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THE UTES NICKNAME: MASCOTS, SYMBOLS, AND NICKNAMES

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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The University of Utah maintains a unique relationship with the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation in northeast Utah. The University has permission from the Ute Indian Tribe to use the “Utes” nickname for athletic purposes. Yet, existing outside of the nickname’s sphere, and without explicit permission from the tribe, the University also uses a circle and feather logo, as well as a red-tailed hawk mascot named Swoop. The interaction between all three of these elements—the nickname, the mascot, and the logo—creates a unique depiction of the “Ute” identity as pertains to those on campus and at the university, and reflects back on its namesake, the Ute Indian Tribe. While there is a wealth of literature regarding the negative impact of Native American mascots on Native Americans’ psychological health and position within American society, there is comparably little about how Native American nicknames, logos, and non-human animal mascots affect Native American identity. Thus, in my Honors Thesis, I fill a large gap in the literature by analyzing the intersection of these three disparate elements of the University’s athletic “Utes” identity. In order to fill the gap, I use critical discourse analysis (CDA) to evaluate University Athletics media guides from 1990-2016 from men’s and women’s basketball, football, and gymnastics for instances of rhetorical colonialism and/or rhetorical sovereignty. This analysis works to reveal what audience the University of Utah Athletics Department constructs the “Ute” identity for through its use of the “Utes” nickname, Swoop mascot, and circle and feather logo.