

# A Critical Rhetorical History of the Utes Nickname

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American Indian mascots, nicknames, logos and other symbols used by universities and professional sports organizations have been the subject of intense controversy for decades. The use of American Indian mascots and other symbols by universities and sports franchises intersects with a broader cultural appropriation practice of “playing Indian,” which historian Philip J. Deloria notes is “a persistent tradition in American culture, stretching from the very instant of the national big bang into an ever-expanding present and future.”<sup>1</sup> Research on American Indian symbols associated with universities and sports teams reveals not only that these symbols can reify structures and practices of colonialism and racism, but also that these symbols and the aggressions that accompany them can have negative impacts on the wellbeing of American Indian peoples’ self-esteem and self-image.<sup>2</sup> Yet, there are proponents of American Indian mascots and other symbols who contend that these symbols—or at least certain types of American Indian symbols—are honorific, respectful, and serve as a reminder that American Indians continue to have a valuable presence on this continent.<sup>3</sup> Within these debates, I am particularly interested in the diversity of American Indian peoples’ responses to the use of American Indian mascots and symbols. Across the over 500 federally recognized American Indian nations in the United States and within a particular American Indian nation (such as the Utes), there are a range of perspectives on American

Indian mascots and symbols. These differing perspectives can sometimes clash in the context of a particular American Indian sports symbol controversy—such as the widely publicized dispute over the Washington R—skins nickname or the less widely publicized controversy over the use of the Utes nickname at the University of Utah—leading to American Indian people speaking out both in favor of and in opposition to American Indian mascots, nicknames, and other symbols.

Arguments about these forms of American Indian symbolism take on an additional level of complexity in cases where an American Indian nation gives permission for their name and associated symbolism to be used by a university, such as the University of Utah Utes (others include the Catawba College Indians, Central Michigan University Chippewas, Florida State University Seminoles, and Mississippi College Choctaws). While some argue that an American Indian nation's choice to lend their name and imagery to a university or sports team is an act of self-determination and resistance, others argue that is a form of complicity via self-colonization.<sup>4</sup> As a critic, it is not my job to adjudicate whether a permitted American Indian mascot, nickname, or symbol is an act of colonialism or not. Of course, there is no easy answer, particularly when contending with the complexities of resistance to contemporary colonialism. Both arguments for the right to self-determination of an eponymous American Indian nation that gives permission to use its name and arguments that permission is complicit with racism and colonialism can be conceptualized as efforts to resist, to survive, and to promote justice for American Indians. As Jason Edward Black (2015) argues, “Native groups ‘talked back,’ which helped them reconstitute their own identities, rebuke governmental policies, and reconfigure US identities in the rhetorical process.”<sup>5</sup> There is not one form or method of talking back, and an analysis of the controversy over permitted American Indian nicknames offers an opportunity to demonstrate the tensions that arise in the discourse about these unique cases.

The Utes nickname, the use of caricatured imagery of American Indian warriors, fans dressing up in feather headdresses and performing the U chop, campus streets named after famous Ute leaders, the drum and feather logo, and statues of brave Utes on campus are rhetorical artifacts that provide a window not only into how members of the university community used these symbols to communicate something about its identity, but also into how members of the Ute nation conceive these symbols in relation to self-determination and cultural preservation. This chapter is an outgrowth of the Utes Nickname Project,<sup>6</sup> an ongoing endeavor to create a digital archive that documents the use of the Utes nickname and other American Indian symbols at the University of Utah.<sup>7</sup> Through analysis of the materials in this archive, I offer a critical rhetorical history that exposes the tensions in American Indian peoples' rhetoric about the Utes nickname and

other symbols. My previous research identified a rhetorical double-bind faced by American Indian opponents of a permitted mascot or nickname, wherein resistance to the permitted nickname also entails contesting an American Indian nation's sovereign decision.<sup>8</sup> The double-bind forces a simplistic choice between either supporting sovereignty or working to eliminate the harms associated with American Indian nicknames and mascots. Both of these choices are attempts to resist practices of colonialism and racism that are a reality for American Indians, and, therefore, both can be regarded as part of struggles for American Indian social justice. In this chapter, I expand on the double-bind argument by honing-in on the tensions inherent in the relationship of power between the University of Utah and American Indian symbols. A focus on tensions allows for an understanding of the complexities of contemporary colonization without falling into the trap of either/or thinking. As such, this history represents a heteroglossia of the University of Utah, the Ute Nation, and other non-Ute American Indians that illuminates the consequences of the permission argument for American Indian voice within a context of ongoing colonialism. Moreover, this story of changing rhetorical symbols reflects, responds to, and shapes larger contexts and attitudes about the role of American indigenous people in American society.

The chapter begins with a primer on the relationship between American indigenous people, colonization, and decolonization. Next, I argue that critical rhetorical history, and more specifically the invention of new archival collections, can act as an intervention into colonialism by highlighting the myriad voices at play in historical and contemporary controversies. Then, I sketch the history of the relationship between University of Utah and the American Indian symbols as a way to demonstrate tensions between colonization and decolonization. My analysis of American Indian rhetoric about the Utes nickname and other symbols reveals that the Utes nickname cannot be easily categorized as either complicit with colonization or a form of decolonization. Instead, the analysis highlights complex rhetorical tensions between cultural appropriation and self-determination, honor and harm, sanctioned and unsanctioned uses, and Ute experience and American Indian experience. The chapter concludes by highlighting the implications of this study for larger questions about decolonization, American Indian rhetoric, and rhetorical history.

## Colonialism

Colonialism, in the broadest sense, is a relation of power comprised of a multi-faceted set of material-rhetorical practices of subjugation, in which the colonizers

extract resources from a group of people and their land to their benefit. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang note that although colonialism is often divided into external and internal forms, neither entirely describes the relationship between indigenous people and the nation-states of North America.<sup>9</sup> They, like many others in Native American and indigenous studies, have adopted the term settler colonialism to explain the situation in the United States, “in which the colonizer comes to stay . . . with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in the new domain.”<sup>10</sup> Patrick Wolfe argues that settler colonialism is a structure and not an event, in an effort to move beyond historical characterizations to recognize the ongoing practices and consequences of the colonial relationship between settlers and those indigenous to the land.<sup>11</sup> Settler colonialism rejects the “post” in postcolonial theory, insisting that colonialism is ongoing for indigenous people. The use of settler colonialism in Native American studies recognizes that there is not one universal experience of coloniality that spans all situations, but it also seeks to focus on the similarity of practices of colonization and decolonization for indigenous people, particularly those in North America, whose homelands have been settled by non-indigenous people. Settler colonialism in the United States is characterized in the domestic-dependent relationship between the U.S. federal government and its “wards,” the over 500 American Indian nations within the nation.<sup>12</sup> Decolonization, variously defined across scholarly literature, describes theoretical, practical, processual, or activist means of resisting colonialism.<sup>13</sup> As noted above, Jason Edward Black conceptualizes decolonization as the ways in which indigenous people “talk back” to colonization,<sup>14</sup> working both with and without the “master’s tools.”<sup>15</sup> Viewing the relationship between the University of Utah and American Indian (including Ute) symbols within a lens of colonialism, my analysis will showcase the diverse modes of engagement with colonialism in Ute and other American Indian reactions to the Utes nickname and other symbols used at the University of Utah.

Colonialism is a material-rhetorical phenomenon, in which material realities are co-constituted with rhetorical practices. Caskey Russell notes that colonization entails “vast justification systems” that I argue are mainly accomplished through an interplay between rhetoric and material consequences.<sup>16</sup> Several generations of rhetorical scholars have studied the rhetorical dynamics of colonization and decolonization, ultimately advancing our understanding of rhetorical colonialism, decolonization, and (de)coloniality across a variety of indigenous, Latinx, African, Indian situations.<sup>17</sup> This book chapter focuses on the interplay between colonization and decolonization as practices enacted, in part, through rhetoric, in this case the rhetoric of American Indians about the Utes Nickname and other American Indian symbols used by the University of Utah. Three tensions in American Indian

rhetoric emerged from my analysis: (1) colonization and decolonization; (2) cultural appropriation and self-determination; and (3) complicity and resistance. These are not either/or questions, but rather they allow for examinations of how these tensions emerge and ultimately remain unresolved in American Indian discourse about the Utes nickname. These tensions allow for a focus on what the editors of this volume call the “the complex rhetorical agency of American indigenous communities”<sup>18</sup> through the “heteroglossia of American Indian discourse”<sup>19</sup> about the Utes nickname.

## Rhetorical History as Critical Intervention

As a rhetorical history, this project is an “historical study of rhetorical events” surrounding the University of Utah’s relationship with the Utes and its use of American Indian symbols, such as mascots, nicknames, and logos.<sup>20</sup> As a critical rhetorical history, this essay seeks to explicitly examine the dynamic relations of power that circulate within the changing discourse about the Utes nickname. Critical rhetorical history can also act as an intervention into dominant logics by telling another side of a story, particularly via vernacular and previously undocumented voices. This story focuses our attention on historically underrepresented voices, and, in this case, documenting the complexity of voice within larger colonial structures. Vernacular voices should not be taken as automatically emancipatory because they come from an underrepresented positionality, suggesting that there is value in critical consideration of all discourse.

Following the point that critical rhetorical history performs an intervention by making available previously unheard voices, I argue that creating an archival collection can be a form of public scholarship that is poised to make an intervention into dominant logics. As many before me have argued, information is power. Yet, too often information is hidden or inaccessible in archival collections, as a result of archivist categorization choices, ideological viewpoints and prejudices, and efforts to protect positive memories.<sup>21</sup> Through the rhetorical invention of an archive, enacting different choices and ideological viewpoints, the critic can not only gather materials for a rhetorical analysis, but can also curate a new collection that collates information in one place and offers a resource for future scholars, teachers, students, and interested publics. In line with my previous recommendation that scholars use oral history interviewing over qualitative interviewing precisely because the material is then made public for future generations to use, I believe that creating new archives that do the work of curating a collection out of diverse sources that may be hidden by current classification schemes is valuable, not only for rhetorical criticism but also as an act of rhetorical invention. As Morris notes,

“the archive significantly influences what we are able to study, to say, and to teach about rhetorical history, and what we do, as rhetors, with its holdings in our scholarship, in our classrooms, and in the streets.”<sup>22</sup> Why wait for others to create the archive if the process of critical rhetorical history already puts us in the position to curate a new archive? The Utes Nickname Project attempts to create a centralized repository of previously dispersed information about the relationship between the University of Utah, the Ute Nation, and other American Indian symbols. As much as I seek to resist an extractive impulse in this archival project,<sup>23</sup> there is an inevitability that my own choices are imbedded with power. This archive is a “dynamic site of rhetorical power” that reflects my own ideological and critical choices in an effort to make visible and accessible the story of the relationship between the University of Utah, the Ute Nation, and American Indian symbols.<sup>24</sup>

## The Utes Nickname

Prior to European–American contact, Ute people (who call themselves Nucu) occupied portions of places that are now known as Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico.<sup>25</sup> There were twelve bands of Ute people who remained relatively free from colonial contact until Mormon settlement beginning in 1847.<sup>26</sup> In an era of contact with the U.S. federal government in the late 1800s, the Utes were relocated into three federally recognized Ute nations, each with reservation land: the Southern Ute Indian Tribe in Southwest Colorado, the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uinta-Ourey Reservation in Northeast Utah, and the Ute Mountain Tribe (including the White Mesa Ute Tribe) in the four corners region (specifically Utah, New Mexico and Colorado). The University of Utah has a relationship—including a memorandum of understanding that grants permission to the University to use the Utes nickname—with the Ute Indian Tribe, also known as the Northern Ute people.

The relationship between American Indian symbols and the University of Utah has changed over time, with both official and unofficial names, images, mascots, and symbols being used by members of the University community. I begin with the history of American Indian naming and symbol usage at the University of Utah. Although the Ute Indian Tribe’s official agreement with the University offering support for the Utes nickname purportedly began in 1972,<sup>27</sup> American Indian (not always Ute) symbols have been used by students, faculty, and staff at the University of Utah since as early as 1907 (see Figure 7.1). The official colors of the University of Utah, when it was established in 1892, were crimson and silver and the athletics teams at the University were originally called the Crimson.<sup>28</sup> Yet, in the first two decades of the 1900s, the *Utonian* (student yearbook) and



Figure 7.1: Caricature in the 1907 *Utonian*, p. 62.

*Daily Utah Chronicle* (student newspaper) begin to include references to the students and athletes as “R—skins,” “Indians,” and “Utes” and stereotypical American Indian imagery while references to the “Crimson” faded out. American Indian symbols at the University of Utah continued to proliferate through the 1930s and 1940s, including images of students dressing up in “Indian” garb and images of a caricatured American Indian child. In 1947, this “I’l Ute mascot” was officially named Ho-Yo, which a 1947 article from the *Daily Utah Chronicle* reports means “little hunter.”<sup>29</sup> Ho-Yo was not only a cartoon but also a live dancing mascot, reminiscent of the Boy Scouts of America Indian dancers that represent a trend in the history of American Indian university mascots (see Figure 7.2).<sup>30</sup> Amidst widespread American Indian symbolism at the University of Utah, the first eleven Ute students attended the university in 1951. According to an article in the *Daily Utah Chronicle*, “For the first time in the history of the university, full blooded Ute Indians will be a part of the student body” as a result of a program started by the Ute governing council. The article’s last sentence states: “The university cartoon mascot Yo-ho [sic] will at last have some country cousins to urge him on to greater activity.”<sup>31</sup> Ho-Yo remained through the 1960s and early 1970s, although



**CARL HENRY**  
A Spirited Mascot

## Transfer Student Plays Hoyo For U Ball Games

The Redskin football team has a new member! Hoyo, the mascot of Uteville, will be on hand Saturday night to cheer on the team and entertain with an Indian dance. Our little mascot goes by the name

of Carl Henry; he is a transfer student from Wisconsin University and is majoring in drama.

Hoyo is being sponsored by Alpha Phi Omega, a service fraternity. According to Jay N. Thorpe, president of Alpha Phi, their current project is the encouragement of school spirit at games and on the campus.

Hoyo has agreed to help them out and will be at every game this year. (The donation of an Indian blanket would be appreciated; if you have one available, contact the Graduate Manager's Office, 402 Union Building.)

Figure 7.2: "Hoyo" as a live mascot. "Transfer Student Plays Hoyo for U Ball Games," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, October 9, 1953.

the imagery changed over time. For instance, Figure 7.3 shows another version of the Ho-Yo mascot who appeared at sports games.

Beginning in the 1970s and the decades following it brought changes in American Indian symbolism at the University of Utah. Although the first Ute students began attending the University in the 1950s, during the 1970s, the University and the Ute nation began to formalize an agreement about the use of the Utes nickname and other symbols. While national Red Power activism was making headlines, University of Utah students, faculty, and alumni raised concerns about the stereotypical and harmful characteristics of racist nicknames and imagery, leading to creation of Indian Awareness Week, a Native American Affairs Advisor, and Intertribal Student Association (ITSA) and streets in the new University Research Park named after famous Ute leaders, such as Chief Wakara. In 1972, the University of Utah adopted the “Utes” nickname with permission from the Ute Indian Tribe and retired R—skins, Indians, and other terms.<sup>32</sup> In 1975, the university began using the drum and feather logo.<sup>33</sup> The University of Utah officially retired Ho-Yo a few years later in 1978. Many viewed these actions as a positive move toward more honorific portrayals of American Indians. Yet, several controversies erupted, indicating the Utes nickname and associated imagery remained controversial. For example, a debate emerged over whether the “Utahans” cheerleader costumes—said to have included fur and feathers—were honorific or stereotypical and harmful.<sup>34</sup> In 1985, with the permission of the Ute Tribal Business Committee (governing council), the university introduced the “Crimson Warrior,” to go along with the Utes nickname (see Figure 7.4). Ted Capener, the Vice-President for University Relations at the time, carefully labeled it “not as a mere mascot, but as a symbol” that would be used and performed in a “respectful and dignified way.”<sup>35</sup>

The Crimson Warrior lasted for fewer than ten years. In 1993, the University retired the live Ute mascot and began investigating new mascots and nicknames, because “there were members of the [tribal] council that indicated that for them and other students at the U it was offensive to the Native American people.”<sup>36</sup> The University decided to retain the Ute nickname, but to adopt a new mascot in 1996: Swoop—a Red Tailed Hawk. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s there has been episodic controversy over the Utes nickname. In 1996, the *Daily Utah Chronicle* reports that the Ute Tribe threatened legal action against the University of Utah and to discontinue the Utes nickname because of their belief that the university was not doing enough to support Ute students.<sup>37</sup> According to an article in the *Deseret News*:

The university did have a face-off with the tribe in 1996, when the tribe threatened to sue for “reparations” for using the Ute name. Then-U. President Arthur K. Smith responded that the school would not pay for use of the name but would drop the name if it offended tribal members. The dispute ended with Ute leaders saying “they



Figure 7.3: “Hoyo welcomed spectators at Ute football games,” *Utonian*, 1966, p. 405.

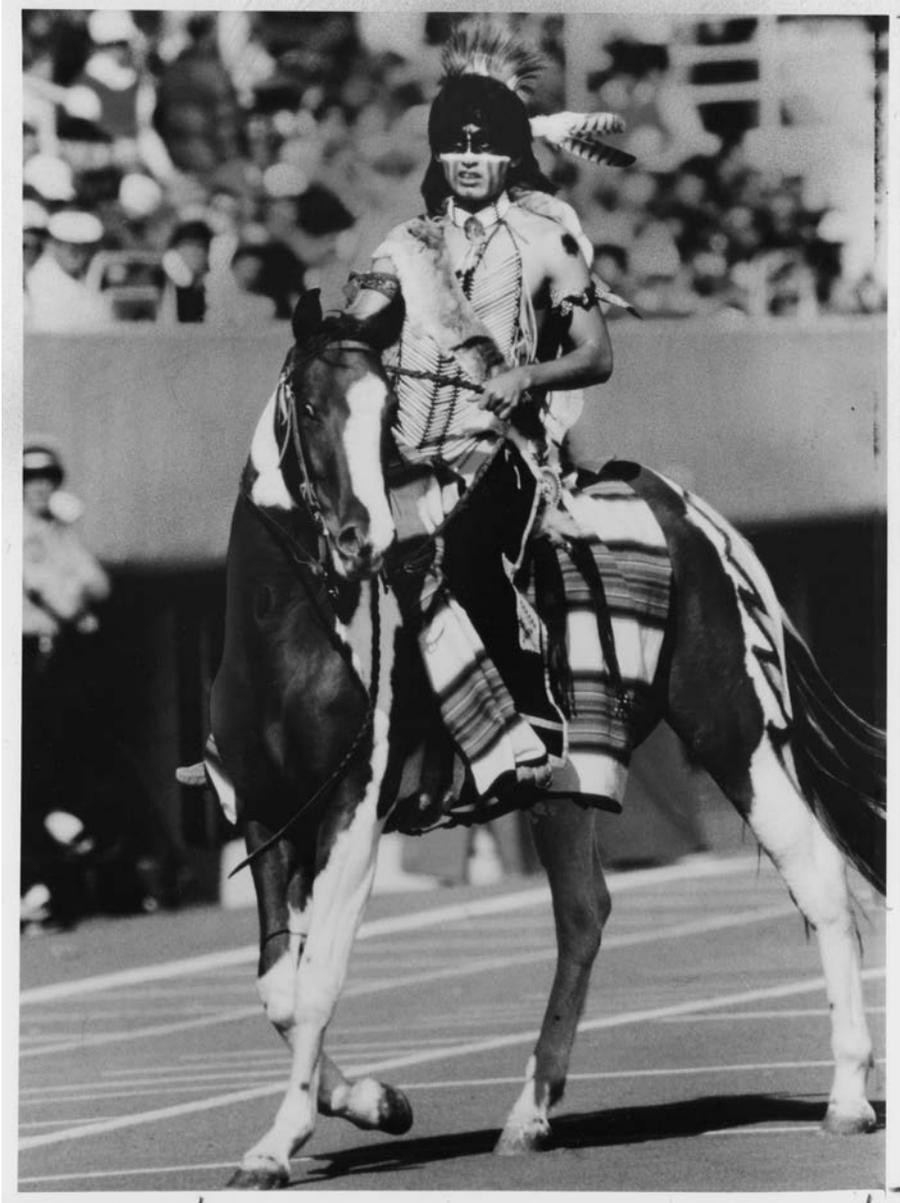


Figure 7.4: Image of the Crimson Warrior. Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, The University of Utah, University Archives C-Mascot, Folder 1, Image 2.

would not oppose the school's continued use of the nickname, as long as it was used respectfully and with dignity."<sup>38</sup>

In 2005, after the NCAA created a policy banning hostile nicknames and mascots, the university won an appeal to keep the Utes nickname, based on the Ute nation's permission and the 2003 memorandum of understanding between the Ute nation and the university. The University of Utah changed the design of the drum and feather logo to the circle and feather logo in 2008 (see Figure 7.5).<sup>39</sup> There have been several moments of campus activism spurred by American Indian (most of whom not Ute) and non-American Indian student groups. In a protest that happened in 2008, students, staff, and faculty were calling for scholarships for Utes, along with monetary support for Native Americans on campus. In 2012, Indigenous Students and Allies for Change and ASUU brought the 1491s—an indigenous sketch comedy group—to campus. The 1491s created a video in which they talked to people at tailgate parties about American Indian costumes they wore.<sup>40</sup> Based on growing student protest about the Utes nickname and drum and feather logo, growing Ute dissatisfaction with the University's commitment, and rumors that the University was planning to drop the nickname and logo, the Ute nation called for new negotiations for a new memorandum of understanding. In April 2014, the University and the Ute Tribal Business Committee renegotiated a memorandum with a five-year term, that reaffirmed Ute permission for the Utes nickname (the drum and feather logo is not included in the memorandum of



Figure 7.5: Circle and Feathers Logo.<sup>41</sup>

understanding), set up a permanent scholarship category for Ute students, and initiated a “Ute Proud” campaign co-created by the Ute nation and the University’s marketing team.

This history, constructed via the Utes Nickname Project archive, exhibits a dynamic and changing relationship between the University of Utah and American Indian symbols, beginning in the early 1900s and continuing to the present. The university’s relationship with the Ute nation may have begun earlier, but the first indication of an official relationship related to the Utes nickname occurred in 1972 when the Utes first gave permission for the nickname to be used. In the next section, I focus on the time period between 1972 to the present to identify the multivocal, and sometimes competing, voices of American Indians about the Utes nickname, drum and feather logo, and other symbols.

## American Indian Responses to the Utes Nickname

Viewing this history through the lens of colonialism, specifically settler colonialism in a North American context, allows for an examination of how American Indian voice is both constrained and enabled within colonization. At its simplest, this tension could be boiled down to a question of whether the use of the nickname is an act of colonization or an act of decolonization. By giving permission to use the Utes nickname, is the Ute nation complicit via self-colonization or is the Ute nation speaking back to colonization by resisting the erasure of discourse about the Utes? For example, although University of Utah student Wesley Francis, of the Penobscot Nation, wrote “many Indian people feel that the Ute mascot is just a symptom of a disease called racism brought here (like so many others) by European colonizers,”<sup>42</sup> Ute Tribal member Forrest Cuch wrote, “With the exception of the University of Utah nickname, what other landmark is there to suggest that any indigenous people inhabited the Salt Lake Valley prior to Mormon settlement?”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, are those American Indians who resist the Utes nickname engaged in a struggle for decolonization by seeking to remove the stereotypical and harmful effects of the Utes nickname or are they supporting colonization by calling into question the Utes sovereign right to give permission for their name to be used as a sports nickname? According to the Indigenous Students and Allies for Change [ISAC], “whether intended or not, the use of mascots, logos and nicknames stereotype, marginalize, intimidate and harm Native American students and undermines the educational experience of all students.”<sup>44</sup> Cuch countered opponents of the Utes nickname, stating:

I take major exception with some students at the U., the Indigenous Students and Allies for Change, who have gathered signatures in support of dropping the drum and feather for good. These students and some faculty (many of whom are not from the state of Utah) are demonstrating disrespect by opposing and totally disregarding the sovereign rights of the Ute Indian Tribe.<sup>45</sup>

Navajo student and leader of ISAC Samantha Eldridge replied, “We respect tribal sovereignty and the relationship the Ute Tribe has with the University of Utah. However, we argue this is a student, human and civil rights issue.”<sup>46</sup>

Engaging with and talking back to colonization can take numerous forms, highlighting the multivocality of American Indian rhetoric and the debates that occur within American Indian communities about mascots, nicknames, and other symbols. The next four sections demonstrate how these tensions come into play in American Indian discourse about the Utes nickname, particularly in the overlapping tensions between cultural appropriation and self-determination, harm and honor, unsanctioned and sanctioned uses, and Ute experience and American Indian experience.<sup>47</sup>

### Cultural Appropriation and Self-Determination

The Ute Tribal Business Committee has consistently expressed support for the nickname and reinforced its sovereign right to self-determination and to give permission for the use of the Utes Nickname. This is of crucial importance to understanding this case because sovereignty and self-determination are two of the most important tenets in American Indian decolonization struggles. In support of the University of Utah’s appeal to the NCAA policy banning hostile and abusive nicknames and mascots in 2005 and 2007, Maxine Natches, then chair of the Ute Tribal Business Council, wrote, “The Ute Indian Tribe has formally approved the university of Utah’s use of the Ute name and supports the University’s continued use of it.”<sup>48</sup> This countenance of permission depends on both sovereignty and the related concept of self-determination: the Utes nation has a sovereign right to determine how its name is used, and that the use of the nickname cannot be cultural appropriation if the nation agreed to it. Although he was actually speaking against the use of the Utes nickname in 1993 when the Crimson Warrior was retired, Ute member Curtis R. Cesspooch emphasized the importance of listening to American Indians when making decisions about nicknames and mascots: “Too many times, others have decided what they think is best for the Indian instead of listening to the voices of the Indians for what they want.”<sup>49</sup> The recent creation of the Ute Proud campaign, including half-time shows that display traditional Ute dancing and drumming,<sup>50</sup> is an example of the Utes’ efforts to play a role in how

the Utes nickname is presented by the University. Ute proponents of the nickname also highlight the importance of the Ute nation's sovereignty as related to its right to give permission for the nickname. Ute member Forrest Cuch, for instance, wrote, "The Utes are not like other minorities; they have a political relationship with the state and national government."<sup>51</sup> He also wrote that although American Indian students in the 1970s dropped their objections to the Utes nickname when they learned that the Ute nation gave permission, "this generation [of American Indian students in the 2000s] has no respect for tribal sovereignty."<sup>52</sup> From this perspective, the Utes nickname can be interpreted as speaking back to colonization via promoting the Ute nation's rights to sovereignty and self-determination. The Ute Proud campaign, which was co-created by the Ute nation, is an effort by a sovereign nation to present Ute culture to University of Utah audiences on their own terms, in a form of non-exploitative cultural appropriation.<sup>53</sup>

Cultural appropriation is a concern of those who opposed the use of the Utes nickname and the drum and feather logo. It is important to note that the most recent memorandum of understanding between the university and the Utes only covers the nickname and does not mention the drum and feather logo.<sup>54</sup> Yet, the Ute nickname and drum and feather logo cannot be easily separated, and are seen by many students, faculty, staff, and fans as part of a combined university identity. Samantha Eldridge (Navajo), co-chair of the Indigenous Students and Allies for Change (ISAC), stated: "It is clear that the insensitivity and misrepresentation of Native American students will continue as long as the University of Utah identifies itself with the drum and feather logo and Ute nickname."<sup>55</sup> Speaking directly to cultural appropriation, she continued:

We have provided testimonials and research [to the University] to support the negative impacts resulting from the cultural appropriation of Native Americans. Meanwhile, the University of Utah has failed to set policies in place to prevent inappropriate behavior and dress.

This quotation eludes fans of University of Utah sports teams dressing up as American Indians, painting their faces, performing the U chop, and engaging in other behaviors that activate the Utes nickname. An ISAC petition to end the use of the Utes nickname and "drum and feather logo" highlights how these behaviors are a form of "playing Indian" that allows "the denigration and mockery of Native American traditions, customs, and religious symbols."<sup>56</sup> As I will discuss in the section on the tension between sanctioned and unsanctioned uses of the nickname, the question of cultural appropriation extends beyond the way the Utes intend for their nickname to be used and the Ute Proud campaign. Fans engage in cultural appropriation behaviors as a result of the Utes nickname, regardless of its intent to be honorific and educational.

From the perspective of Ute proponents of the nickname, self-determination supersedes concerns about cultural appropriation. And from the perspective of American Indian opponents, eradicating cultural appropriation trumps self-determination. This is not simply an either/or choice. The archival materials instead reveal how cultural appropriation and self-determination exist in tension with each other, a tension that is common within a colonial system. Moreover, although definitive evidence of intent is difficult to secure in any analysis, both proponents and opponents of the Utes nickname could be interpreted as trying to engage in practices that resist colonial structures. Fighting cultural appropriation resists colonialist perceptions of American Indians and encourages American Indian self-definition. Monique Thacker [Makah], for example, expressed: "I want to represent myself as a Native American woman not as an Indian representation at games."<sup>57</sup> From the perspective of the Utes, permission and support of the nickname's intended use upholds sovereignty and self-determination and resists colonial forms of domination and erasure.

## Harm and Honor

Within the archival materials from 1972–present, the most prolific argumentative stasis point in the controversy is the question of whether the Utes nickname is honorific or harmful. This discourse is not just about whether mascots and nicknames in general are harmful or honorific, but also addresses how determinations of honor and harm are relative to the specific history of the University of Utah's use of American Indian symbols, Ute permission, and comparisons with other American Indian mascots and nicknames. Despite episodic concerns over the agreement between the University and the Utes, the Ute nation's support for the nickname centers on its honorific intent. Tribal chair Maxine Natches wrote in a 2005 appeal to the NCAA to let the University keep the nickname: "Ute Tribe has found the University's use of the Ute name to be honoring and respectful of Tribal culture, and the University's affiliation with the Ute name is a source of pride for Tribal members."<sup>58</sup> Yet, as Lance Harris—Ute and Native American Affairs advisor for the University—addressed in 1982, pride in the nickname does hinge on the means of representation:

The Ute Indian people out on the Uinta-Ourey reservation are very proud that the University has the name. They are, as any people would be, sometimes ashamed of the way the name is portrayed: a caricature, as clown, these kinds of things ... What we are afraid of is that the respect, the dignity, the pride in the name will be tarnished.<sup>59</sup>

This expression of honor and pride is consistent with the University of Utah's messaging about the Utes nickname.<sup>60</sup> As noted above, some Utes also see the

honorific use of the nickname as a way to prevent the erasure of indigenous perspectives from the collective consciousness of people affiliated with the University of Utah. When seen in the light of the Ute nation's permission for the nickname and involvement in the Ute Proud campaign, an honorific nickname can resist dominant forms of erasure and less honorific American Indian symbols, such as the R—skins and Fighting Illini that Forest Cuch described as a “no-no.”<sup>61</sup>

The Indigenous Students and Allies for Change counter that: “And whether intended or not, the use of mascots, logos and nicknames stereotype, marginalize, intimidate and harm Native American students and undermine the educational experience of all students especially those who have little or no contact with Native Americans.”<sup>62</sup> The Ute Nickname Project archives indicate consistent objections of the Utes nickname over time because of the harmful nature of the imagery. For instance, Kurt Harrison, Maidu Indian from California, stated: “A lot of people are completely in the dark and bound to think we’re overreacting, but it’s difficult to see a mighty warrior [Crimson Warrior] portrayed as a buffoon in the same category as the San Diego Chicken.”<sup>63</sup> Navajo Donna Eldridge stated, “The use of it [Utes nickname] relives the historical trauma and the oppression that we’ve gone through.”<sup>64</sup> These statements express the different forms of harm that can be a consequence of the Utes nickname and associated symbols. Given the harm associated with these symbols, Beverly Sutteer—the University’s Native American Student Advisor in the 1990s—expressed

This [Crimson Warrior] is not honor. If the U. wants to honor the Utes, they need to change their mascot. They should also acknowledge that the land the U. is sitting on was from the Utes by the pioneers. If the U. truly wants to honor the Utes, they should set up scholarships for them.<sup>65</sup>

The tension between honor and harm has played out across many years and highlights, again, how American Indian rhetors respond to the constraints of dominant, colonial perceptions. One approach seeks to avoid erasure by using a better, and more honorific set of symbols. Another approach aims to eliminate the specific harms that come from misrepresentations of Ute and American Indian peoples. The honorific intent and harmful consequences of American Indian symbolism at the university are related to a tension between unsanctioned and sanctioned behaviors enacted by people associated with the University of Utah.

### Unsanctioned and Sanctioned Behaviors

Despite the Ute Tribe and University of Utah’s intention to use the symbol in honorific ways, the Ute symbol reverberates through the university and the community

in unsanctioned racist and discriminatory ways. Students at games dress up as “Indians,” tailgate with teepees, wear headdresses and “warrior” face paint, and create unapproved t-shirts and signs that are displayed at sports games. For example, Samantha Eldridge (Navajo) commented on the problematic behaviors that come out of the Utes nickname: “They used to put the drum and feather on underwear. T-shirts have Ute-aholics written on them. Students paint their face red and wear headdresses. The whooping, the hollering and tomahawk, at every game you will find someone like this.”<sup>66</sup> On this topic, Ute proponents of the nickname agree that these behaviors should be better addressed by the university. In a *Salt Lake Tribune* op-ed, Forrest Cuch (Ute) wrote:

I am troubled that the University of Utah administration has not done more to better inform the university community of the native peoples of the state to curb the disrespectful behavior of some of the U. fans. Again, I see this as an opportunity to educate the greater community about the native peoples. After all, isn't that the purpose of the university?<sup>67</sup>

The most recent 2014 memorandum of understanding between the University and Utes initiated the Ute Proud campaign as well as an overhaul of the fan behavior guides to address the troubling reverberations of the Utes nickname. While both perspectives come from a place of resistance, the point of disagreement between is whether the solution is to better educate about the proper usage of the nickname and logo or to eliminate them.

### Ute Experience and American Indian Experience

A final tension in the controversy over the Utes nickname and associated symbolism is between the experience of the Ute people and non-Ute American Indians. While the Utes view the nickname from the purview of their self-determination and its benefits for Ute people (as demonstrated in previous sections of this chapter), non-Ute American Indians stress that the rhetorical consequences of the Utes nickname cannot be contained to only Ute people. The drum and feather logo is important to this tension because while it is arguably related to the Ute people, it also employs generic American Indian imagery—a drum and a feather—that extends beyond only Ute people. According to Donna Eldridge (Navajo), president of the Inter Tribal Student Association, “The logo doesn’t just affect the Ute tribe—it affects all of the tribes. It’s the whole native population. It perpetuates negative stereotypes of Native Americans.”<sup>68</sup> Further, opponents of the Utes nickname and its associated symbols note that there is a separation between Ute tribal members who may only encounter the Utes nickname at sports events and

the American Indian student on campus who, according to Navajo Stella Clah, “have to deal with the symbol and the discrimination on a daily basis.”<sup>69</sup> Samantha Eldridge, also Navajo, noted: “A lot of their [Ute] community members don’t go to these games, and they are not in there and seeing what’s going on.”<sup>70</sup> Resistance to the Utes nickname focuses on the negative experiences of American Indian and non-American Indian students at the University of Utah whose educational experience is framed, in part, by the Utes nickname.

One Ute member, Forrest Cuch, has responded extensively to those American Indians who oppose the use of the Utes nickname. For example, he wrote in an op-ed:

I take major exception with some students at the U., the Indigenous Students and Allies for Change, who have gathered signatures in support of dropping the drum and feather for good. These students and some faculty (many of whom are not from the state of Utah) are demonstrating disrespect by opposing and totally disregarding the sovereign rights of the Ute Indian Tribe. The Tribe has authorized the University to use the Ute nickname over the years and is currently in negotiations with the University to renew and build upon this relationship with the school.<sup>71</sup>

This response demonstrates a rift between Ute experience and American Indian experience, which is not uncommon in inter-tribal communication. According to Stuckey and Murphy, “rifts—and their consequences—continue and contribute to some of the most difficult political divisions among and between indigenous peoples in North America today.”<sup>72</sup> This rift between Utes and pan-American Indians opposed to the nickname demonstrates a tension inherent in colonization wherein American Indians are grouped together as victims of colonization, but also represent independent nations (some of whom had conflicts that pre-dated colonization).

## Conclusion

This chapter presented a critical rhetorical history of the Utes nickname that highlights the many tensions in colonization and struggles for decolonization. This history aligns with scholars seeking to complicate our understanding of American Indian rhetoric through analysis of specific controversies within American Indians contexts involving multivocality. It also highlights how difficult it can be to make a determination about what constitutes an act that is complicit with colonization and what constitutes decolonial resistance. Colonialization is an ongoing and all-encompassing presence in the lives of indigenous people.<sup>73</sup> “Decolonization is the meaningful and active resistance to forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands. Its ultimate purpose is the overturn the colonial structure and realize indigenous liberation.”<sup>74</sup>

Resistance to colonial structures can take many forms, and turning to analysis of controversies within American Indian discourse can allow for an understanding of many ways of talking back to colonization. Given difficulties in accessing American Indian discourse, there is also value in creating new archival collections that can resist colonial erasure of American Indian voices.

## Notes

1. Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 7.
2. For example: Lawrence R. Baca, "Native Images in Schools and the Racially Hostile Environment," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 28, no. 1 (2004): 71–78; Laurel R. Davis, "The Problems with American Indian Mascots," *Multicultural Education* 9, no. 4 (2002): 11–14; Aaron Goldstein, "Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress: Another Attempt at Eliminating American Indian Mascots," *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice* 3 (2000): 689; C. Richard King, "Defensive Dialogues: American Indian Mascots, Anti-Indianism, and Educational Institutions," *SIMILE: Studies In Media & Information Literacy Education* 2, no. 1 (2002): 1–12; C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, *Team Spirits: The American Indian Mascots Controversy* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).
3. Paul Rosier, "Sports Mascots, Names and Images," in *Native American Issues*, ed. Paul Rosier (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 1–23.
4. Danielle Endres, "American Indian Permission for Mascots: Resistance or Complicity within Rhetorical Colonialism?" *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18, no. 4 (2015): 649–89.
5. Jason Edward Black, *American Indians and the Rhetoric of Removal and Allotment*, 1 ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 6.
6. See: [https://institute.communication.utah.edu/yearly\\_themes/utesnicknameproject.php](https://institute.communication.utah.edu/yearly_themes/utesnicknameproject.php).
7. Ute Indian Tribe is the nation's preferred title. While the term "tribe" has been criticized for upholding notions of savagery, Ute Indian Tribe is the terminology used by the Ute government and by the U.S. federal government. There are three federally recognized Ute nations: Southern Ute Indian Tribe of the Southern Ute Reservation (Colorado), Ute Mountain Tribe of the Ute Mountain Reservation (Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico), Ute Indian Tribe of the Uinta & Ouray Reservation (Utah).
8. Endres, "American Indian Permission for Mascots."
9. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (September 8, 2012), <http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/download/18630>.
10. *Ibid.*, 6.
11. It is important to note that Patrick Wolfe has used the concept to describe a variety of situations. The concept has been taken up in Native American and indigenous studies, so much so that some argue the term has become empty. Nonetheless, the term holds promise as a starting point for discussion of the complexities of colonialism in the U.S. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.

12. David E. Wilkins, *American Indian Sovereignty and the U.S. Supreme Court: The Masking of Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).
13. Jason Edward Black, "Native Resistive Rhetoric and the Decolonization of American Indian Removal Discourse," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95, no. 1 (2009): 66–88; Casey Ryan Kelly, "Détournement, Decolonization, and the American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island (1969–1971)," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2014): 168–90; Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor"; e.g., Michael Yellow Bird and Angela Cavender Wilson, *For Indigenous Minds Only: A Decolonization Handbook* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2012).
14. Black, *American Indians and the Rhetoric of Removal and Allotment*.
15. I am using Lorde's term master's tools, but am not following her argument against working within dominant systems of oppression. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007).
16. Caskey Russell, "Language, Violence, and Indian Mis-Education," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 26, no. 4 (2002): 98.
17. Kent A. Ono and Derek T. Buescher, "Deciphering Pocahontas: Unpackaging the Commodification of a Native American Woman," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18, no. 1 (2001): 23–43; Raka Shome, "Postcolonial Interventions in the Rhetorical Canon: An 'Other' View," *Communication Theory* 6, no. 1 (1996): 40–59; Darrel Enck-Wanzer, "Decolonizing Imaginaries: Rethinking 'the People' in the Young Lords' Church Offensive," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 1 (2012): 1–23; Mary E. Stuckey and John M. Murphy, "By Any Other Name: Rhetorical Colonialism in North America," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 25, no. 4 (2001): 73–98.
18. Quote from the editor's introduction to the volume.
19. Endres, "American Indian Permission for Mascots," 675.
20. David Zarefsky, "Four Senses of Rhetorical History," in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 29.
21. Cara A. Finnegan, "What Is This a Picture of?: Some Thoughts on Images and Archives," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2006): 116–23, <https://doi.org/10.1353/rap.2006.0023>; Charles E. Morris, "Archival Queer," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (June 5, 2006): 145–51; Davis W. Houck, "On or About June 1988," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2006): 132–37.
22. Charles E. Morris, "The Archival Turn in Rhetorical Studies; Or, the Archive's Rhetorical (Re)Turn," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2006): 115, <https://doi.org/10.1353/rap.2006.0027>.
23. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2006).
24. Morris, "The Archival Turn," 115.
25. Barry M. Pritzker, "The Great Basin," in *A Native American Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 220–48; Clifford Duncan, "The Northern Utes," in *A History of Utah's American Indians* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Division of Indian Affairs/Utah State Division of History, 2000), 167–224.
26. David Rich Lewis, "Ute Indians," Utah History to Go, 2017, [http://historytogo.utah.gov/utah\\_chapters/american\\_indians/nativeamericansinutah.html](http://historytogo.utah.gov/utah_chapters/american_indians/nativeamericansinutah.html).

27. This date appears in University of Utah athletics documents and has been informally verified by a faculty member who was involved with the decision, but I have not found an official document to confirm it.
28. The University of Desert was founded in 1850 and closed in 1853. The University of Deseret was revived in 1867, and the name changed to University of Utah in 1892.
29. I have not been able to verify whether “hoyo” is a Ute word. “Chi O, Kappa Sig Winners; ‘Hoyo’ Tagged on Lil Ute,” *Daily Utah Chronicle*, October 20, 1947.
30. Jennifer Guiliano, *Indian Spectacle: College Mascots and the Anxiety of Modern America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015).
31. “Indian Youths Enter U on Tribal Grant,” *Daily Utah Chronicle*, October 9, 1951.
32. See endnote 27.
33. Lyn Wodraska, “Is It Time for Utah’s Drum and Feather Logo to Go?” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, February 19, 2013, <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=55810828&citytype=CMSID>.
34. Barbara Rattle, “Utahna Costumes Being Debated,” *Daily Utah Chronicle*, October 10, 1979.
35. Amy Page, “Ute Indian Returns to Athletic Events,” *Daily Utah Chronicle*, October 18, 1985, 1.
36. Amy Kenney, “Committee Formed to Search for Performing Mascot at U Games,” *Daily Utah Chronicle*, November 3, 1993.
37. Emily Harwood, “No Agreement Between Pres. Smith, Ute Leaders,” *Daily Utah Chronicle*, February 20, 1996.
38. Stephen Speckman, “U. May Have to Yield Ute Nickname,” *Deseret News*, August 6, 2005, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/print/600153966/U-may-have-to-yield-Ute-nickname.html>.
39. Wodraska, “Is It Time for Utah’s Drum and Feather Logo to Go?”
40. 1491s, *The Tailgating Tale of Apache McLean and the Utah Utes*, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTrFSBtPKwk>.
41. Source: <https://umc.utah.edu/resources/branding-guidelines/university-symbols/>
42. Wesley Francis, “Letter to the Editor: Warrior’s Symbolism in Eye of Beholder,” *Daily Utah Chronicle*, November 30, 1988, 7.
43. Forrest Cuch, “Op-Ed: U. Should Keep Nickname to Increase Awareness of Utes,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, December 16, 2013, <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=57255544&citytype=CMSID>.
44. Samantha Eldridge, “Call to Action to Retire ‘Drum and Feather’ Logo,” Change.org, accessed October 26, 2017, <https://www.change.org/p/president-pershing-call-to-action-to-retire-drum-and-feather-logo-and-ute-nickname>.
45. Cuch, “Op-Ed.”
46. Lyn Wodraska, “Utah Athletics: Student Group Asks U. to Drop Ties to Ute Tribe,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, December 5, 2013, <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=57218374&citytype=CMSID>.
47. By American Indian discourse, I am referring to both Ute and non-Ute American Indians.
48. Maxine Natches, “Application of the NCAA’s August 4, 2005 Policy to the University of Utah,” August 29, 2005, 1, [https://institute.communication.utah.edu/\\_documents/](https://institute.communication.utah.edu/_documents/)

- native\_american\_archives/mous\_archives/Memorandum%20of%20Understanding%20renewal%202005.pdf.
49. Curtis R. Cesspooch, "Letter to the Editor: Change 'Ute' Mascot," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, October 14, 1993, 5.
  50. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NEXFCgHviU&t=9s>.
  51. "Utes Fed Up with U," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, September 19, 2006.
  52. Christina Rose, "The University of Utah Utes: Working Toward Understanding," *Indian Country Today Media Network.com*, February 20, 2014, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/02/20/university-utah-utes-working-toward-understanding-153661>.
  53. Richard A. Rogers, "From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation," *Communication Theory* 16, no. 4 (2006): 474–503.
  54. My archival research has not yet found definitive evidence about whether the circle/drum and feather logo has been an official part of the agreements between the University and the Utes in the past.
  55. Wodraska, "Utah Athletics."
  56. Eldridge, "Call to Action to Retire 'Drum and Feather' Logo."
  57. Rose, "The University of Utah Utes."
  58. Natches, "Application of the NCAA's August 4, 2005 Policy to the University of Utah," 3.
  59. Marco Kunz, "Ute Image More Than a Mascot," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, 1982.
  60. Endres, "American Indian Permission for Mascots."
  61. Sean P. Means, "Group Says Indian Names Too Steeped in Old Racism," *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 6, 2005, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utah.edu/docview/281979357/47090A7D87814303PQ/2?accountid=14677>.
  62. Eldridge, "Call to Action to Retire 'Drum and Feather' Logo."
  63. Amy Page, "Ute Indian Returns to Athletic Events," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, October 18, 1985, 4.
  64. "Native American Justice Revisited; Logo Debated," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, September 17, 2012.
  65. Camilla Moore, "U. Considers Changing 'Ute' Mascot," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, September 29, 1993, 2.
  66. Rose, "The University of Utah Utes."
  67. Cuch, "Op-Ed."
  68. "Native American Justice Revisited; Logo Debated."
  69. Christian Aggeler, "U. Mascot Labeled Discriminatory: Ute Derogatory and Demeaning," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, October 26, 1988, 1.
  70. Rose, "The University of Utah Utes."
  71. Cuch, "Op-Ed."
  72. Stuckey and Murphy, "By Any Other Name: Rhetorical Colonialism in North America," 83.
  73. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird, *For Indigenous Minds Only: A Decolonization Handbook* (Santa Fe, NM: Santa Fe Press, 2012).
  74. *Ibid.*, 3.