



# Debate: Should Utah Ditch The “Ute” Nickname?

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Time To Lose Culturally Insensitive “Ute” Name

Connor Richards

Swoop was not the U’s first mascot. Before Swoop was adopted, it was Hoyo, a caricatured Native American child who wasn’t free of any ethnic stereotype. After Hoyo was retired, the Crimson Warrior took life: a student — white, always male — dressed in Indian garb who danced at halftime shows and got crowds hyped at sporting events. As the decades passed and social consciousness increased, the Crimson Warrior was phased out and Swoop, a less controversial and stereotypical symbol, was adopted in 1996.



While the student body and athletic teams are no longer officially represented by racist drawings or outrageously costumed halftime performers, we still refer to ourselves as the Utes. As we celebrate Swoop’s birthday and reflect on previous mascots and representations of our school, it might be time to finally reconsider the nickname.

Although it is likely that the use of the phrase is not usually ill-intentioned, it is not without its consequences. By calling ourselves the Utes, we are adopting a new identity and giving the name a new meaning. No longer does the name solely refer to an indigenous people who have their own rich personal history. By simply attending the U, I’m a Ute, she’s a Ute and you’re a Ute. Anyone able to get into the U automatically becomes one, as well as any and all faculty and alumni. In short, by taking a tribal identity and using it as an official name for a student body, we are appropriating the term and using it to describe something it is not.

Worse than applying the term to a student body is using it for athletic teams, which is exactly what the U does. Using the name of an oppressed group of people (historically and contemporarily) to represent something as irreverent as a basketball or football team would seem inflammatory in any other context. Here’s a thought experiment: if a corporation or college decided to come to Utah to unveil the Salt Lake ‘Mormons’ or the ‘St. George Latter-day Saints’, do you know of any friends, relatives or neighbors who would be upset? I do, and I couldn’t really blame them. There is something undeniably wrong with commodifying a people’s identity and attaching it to a sports team or franchise.

It's been argued that this conversation need not be had since the 'Ute' name is used with the approval of the Northern Ute Tribe. If they are okay with it, what controversy could there be? Although tribe leadership may sanction usage of the term, there are still many who are seriously opposed. In 2013, Indigenous Students and Allies for Change filed a petition to get the U to "end the misappropriation of Native American traditions" through retiring the nickname and drum and feather logo. "By allowing University of Utah students and fans to wear Native American headdresses, paint their faces red and 'play Indian' throughout campus, at tailgating events and in the football stadium," the petition states, "the University of Utah is unilaterally allowing the denigration and mockery of Native American traditions, customs and religious symbols."

We may no longer have the Crimson Warrior as a mascot. However, we still have students who find it appropriate to craft mock headdresses and wear them to sporting events and costume parties. The Warrior is still with us; he's just part of the crowd now. The reason some students don't find this behavior to be culturally insensitive is that even after several major mascot revisions, we remain the Utes. As long as we are comfortable calling ourselves this, we should expect this kind of culturally insensitive behavior.

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Ute Name Should Remain

Emma Tanner

Over the years, people seem to have gotten more sensitive to and serious about specific team mascots and nicknames. Whether they represent educational institutions, sports teams or both, people are standing up more than ever against political incorrectness and potentially offensive representations. They may just be symbols, but that doesn't mean they should be used in degrading or humorous ways. Now, let's bring this home. Are we as Utes acting insensitively by showing off our "Ute pride" and forgoing a name change despite requests that we do so? I don't think so.

I'll be the first to say that there are team names out there so blatantly offensive it hurts. The Washington Redskins comes to mind immediately, as many Native Americans view the term "Redskin" as equivalent to other racial slurs. Now consider, would you proudly support a professional sports team called the "N—"? Neither would I. The Freeburg Midgets and the Frisco Coons (now "Raccoons") and, dare I say it, the Nads from the Rhode Island School of Design (yes, their mascot is literally a person dressed as a penis). I understand and accept that these mascot representations are completely out of line and should be changed, but as "Utes," we don't fall into the same offensive category.

The fact of the matter is that representations of educational institutions differ from mascots of professional sports teams. While the two may go hand in hand sometimes, there's more respect and seriousness in representing a school or university than there is in representing a professional team where men collide like animals for a living while middle aged men with painted faces chant and curse in the stands. The Ute tribe is partially represented by a respectable and well-regarded university where students from all over the world have come together as one body to learn, support each other, promote lifelong wellness and work hard for futures that will better society as a whole.

I'm not saying we don't have our share of classless fans, but the U has made an effort to distinguish symbolic representations of athletics from a commitment to serious education by swapping out our once physically-representative Native American mascot with the beloved Swoop, a red-tailed hawk. The sports-related behavior that goes on at our athletic events is no longer perpetuated by a cartoonish Native American running around trying to hype up what is probably already an overly aggressive band of sports fans and college students. I'll be the first to admit the previous mascots were offensive.

The people I know who attend the U and who are fans of the university and its sports teams take pride in being affiliated with the Ute tribe. There's nothing laughable or offensive about our school's symbolic representation, or how we, as a community, associate with it. The tribe is something unique to Utah and we value that aspect of our state's history. We treat our drum and feather with a great deal of respect because, not only is it the right thing to

do with regard to recognizing our state's Native Americans, but the U has earned that respect through years of upright tradition and achievement. We've acknowledged others' concerns and been sensitive to issues regarding athletic mascots by adopting Swoop to lead our sports teams and their fans. I don't know about you, but I'm proud to be a Ute.

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