

# **OPINION on Dartmouth Indians Logo: “New rule about not being offensive suffocates freedom of speech”**

“Is “Defend Dartmouth” Offensive?”

Someone found the slogan “Defend Dartmouth” quite offensive: “This is not a war, what are you defending for?” True, but “defend” does not have to be a war – that is why a student does not defend his thesis with a sword.

Since when did we get this new golden rule – “you shall not express anything that may be offensive to someone”? Like “Merry Christmas”, like the Dartmouth Indian Logo. The old golden rule encourages us to treat others as we would like to be treated, which is not hard to follow because we know exactly how we would like to be treated. But to find out what may be offensive to others is such a challenging task these days.

First, the “offensive” criteria is constantly evolving. Something that has not been offensive for years now suddenly becomes offensive. People need to be “educated” to keep up with these newly discovered “offensive” expressions. Second, the victim being offended is usually an abstract group concept rather than a real individual in front of you. The Dartmouth Indian Logo is considered as offensive to the Indigenous People group despite of the fact that the real local indigenous persons from Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head standing right in front of us, enthusiastically support this logo. As a piece of artwork, shall its author Mr. Clyde Andrews, have the best interpretation rather than some remote researchers to read their interpretation into this logo?

Want to play the game “find racism anywhere”? Consider this entry-level one:

“White-dominated town of Dartmouth decides to retire the Indian warrior high school logo designed by ingenuous alumnus even when the local tribe people strongly urge to keep it”

Furthermore, the “offensive” criteria is also quite subjective and dynamic. Something that is not offensive to you may be offensive to others. Something that was not offensive to the person yesterday may be offensive to the same person today. We must be considerate and not to offend anyone. Someone who used to live in Dartmouth and was proud of this logo now thinks that this logo should retire because it may be “offensive” to people outside of Dartmouth.

Not to offend anyone? Is it even possible? Almost anything could be offensive to someone somewhere given the ever-evolving, sophisticated, highly-subjective offensive criteria that we are struggling to keep up with. We live in constant fear and insecurity, just like High school student Natalie Murphy in the March 22nd public forum said to the school committee, “we have enough insecurity of what we wear and we might offend with our opinion and our identities so please help us teach us set some limits wear uniforms that don’t make us worry that we’ve offended our opponents”.

We all want to be nice people and not offend anyone. However, this new golden rule completely suffocates the freedom of speech – a right protected by our constitution. All speech and expressions (with a few exceptions, such as “defamation” and “incitement to riot”) are protected by the constitution including those offensive ones! Only so we could have the foundation of democracy that people may express their own ideas, listen to different opinions, communicate and debate about government policy and candidates to elect, speak out and criticize the government to prevent the abuse of power, protect human liberty and individual’s ability to think and

decide issues for themselves.

The stakes are extremely high-looking at all those countries where only approved voices are allowed. I grew up in such a country. Every day when I went to school, my parents always reminded me of something that literally translated to "Watch your mouth!" I always replied with "Yes, I know". Because my parents love me, their reminder actually meant "Have a good day", just as American parents say to their children. But in that country, we all have learned that you will have a good day only if you watch your mouth.

Because we have freedom of speech, we also have the freedom to be exposed to "offensive" ones. This is a price we must pay. Instead of "being offended", we may just communicate and reason with people who have different opinions rather than shutting them up with this "offensive" duct tape.

What is "Defend Dartmouth" defending? Not only the heritage and the unique culture of Dartmouth, but also the freedom of expression of Mr. Andrew, Dartmouth Wampanoags, all residents who were called racist by the school committee chair and everyone's right to be free from the fear of offending others.

Signed, a Dartmouth resident who does not intend to offend anyone." –Shelley Zhang.