

This was a letter-to-the-editor in the Everett (Wash.) Herald, submitted June 26, 1007. It was written by Kara Briggs, Yakama, Senior Fellow of the American Indian Policy and Media Initiative.



LETTER: QUOTING HATE GROUPS

By Kara Briggs

Dear Editor:

Increasingly daily newspapers are letting the language of anti-Indian hate groups slip into otherwise straightforward news articles. Such was the case in the Saturday, June 23 Everett Herald article by Krista J. Kapralos and Jim Haley, which quoted a leader of the Citizens for Equal Rights Alliance from a city 180 miles away.

The alliance has been identified as a hate group by the National Congress of the American Indian, the United South and Eastern Tribes, the Montana Human Rights Network and the Yakama Nation, where Elaine Willman, a director of the alliance, lives.

This is the equivalent of the Everett Herald calling a white separatist group for a comment on a story about the black community, or do your reporters call the Neo-Nazis to comment on Jewish community stories?

As a long time journalist for the Oregonian and the Spokesman-Review, I find it puzzling that reporters would seek out a known hate-group leader to quote alongside local elected officials and university research directors. Editors need to set the bar high for the quoting of hate-group leaders in news stories, and they need to question reporters who seek out such sources.

At the same time it is the responsibility of reporters to do research to learn the background of a potential source such as the Citizens for Equal Rights Alliance. Even a cursory read of the Citizens for Equal Rights Alliance website would show its connection with a variety of other national anti-Indian groups.

Anti-Indian hate groups distinguish themselves from better known hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan by focusing on legislative or governmental agendas concerning federal Indian law, according to the Montana Human Rights Network. But beneath the talk is a focus on eroding the rights of Native peoples and their nations, despite the treaties and other legal agreements

entered into by the United States with these nations.

These groups use professional public relations methods to hide their racism, saying we have Indian friends, and some of their websites coach them on how to get their messages into the news media.

The Everett Herald article reminded me of a chapter that I am editing for the forthcoming book "Shoot the Indian: Media, Misperception and Native Truth," a publication of the American Indian Policy and Media Initiative. New York journalist Tom Wanamaker criticizes coverage by the Observer-Dispatch in Utica, N.Y., and specifically cites an article that Kapralos wrote when she was a reporter there in 2005. That article, which is a follow up to a court case, twice quotes a leader in the Upstate Citizens for Equality, another organization identified as a hate group by the National Congress of the American Indian.

In that case your reporter described Upstate Citizens for Equality in her text as merely a landowners' advocacy group, an assertion that is not supported by other mainstream journalists and journalism professors in New York State. For that article she put the words, hate group, in quotation marks.

In bringing up these articles I am describing an alarming pattern of reporting that seeks to stir up racial trouble in a community that is working hard to build bridges across old divides. This attitude doesn't belong in our community. Yet I am left to think that the desire of a reporter to be provocative in print has again outweighed the journalistic ethic of choosing credible sources.

Sincerely,

Kara Briggs
Associate Director

The AMERICAN INDIAN POLICY AND MEDIA INITIATIVE is a grant-funded academic and professional project of the Communication Department at Buffalo State College. The Initiative's focus lies at the intersection of media, public policy and Native interests. The Initiative prepares and publishes commentaries, news, research and academic reports that offer original and authentic voices of and about Native America. Available online at AmericanIndianInitiative.buffalostate.edu