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On behalf of San Diego State University, we find the inclusion of the Aztecs as a reference to the use of Native American identities in sports problematic for a number of reasons, which are outlined below.

The significance of an ethnic studies program at the high school level, as we understand it, is to assure that our youth learn a fuller, richer and inclusive history of their country and how citizenship can be contingent on these identities. The classification of ethnic identities into pan-identities is a grave disservice to the overall intention of teaching and learning about how we live and honor heritages. We see this as the issue in this module. While there is no denying that within a global framework, indigenous and native peoples have experienced great harm at the hands of others, there is a profound difference in how we teach about indigeneity on a global scale, compared with how we teach about the lived experiences of ethnic identity in the United States.

As research clearly indicates, the Aztecs are not part of Native American/American Indian history in California, nor the United States. Their histories, political and economic structures and cultures were, and are, not the same. The inclusion of the Aztecs in the chapter on native peoples of California and the United States does not give justice to their inherently unique identities and histories as Nahuatl speaking people of Mesoamerica nor to diverse Nahua communities' engagement on the issue of representation. Of equal importance is the diminishment of the focus on Native Americans as peoples with a distinct history relative to California and the United States.

Our concerns lie in the sports reference on page 226, line 4807, that places the SDSU Aztec within the same frame as Native American representations. San Diego State University underwent a significant reflection on the use of the Aztec as its Spirit Leader. During the last two years, we as a university sought to determine the impact of the name and depictions of the Aztecs on descendants of the Aztecs who are contemporary Nahua peoples of Mexico and El Salvador, its relationship to our diverse campus and local communities, and our relationship to native and indigenous peoples in our region and those affiliated with the Aztec Empire. It was through a thoughtful and deliberative process, which included surveying of campus and general community members, that the university opted to make significant changes in six key areas: improved education; creation of a governing body to ensure ethical, moral and fiduciary responsibility of carrying the Aztec name; growth in meaningful engagement with Native American and indigenous communities of the U.S. and Mexico; adaptations to ensure appropriate signage and symbolic representation across the campus of the Aztec Empire and contemporary Nahua people; efforts to ensure the respectful and correct use of the Nahuatl language, especially in the invocation of such in awards and other forms of recognition; and stricter guidelines for the Aztec as a Spirit Leader.

We recognize the sentiments held by some native peoples of California and the larger United States – as well as other groups -- in relation to cultural appropriation and racist rhetoric that



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manifests through negative and disrespectful use of their names, symbols, and cultural practices. To that end, SDSU has not invoked a mascot for several years and does not currently have a mascot. There are no official human or characterizations of humans used in any of our references, logos, or other material depictions of our Aztec moniker. We take seriously the invocation of the Aztecs and do so with honor, respect, and validated and appropriate representations in all that we do. We have committed to the integration of an Aztec identity that derives from the culture, practices, philosophies, and language of the Aztec Empire and to their contemporary descendants. We recognize that their empire incorporated the languages, cultures, and practices of the many indigenous peoples of an extended region that encompassed their political and economic engagements. We also fully commit to both improving and expanding awareness and understanding of the Aztec Empire through teaching and programming. In addition, the university formally institutionalized the Aztec Culture Education Committee, responsible for articulating and recommending ways to meaningfully include local Native American tribes in our significant functions and annual ceremonial events, such as our All-University Convocation and Commencement.

As such, our own engagement with native and indigenous peoples that are part of our community are included in our university identity, culture, practices, teaching, and commitment to the future. SDSU currently offers language instruction in three indigenous languages – Nahuatl, Mixteco, and Zapoteco – and we are working with local Kumeyaay and Kumiai speakers to develop a full language curriculum in Kumeyaay.

In recognition of our location on the lands that carry the footsteps of millennia of Kumeyaay people, we will not only have a land acknowledgement at all major events, but also further integrate knowledge of the Kumeyaay in our university culture and teaching. We are very careful and intentional in educating our faculty, staff, students, and larger community about the differences between the Kumeyaay and the Aztecs.

In summary, we believe that the inclusion of the Aztec without appropriately differentiating and distinguishing the different histories and modern context between and within Native Americans and the indigenous peoples of Latin America creates confusion and conflates the very real differences between them. Such a conflation results in an inaccurate representation and defeats the intention of an ethnic studies program that is focused on the US. Second, to ignore the enormous steps taken by SDSU in the last 18 months that would provide teachers, students, and others an opportunity to effectively weigh the very different issues surrounding the Aztec debate that is outlined in this activity challenges non-US indigenous autonomy and results in bias and misrepresentation.

We are highly encouraged by the diversity of opinion on Native American representations that is represented in this section. We do not deny nor negate the conversations that have occurred on our campus relative to our Aztec identity or the Spirit Leader. We use the many perspectives that are shared with us to advance a positive, respectful and inclusive engagement with our



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invocation of the Aztecs, their contemporary Nahua descendants, and of our Native American communities as we honor our location on the lands of the Kumeyaay.

References

<https://president.sdsu.edu/moving-forward/aztec-identity/overview>

<https://president.sdsu.edu/moving-forward/aztec-identity>

<https://president.sdsu.edu/moving-forward/aztec-identity/decisions-and-next-steps>

<https://president.sdsu.edu/pdfs/Aztec-Identity-Task-Force-Report-2018.pdf>