

SHOULD WE KEEP THE “UTES” NICKNAME?

OVERVIEW

Before colonization, Nunt’z (Ute) peoples lived in roughly eleven autonomous bands in most of the present day state of Utah. There are now three federally registered Ute nations, each with Reservation land: the Southern Ute Indian Tribe/Reservation in Southwest Colorado, the Northern Ute or the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uinta-Ourey Reservation in Northeast Utah, and the Ute Mountain Tribe/Reservation (including the White Mesa Ute Tribe) in the four corners region (specifically Utah, New Mexico, and Colorado). Since 1978, the University of Utah has used the “Utes” nickname with the permission of the Northern Ute tribe. The Northern Ute are a living, breathing, and changing people who, like most American Indians, live what may appear to be a standard everyday life in line with the dominant culture. Currently, the University of Utah officially uses the licensed nicknames Utes™, Utah Utes™, Runnin’ Utes™; has a Circle and Feather® logo (colloquially referred to as the drum and feather logo); and uses the mascot “Swoop,” a red-tailed hawk native to Utah. The University has permission from the Northern Ute tribe to use these symbols under a Memorandum of Understanding first signed in 2003 and renewed in 2014. In 2014 the University and Utes Nation also initiated the “Ute Proud Campaign” including a website with information about the relationship between the University and the Utes, and suggestions for appropriate fan behavior, a Ute Proud T-Shirt, and a scholarship for Ute students. Yet controversy persists about whether the University ought to keep the “Utes” nickname.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to *foster a critical discussion about the current use of the Utes nickname by the University of Utah.*

STUDENT READINGS

1. Rosier, Paul C. 2003. “Sports Mascots, Names, and Images.” In *Native American Issues*. Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1-29.
2. Endres, Danielle. 2015. “American Indian Permission for Mascots: Resistance or Complicity within Rhetorical Colonialism,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18, no. 4, 649-689.

MATERIALS

For this lesson, the classroom will ideally be equipped with a computer and projector screen. Since students will be breaking up into groups, the room should be arranged in a way that allows for easy mobility. Students will need pens and paper.

PROCEDURE

At the beginning of the class session, the instructor should give a mini-lecture on the history of Native American symbols and mascots at the University of Utah. Materials for this lecture can be gleaned from the essay by Danielle Endres noted above as well as from the PowerPoint presentation linked to this lesson plan. After the lecture, have students break up into three groups: those in favor of keeping the “Utes” nickname, those undecided, and those in favor of getting rid of it. If the groups do not divide somewhat evenly, you may need to more evenly distribute the students. Each of the groups should brainstorm a list of reasons for their position, creating a justification for their respective arguments. One member of each group should transcribe their list and be prepared to report back to the entire class. After each group has reported their justifications to the entire class, close with a discussion of the complexities involved in making a decision about whether to maintain or get rid of the “Utes” nickname. Have students consider: the official University policy of respectful usage versus disrespectful (and racist) fan behavior; the challenges of supporting Ute nation sovereignty vs. supporting pan-Native American students on campus who oppose the nickname; how and why any students changed their minds in the course of the discussions. Conclude the class with this question: If we agree that supporting the Ute nation’s right to give permission is important but also agree that there are harmful and disrespectful repercussions from the nickname, what is the best path forward?