

Letters from Here and There

Writer: Witchcraft Ridiculous

May 26, 1971
Bethel, Alaska 99559

Sirs:

Reference: "Eskimo Dance: Witchcraft."

Having just read May 19's Tundra Times with the very interesting big black headlines, "Eskimo Dance: Witchcraft!" Personally, the whole affair is extremely ridiculous. I can only laugh at the parties who branded Eskimo dancing, witchcraft, and even to go so far as to threaten a trial on top of that!

Eskimos have been there in Kotzebue hundreds of years in a land so desolate where recreation was impossible out-of-doors, so this being the case they met indoors and danced to do away with some of the monotony in that way of life. Now, the part about the Shaman or witchdoctors being present was true. So what? Where else was there to go? The dances probably took place in the Kashim where the men lived.

In an age such as this we so-called adults know that shamanism and witchcraft has been brought under considerable control. No wonder the younger generation is blamed for a generation gap between age groups. Can anyone see that this generation gap is really the grownups' stupidity? Shaman and witchcraft! Really!

Just because Shaman in the days of old used to be at those dances does not mean that now the dances are cursed by them. And those dances tell stories. They do not make magic! They do not denounce God! What's happening of us adults!

I understand the \$80,000 from the federal funding is for an Eskimo cultural program.

Studying the Eskimo culture out of books and other writings can become pretty boring. But to perform some of the cultural aspects of a people like Eskimo dancing, learning by memory their legends and stories would greatly add to an individual's character just by knowing how to do these things. I've yet to see someone from the Lower 48 who claims to have lived among Indians but had nothing to show for it except material things.

I don't understand why the clergy and some townspeople there in Kotzebue proclaimed that outrageous reason why they were against Eskimo dancing. Instead they should be proud that the young do not want to forget their forefathers and for the outsiders who want to learn something about the people.

About the teachers, they must be a special type of people to take an interest in the young. I'm glad there are people like them still around where generation gap means nothing to them, including the singers and dancers! Thank you.

About that petition which was signed by a few natives in the community. They, the natives, probably did not care one way or the other!

I protest the petition and the discrimination induced on the native children of Kotzebue and those non-natives who are not too proud to learn the ways of the Eskimo!

Surely, there are far greater problems in Kotzebue that need attending to than this problem, such pollution and what have you. Bring it to trial, and this will be another monkey trial with all due respect to the accusation.

Too many times in different areas of the world people have been pushed into extinction not physically, but mentally, and morally. The accusation in Kotzebue against teaching Eskimo dances is a beginning of a

different form of extinction. Surely if God has permitted Eskimo dancing all this time who are we as mere men to stop it?

I'm an Eskimo. I like white men's ways of thinking, their ideas, their goals. I enjoy what white people do, but sometimes I don't really like some of the things they bring with them. Don't get me wrong. I like their idea of religion, but I haven't branded it untrusion—just yet! I don't aim to. But when outsiders, regardless of the fact how long they've been here, will tell me how to live on my rightful land, then you have something else coming and that idea is a good argument on any subject that you outsiders can think of.

I of course would argue in the Eskimo language! By the way, "Eskimo Dance: Witchcraft!" came from the white mens' mouth, not the Eskimos'!

John Active

Plenty Room for Other Practices

Washington, D. C.
June 2, 1971

To the Editor
Tundra Times:

Reference the "witchcraft" dispute in Kotzebue: Though far removed from that town in distance and other ways, I'd like to suggest that there's plenty of room for accommodation between strictly Christian practices and those of other—older—cultures. If this were not true, we so-called Christians would not be reading the Old Testament, and would celebrate such events as Christmas and Easter in far different ways than we do now.

Having danced with the Eskimos at Kotzebue, I say: If this be witchcraft, make the most of it!

Sincerely,
Tom Myer