. What the English did for hundreds of years, especially in Ireland, was a terrible blight upon the history of England. A terrible blight. But really, what good would it be to talk about it past historical? Or, if I can name names of English families whose ancestors participated in the pillaging, raping, burning, looting and outright murder of hundreds of thousands of Irish and Scottish homes and

families over the centuries--hey, maybe I can put some money in my pocket too. Yes, yes. Make the English today eat some dirt because of past injustices. Sic.

3 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



abichel 1 month ago

Really?

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



wclibrary 1 month ago

Ask Paul Allen about Bill Gates.

Ask any educator--especially a New York educator-- who doesn't teach at Hopkins about Bloomberg.

Ask the little people hurt by currency manipulations about Soros

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

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