

# PORTSMOUTH / SEACOAST

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## Fighting racism, poverty

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DURHAM — Imagine thousands of stadium fans wearing white hoods and cheering the Atlanta Klansmen to a World Series victory. Too impossible to imagine?

Not for 2 million Native Americans who watched last month as Braves fans with war-painted faces and chicken feathers in their hair, chanted and chopped with excitement.

Clyde Bellecourt, co-founder and national director of the American Indian Movement, spoke at the University of New Hampshire last night in the first lecture of a series honoring the American Indian Movement. The lectures are part of the Sidore Lecture Series put on annually at the university.

Funded by a grant from the Sidore Foundation, the lectures

bring subjects to the community that raise critical and sometimes controversial issues. Bellecourt talked about racism and how it affects Native Americans.

"The drum beating, cheap Hollywood chants, chicken feathers and war paint, and tomahawk chops insult our true culture. Little Black Sambo is gone, and John Wayne is dead. It's time to let go of America," Bellecourt said.

Ernie Proper, coordinator of the American Indian Movement Series, was hired by the university to organize a series of lectures that would offer insight to the American Indian Movement and its objectives.

"When I speak, I speak on behalf of all Indian people. Some might not like what I say or how I say it,

but I speak the truth," Bellecourt said. And he spoke very openly about the problems facing Native Americans. "People talk and complain about a recession taking place in American economics, we (Indians) have been in a recession for over 200 years."

The American Indian Movement was founded in 1968 when 90 percent of American Indian housing was considered substandard, the suicide rate among Native Americans was seven times the national average, the average American Indian lived to be just 45 years old, and in some parts of the country the American Indian unemployment rate was as high as 90 percent.

"The pride of our young people was very low; there was no self-

esteem and we were dealing with problems such as alcoholism and drug abuse," Bellecourt said.

Bitter and frustrated by the plight of his people, story after story was told of wrongdoings against Native Americans.

"We're the biggest welfare program this world has ever seen, everything America has we gave to them," Bellecourt said.

When Bellecourt walked into his appointed elementary school more than 50 years ago, he said the first thing he saw was an American flag. The second was a guy nailed to a cross that he didn't know much about, and the third was a guy wearing tights and buckles on his shoes that had supposedly been the discoverer of America.

"In regards to the destruction of the American Indian, we look toward education, organized religion and the federal government as our three worst enemies," he said.



Staff photo

Clyde Bellecourt speaks to a crowd at the University of New Hampshire's Murkland Hall, last night. Bellecourt is with the American Indian Movement.