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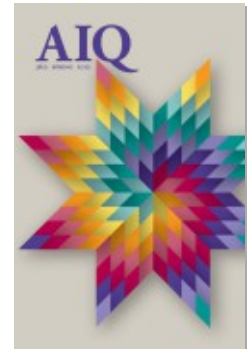
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## The “Mascotting” of Native America

*Construction, Commodity, and Assimilation*

JASON EDWARD BLACK

Recently I stumbled across a thought-provoking athletic booster letter from my undergraduate alma mater. The mailer was addressed “Dear Seminole” and asked that I pledge money to my Tallahassee “tribe.” I understood the request, of course, as constitutive rhetoric shared between Florida State University and me—discourse meant to unite collegiate and personal identities into a collective, a so-called “tribe.”<sup>1</sup> Truly, though, I am not part of a Native nation or society. In fact the concept of assuming Native culture and subsequently eclipsing it with a corporeal desire for championship football and top-notch Nike athletic apparel concerns me as a cultural critic. Likewise the cultural materialism of the Florida State Seminole embarrasses me as a graduate of an institution the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights recently argued “encourages biases and prejudices that have a negative effect on contemporary Indian people . . . (and) blocks genuine understanding of contemporary Native people as fellow Americans.”<sup>2</sup>

The dual identities of Florida State Seminole and cultural critic present an intriguing conundrum, a tension that drives my interest in examining what I deem the “mascotting” of Native America. On the one hand, I carry with me a so-called misrepresented identity, a Seminole persona I do not understand but apparently assume through attending football games and hanging framed parchment on my wall. On the other hand, without a lived experience—replete with cultural understanding, prejudicial suffering, and a sense of heritage—how can Florida State University actually refer to me in good faith as “Dear Seminole?”

The identity vertigo leads to a number of questions. Why do universities insist on employing Native mascots? Why are American Indians upset at collegiate appropriations of their culture? Most importantly for this study, how does the appropriation of tribal identity affect Indigenous peoples? These questions have plagued both sides of the mascot debate since 1968 when the National Congress of American Indians “began a campaign to address native

stereotypes found in sports and media.”<sup>3</sup> Subsequently the past thirty years have witnessed student protests and Natives challenging the authority of the “ivory” towers (for example, University of Illinois, Florida State University, University of North Dakota); universities accommodating antimascot activists by changing their mascots (for example, Stanford University, St. John’s University, Syracuse University); and university strategies of control, arguing for the Native as a symbol rather than a mascot. Ironically, for all the social and political activity surrounding the mascot controversy, “Native American mascots remain understudied, too often taken for granted, and rarely questioned by scholars and citizens alike.”<sup>4</sup>

Indigenous groups, along with cultural studies scholars, view the Native mascots as hegemonic devices—commodification tools—that advance a contemporary manifest destiny by marketing Native culture as Euramerican identity.<sup>5</sup> Kent Ono and Derek Buescher, for instance, write that “Euro-American culture has made a habit of appropriating, and redefining what is ‘distinctive’ and constitutive of Native Americans. This strategy of appropriation relies on culturally specific views of ownership and property.”<sup>6</sup> According to this viewpoint the university consumes and reconfigures Native experiences, a practice institutionally supported by the long history of European and Euramerican prejudices against Indigenous peoples: from the violence of “Columbian contact” and the brutality of the Trail of Tears, to the trampling of Indigenous rights evident in present policies to deny the American Indian community repatriation and reparation. Such consumption harkens back to the long-standing tradition of white hegemonic control over Native identity.<sup>7</sup>

American Indians and Native social movements have not stood by idly as universities, in particular, have asserted their dominance through appropriating Native images. The American Indian Movement (AIM), the Conference on the Elimination of Racist Mascots, and several smaller, grassroots protest cells have come out against universities and professional sports teams alike, insisting that their voices be heard. Bill Means of AIM helped organize the now famous 1991 World Series protests of the Atlanta Braves. During a game against the Twins in Minneapolis, Means discussed the movement’s refusal to acquiesce to the Atlanta ball club’s construction of Indianness. He said then, “We’re not out to spoil anyone’s good time. But when you come to Minneapolis, where there are over 50,000 of us in the state, you have to respect our heritage and history.”<sup>8</sup> Means and AIM are not alone. In addition to partaking in traditional protests, Indigenous groups also have dressed as other ethnicities to demonstrate a “fair-play” strategy of dissent, helped push legislation through state legislatures and local governing bodies to abolish the use of mascots, instituted both symbolically and legally successful lawsuits against mascot users, and helped make the issue a topic of national interest within the dominant American public.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, universities argue that the Native mascot stands as a symbol of honor, respect, and dignity that represents those qualities for which a university strives. Mascot supporter and Florida State booster club columnist Charles Barnes illustrates the representative nature of the mascot: "no athletic team chooses a name or mascot in order to bring contempt or disrepute on itself. . . . They depict Indians and by extension themselves as noble, courageous, and fierce."<sup>10</sup> Universities, then, claim authenticity in justifying the appropriation of American Indian culture as a truly admirable synecdoche for what remains "good" in society and on the playing field: strength, determination, obstinacy, and courage.

In this article I examine the notion of identity within the American Indian and university spheres of existence vis-à-vis the Indian symbol and argue that the mascotting of American Indian culture further perpetuates white hegemony. Universities exert this control by constructing Indigenous peoples as generic, reducing them to appropriated commodities, and blending their culture with assimilation-minded universities. Additionally, I hope to demonstrate that the American Indian community has not suffered as a victim but rather has attempted to (re)claim its identity. With a particular focus on the mascot controversies at Florida State University (FSU) and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, analysis concentrates on collegiate responses to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Report and Indigenous rhetoric aligning itself with the commission's view that Indian "images and nicknames in schools are insensitive and should be avoided."<sup>11</sup> Analysis follows from cultural-critical perspectives regarding appropriation, commodification, and assimilation, especially concerning Native America. University and Native voices arise through documents in the form of university-sponsored commentaries and promascot organization white papers, in addition to American Indian protest narratives and organizational opinion pieces from groups like the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and the Media.<sup>12</sup>

I chose to focus on Florida State University and the University of Illinois because their mascots stand for actual tribes. Certainly, though, other universities appropriate non-tribal-specific Native icons through the use of nicknames like "Tribe" (College of William and Mary), "Braves" (Quinnipiac College), "Chieftains" (Seattle University), "Indians" (Arkansas State), "Redmen" (Carthage College), "Savages" (Southeastern Oklahoma), and "Warriors" (Wayne State). University culture was chosen over professional sports teams (such as the Washington Redskins, Atlanta Braves, Cleveland Indians, Golden State Warriors, Seattle Seahawks, Kansas City Chiefs, and Chicago Blackhawks) because college identity is earned through immersion in two to four years of university culture, which pervades the classroom, workplace, home, and recreational spheres such as sports. Upon matriculation and commencement from, say, Central Michigan, an individual is a "Chippewa." A fan of Washington's pro-

fessional football team is a Redskins *fan* as opposed to a “Redskin.” The distinction of college mascots gets to the heart of identity more so than the athletic team mascot alone.

#### ANALYSIS: MASCOTTING NATIVE AMERICA

A partial role of the cultural critic involves identifying rhetorical acts that legitimize the hegemonic stances of groups in power. In the case of U.S.-Indian relations, the white American public assumes the power position and views Native publics as subordinate. (By virtue of colonization Natives are stereotyped; certainly, though, not every Indigenous group views itself as a victim, and far fewer, I would argue, buy into the Euramerican notion of Indigenous inferiority.) Celeste Michele Condit defines hegemony as “a broad based and coherent worldview that ‘leads’ by gaining active assent from allies and passive assent from other classes or groups.” The concept posits “a direct relationship between the dominant ideology and the ideas of the ruling class.”<sup>13</sup> Hegemony differs from dominance in that the latter disregards “willing consent” and thus oppresses in more adversarial ways. Certainly U.S. colonization of American Indians classifies as a hegemonic process, for while the United States employed physical and institutional domination, it did so frequently under the guise of assimilating Natives through consent. Consent, in early Native America, took shape in the form of treaties and today takes form through cultural marketing of tribalism.<sup>14</sup> Hence a cultural critic intent on discovering patterns of American Indian oppression identifies the hegemony championed by the powerful—white America—through negotiations and cultural assemblage.

Public notions of culture arise through representations of ethnicity, group relations, and media accounts—often derived from incorrect “scholarly” versions of tribal histories and cultures—of customs and traditions. The “mascot” is one such representation. According to C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, “public culture is made and remade, sometimes unwittingly, but always contextualized by particular relations of power.” They continue, “Signifying practices are those activities, discourses, modes of experience, and social relations that serve both individuals and groups in the dynamic construction of cultural subjectivities and identities.”<sup>15</sup> The mascot, I will argue, is a signifying practice that bolsters white power and weakens Indigenous power. Perhaps the scariest of racial stereotypes and prejudices arise when the public cannot recognize such ills. Mascots are one such representation that often goes unnoticed as bigoted toward, and disastrous for, American Indians. King et. al. argue that “one of the reasons why most Americans find the mascots unremarkable and do not turn a critical eye toward the mascots is because of the prevalence of similar images throughout U.S. popular

culture.”<sup>16</sup> The proliferation of stereotypical images of Indianness in American popular culture is, indeed, frightening.

### *Constructing the Generic Indian*

Universities appropriate and construct Indigenous peoples—who vary in cultural traditions, appearances, and religious beliefs—as a generic group represented by numerous stereotypes.<sup>17</sup> Power resides in naming and co-opting a marginalized identity. Some argue that lumping variant groups into one consumable package of traits allows for easier suppression through a hijacking of this identity. Haig Bosmajian, for instance, claims, “once one has been categorized through the language of suppression, one loses most of the power to determine one’s future and most of the control over one’s identity and destiny.”<sup>18</sup> Identity is not lost, however, when Indigenous groups are able to (re)claim what mascots attempt to take away. The antimascot movement seeks continually to remind the American public that Native identity is situated within Native America, not in some caricatured version supported by Euramericans.

“Otherizing” finds a home, Bosmajian continues, “in the use of language which attempts to justify the separation, enslavement, or eradication of the oppressed.”<sup>19</sup> With this argument in mind, the critique of mascotting in U.S.-Indian relations uncovers a hegemonic strategy of separating American Indians from their cultural heritage. Once this severance occurs, nationalism retains control over what Native America means, how it shall exist, and where it shall relocate through the rhetoric of the mascot. As the Native-based Conference on the Elimination of Racist Mascots (CERM) sees the situation, Illinois’s appropriation is “absolutely inappropriate, a mockery” of Native traditions—an act “which reflects the marginalization of a people.”<sup>20</sup> By redefining what it means to be “Indian,” the University of Illinois, for example, loads its token Chief Illiniwek with traits not traditionally associated with the Illini leader. The university employs a generic stereotype of Indianness to conquer the particular heritage of the Illini. Lost or convoluted are true Illini histories and identities because “dominant society’s rhetorical redefinitions of ‘Indian’ have combined to sustain and perpetuate suppression of Native Americans.”<sup>21</sup>

Constructing Seminoles and Illini as Native mascots dehumanizes the tribes by replacing their cultures with nonspecific images. When these nonspecific images come to represent the only image dominant society sees of Native America, Euramerican racism comes to the fore. King and Springwood write about this process:

Native American mascots misappropriate sacred ideas and objects . . . they misuse and misunderstand elements of Native American cultures

and their symbolic meanings. Importantly, since many Euro-Americans encounter Native Americans *only* as mascots and moving images, these unreal Indians materialize the most base images of Native Americans, presenting them as warriors battling settlers and soldiers, noble savages in touch with nature, uncivilized barbarians opposing the civilized and ultimately triumphant advance of Euro-America.<sup>22</sup>

For those of us subscribing to the tenets of social constructionism, such naming and misrepresentation of Indigenous identity comes to define and, on an ontological level, *inhabit* what it means to be Native. As Lee Sigelman puts it, “since actual Indians are a virtually invisible minority for most Americans, stereotypical images have long been widespread in American popular culture.”<sup>23</sup> Widespread exposure of stereotypes, unfortunately, evolves into permanence.<sup>24</sup>

But Native performances and protests, such as those organized at Florida State University and outside the Washington football team’s FedEx Field, seek to disrupt white America’s conception of Indianness. The protests can be seen “as a performative struggle for identity because they constitute an attempt to reclaim or recapture popular notions of what it means to be Native American.”<sup>25</sup> Native groups (re)claim their identity by countering the clothing of “wannabe” fans with true dress; performing authentic and ritualized drum beats and singing mythic Native songs to juxtapose fans’ tom-tom banging and chanting of the infamous “oh-oh-ohhh” of the Florida State war chant; and demonstrating Native peace—versus fan-conceived red savagery—by protesting with words, not violence.<sup>26</sup> In addition, I argue that the *presence* alone of real American Indians—meaning not some hook-nosed, red caricature à la the Atlanta Braves’ Chief Nok-a-homa or Florida State’s grossly inaccurate image of Chief Osceola—demonstrates a strategy of (re)claiming Indianness. Cultural experientialism speaks volumes. When otherwise ignorant or uninformed non-Native fans actually experience the company of American Indians, the Natives’ presence prompts a contrast between real-world American Indians and those emblazoned on one’s t-shirt. Hence Euramerican questioning of the social practice of mascotting can commence. Surely more radical methods of drawing attention to one’s Indianness works as well, but at its base I view the “identification” of *seeing* the other a vital tool.<sup>27</sup>

The universities view the Natives’ (re)claiming of their identity as a waste of time because according to FSU and Illinois, their mascots are positive synecdoches, a sign for the thing signified, which embody all that is good about one’s identity. Why make an issue out of something so positive, they might argue. The universities have appropriated the Indian to mean honorable, brave, and courageous, or as Seminole booster director Charles Barnes notes, “we se-

lected the triumphant human spirit as our symbol. That unconquered spirit is perfectly characterized in the Seminole tribe of Florida.”<sup>28</sup> Florida State appropriates the historical Chief Osceola and Seminole tribe through known artifacts like eagle feathers and chickees. The university, however, also lumps into the Seminole image inaccurate war chants, tomahawks, crooked noses, smoke signals, tepees, leather-fringed pants, and western movie-style war drums.

This latter group of characteristics does not apply to the Seminole tribe and often does not encompass American Indians at large.<sup>29</sup> The image of Chief Osceola astride his horse brandishing a flaming spear—a scene of warlike savagery—is a Euramerican creation born of manifest destiny, myths of the Oregon Trail, and, more contemporarily, Hollywood’s versions of John Wayne battling the fierce, bloodthirsty “red man.”<sup>30</sup> This species of appropriation maintains the controversy and generalizes Indigenous populations to consumable images.

### *Commodifying Culture*

Part of university hegemony involves the “selling of the Indian” as a means of capitalizing on Native culture. Choctaw Laurie Whitt notes, “when the spiritual knowledge, rituals, and objects of historically subordinated cultures are transformed into commodities, economic and political power merge to produce cultural imperialism.”<sup>31</sup> Cultural imperialism, then, seizes and processes vital cultural resources, “remaking them in the image and marketplaces of the dominant culture.”<sup>32</sup> One can easily list a sampling of the ways universities commodify their Native mascots. Harkening to a rhetoric of “bravery and stoicism,” FSU pitches its “Dear Seminole” letter in order to secure development dollars from its similarly valiant and successful Seminole alumni base; Illinois sells the “trash and trinkets” basics from clothing, golf paraphernalia, and Christmas accessories to hygiene products, school supplies, and statuary; and FSU rakes in inordinate amounts of money from its marquis name at some of the nation’s most profitable college bowl games. According to Carol Spindel, the University of Illinois, as a case study in revenue generation, makes some \$500,000 each year on merchandise.<sup>33</sup>

Commodity culturalism examines such economic appropriations of cultural images. According to Robert Goldman et. al., commodity logic “consists of a series of interpretative maneuvers where we abstract a desired relationship out of a lived context, then place it in a formal, binary equivalence with a product image, and then associate the desire in terms of its object substitute—fetishism.”<sup>34</sup> In “Commodity Feminism” Goldman, Heath, and Smith critique the layering of female bodies (lived context) with advertising (product image)

that brings about desire (fetishism). The commodification of female experience correspondingly inspires both female consumption of the image and male gaze upon the image—distorting the lived context of femininity. This critical tool can also be applied to Native American culture, wherein universities layer Native identity (lived context) with university culture (product image) to incite a desire to attend the University of Illinois or to purchase Florida State Seminole boxer shorts (fetishism). In both the feminist and cultural cases, an appropriation of a lived context is co-opted and exploited for material gain.

Given the commodity culture inherent in university spheres, one queries whether Natives are truly commemorated as mascots or simply used as ciphers to collect more money. For this reason, American Indians call university appropriation of Chiefs Osceola and Illiniwek (and the Seminole and Illini) “mascots.” Mascots serve to represent a commercial object, in part, as a parody or farce. They are, as Spindel puts it, “a good luck charm. . . . When they (universities) insist that Chief Illiniwek and Osceola are more than mascots, these schools acknowledge that a mascot may inspire feelings of affection, but not respect.”<sup>35</sup>

Clem Iron Wing, an Illini Native, discusses this metonymy in describing the Illinois bookstore’s marketing of Chief Illiniwek toilet paper:

The eagle feather (which accompanies Chief Illiniwek) is the primary religious symbol of the American Indian. We would like to know how many persons of faith would like their religious symbols used to wipe human excrement? . . . Whenever you see any school using “Indian” as a mascot, you will hear them say this is an honor. Remember the brown stain on the eagle feather and you will know what their honor means.<sup>36</sup>

Here we see that Chief Illiniwek indeed is not revered for his courage; he is mocked because the university creates an image of him as a thing. Why else would he be placed on toilet paper? The university trounces the religious eagle feather by packaging it as a consumable good; Illini identity is trumped in favor of making money from a stereotyped image of Illiniwek and the Plains Indian version of a crucifix or Star of David.

In its defense of selling the “Indian” Illinois argues for a marketing of its own university values—itself a spurious promotional strategy. Because the mascot “embodies the attributes we value as alumni, students and friends of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,” writes the Honor the Chief Society, the university sells Illiniwek as a model synecdoche of Illinois culture. By purchasing his toilet paper, “you too” can take home a piece of the famous Illini stoicism. The society continues, “the tradition of our Chief is a great link to our great past, a tangible symbol of an intangible spirit, filled with qualities to

which a person of any background can aspire.”<sup>37</sup> The link is whitewashed; that is, universities connect with a past they have constructed. The collegiate “Indian” is the white man’s “good” Indian. Spindel recalls for us, “to minimize criticism, most teams have retired bad Indian mascots or sanitized their images so that the mascots that remain are mostly good Indians . . . It’s noble or nothing these days.”<sup>38</sup> Truly, though, a consumer purchases not an authentic account of Illini history or an accurate representation of Illini culture but rather a sampling of university ideology by way of buying a piece of, and connecting with, Illinois’s Native mascot.

Euramerican commodification remains predicated on property and ownership; Americans conquered the so-called savages during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so they presently think they can do with Indigenous cultures what they see fit.<sup>39</sup> The mascotting of Native America spells out an unfortunate social death in this vein: not only was past Native identity conquered and capitalized upon—through slave labor and land sales—but their current identities are also being sold. Moreover, this sale is marketed inappropriately as university identity. Miller argues that the “whole notion of winning the West meant that Euramericans had to have an enemy to conquer, and Native Americans were cast in that role.”<sup>40</sup> To reconquer Native America by selling—and thus *owning*—a commodity casts American Indians back into an adversarial role. This role is then sold and becomes “a new way to oppress.”<sup>41</sup>

### *Assimilation through Unity*

Since the dawn of first “contact” Euramericans have set about stereotyping and making complete, civilized, educated, and Christian the “red children” of Native America.<sup>42</sup> The blending of university and Native identities allows for an assimilation of the less powerful into the dominant public. This, of course, translates into American universities attempting to envelop Native America. Reading through historical accounts of U.S.-Indian relations, it comes as no surprise that when American and Indigenous cultures are unified under a conjoined goal or law American identity always tries to eclipse Native culture. In *Cherokee Nation v. State of Georgia* (1832), for instance, the Supreme Court ruled that the Cherokee of Echota and Georgia residents should live together under the rubric of federal authority, issuing a wholesale rejection of tribal law and the Cherokee constitution.<sup>43</sup> This type of hegemony-by-unification is not uncommon in Indigenous histories. The United States viewed American Indian culture as an extension of America and sought to assimilate it through integration methods. This integration was mostly rhetorical, however, in that removal physically divided the cultures, but laws and treaties united them under a white-controlled nationalism.

Likewise universities see their mascots as extensions of the collegiate community. Upon entering Florida State or the University of Illinois (whether as faculty, staff, or student) a person *becomes* a Seminole or Illini. This identity entrenches the university constituent and carries into not only professional conferences, summer internships, football games, or any other event partaken in by direct connection with the university but also well beyond the physical boundaries of the university itself. So when a faculty member retires, a student graduates, or a staff member leaves the campus, he or she is still a Seminole. As one Florida State graduate living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, mentioned, “I defend our Seminole symbol . . . although everyone here lives for [the University of North Carolina] Tarheels, it’s fun being the lone Seminole.”<sup>44</sup> The identity of “Indian” becomes a label one cannot shake; an Illinois graduate is forever an Illini—whether reminded by oneself or another, such as the alumni newsletter (“Dear Fellow Illini”) or the coworker who comments, “Hey, I graduated from Illinois. Looks like there are two Illini here now.”

Universities pack their mascots full of positive traits that they see both the Native icons and the university sharing in a representative nature. The mascot embodies honor and distinction, traits that also are manifest as a part of a university’s hard sell to future students and the public in general. The universities opine that—much like the Native who works hard, overcomes challenges, and embraces virtue—so, too, will the university’s graduates exhibit these qualities in the workforce and carry them into society to make the world a better place. This allows the universities more attractiveness and nobility. Consider Seminole booster director Charles Barnes’s comments about the tie between the Seminoles and the Florida State Seminole:

We routinely honor the Seminole Tribe of Florida in public by raising them as the one tribe, among all the indigenous peoples, which was never conquered. The Seminoles never surrendered, we say. They never gave up. The public, mainstream America, sees this as a great tribute to them. . . . Refusing to surrender is admirable. To never give in is a virtue that we admire, that we exult.<sup>45</sup>

A syllogism exists here: Seminoles are admirable. We are Seminoles. Hence we are admirable. Beyond the propositional logic, however, lies the image that unites the premises. Florida State Seminoles are not *Seminole* until the Native can come to represent them; the university builds and perpetuates this bridge by weaving the Seminole into Florida State culture. Florida State University creates the FSU Seminole and traditions like the “Tomahawk Chop” to provide university constituents with some semblance of their “Indianness.” Soon, constituents—as well as the public that sees national championship football games and the mascot fanfare exhibited there—cannot think of the Seminole

tribe without bringing to mind the garnet and gold glitz of Chief Osceola and the FSU Seminoles. The university and mascots are thereafter joined infinitely.

Universities claim that the appropriation of American Indian culture honors tribal customs by uniting the past with the present. In a temporal sense universities—or at least those, like Florida State and Illinois, employing the synecdoche of an actual tribe—argue for a natural extension of the Native as “symbol” of the university. The Honor the Chief Society posits a temporal and spatial bond between the Illini and the Illinois Illini:

As a reminder of our only common geographical ancestor, Chief Illiniwek reminds us of the high ideals of the First Nation people who made up the Illini confederation of tribes for which the state of Illinois is named. The Illini tribes took their sustenance from the same land we share today. Although the original Illini disappeared from the region long ago, they are remembered through the Chief Illiniwek tradition.<sup>46</sup>

The University of Illinois seems to say that the Illini spirit “called to it” to appropriate the image, thus taking the onus for choosing the Native off of the university and placing it on Indigenous peoples themselves. Randall Lake, in examining Native myth, writes that the Native narrative “grounded in time’s cycle, seeks to renew the ties between past and present to enact a future.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, universities have acknowledged this myth by allowing the mascot to come to represent all that the university wishes to embody: virtue, honor, work, and steadfastness. Universities play on the Native temporal myth and essentially say “you are the past (Illini), we are the present (Illini), let us build a future together.” “Rather than dealing with the painful reality of Native Americans’ marginalization,” universities have further perpetuated white hegemony.<sup>48</sup> That is, they do nothing more than cling to “sentimentalized stereotypes and caricatures” of their own making. Universities need to face the fact that their cyclical fallacy of creating a so-called symbol of honor, worshipping that symbol, and subordinating the true Indigenous cultures—the impetus behind the honor—only enhances cultural domination. As Mark Connolly states, the blending of university and Native cultures makes “souvenirs” out of American Indians.<sup>49</sup> What is a souvenir? Like a Mammy doll or a Disney Pocahontas figurine, it is a misrepresentation meant to satisfy the “possessive,” “consumptive,” and “hegemonic” desires of the purchaser, the one in control of the souvenir and its procurement.<sup>50</sup>

Based on the history of hegemony-by-unity, how genuine is the joining of Native and collegiate cultures supported by FSU and Illinois? Cultural scholars see a one-sided relationship.<sup>51</sup> Following suit, unifying colleges and American Indians harkens to what Richard Morris calls “transformational mimesis.” When a dominant entity consents to joining its forces—so to speak—with a

marginalized group, the dominant entity will monopolize the relationship. Moreover, in this case American Indian identity is then forced to mimic the dominant identity's so-called superior way of life. Again, this is not always true. Many Natives resist at all costs and refuse to mimic Westernized ways of sociality, religion, education, and value formation. Morris states:

Transformational mimesis is just such a symbolic process that . . . serves to put someone's cultural identity under erasure . . . in the moment of acculturation by denigrating and calling into question that identity and by insisting that a readily available "superior" alternative identity provided by a dominant society furnished the only means of escape for those who are "trapped" by their heritage.<sup>52</sup>

Hence acculturation by "calling into question" Native identity extends more dominance and power to white culture. FSU and Illinois capitalize on assimilation tactics by using Native identity in order to establish their respective mascots. Once this occurs Seminoles and Illini "become both Indian and white . . . everything in their world is now in conflict."<sup>53</sup> In the confusion of blended identities, universities—staid and supported by American nationalism—get to control Indianness on their own terms.<sup>54</sup> That is, until American Indian agitators are able to (re)claim their identity through public display and protest. The status quo always begins, however, with universities "claiming" Native identity. This is the rhetorical impetus for the controversy, after all.

#### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The primary implication of this study points to reassessing the ways in which the mascotting of Indigenous cultures violates American Indians' rights to self-identity. Moreover the analysis queries whether mascotting is the twenty-first century's version of a conquering of Native America. Given the arguments above, it seems that university mascots work to confuse and subordinate Indigenous identity by eclipsing it with white constructions, marketing, and assimilation. At the same time, collegiate labeling, selling, and acculturation differs only in chronology and context from the exploits of the Indian Removal Act and various American devices used to control the continent's Native populations. Today's media-fed milieu, including the world of sports, bolsters the way America views its Indigenous neighbors. Bird writes, "For most white Americans, to live in a media world is to live with a smorgasbord of images that reflect back themselves, and offer pleasurable tools for identity formation."<sup>55</sup> This self-dignity comes at the cost of committing (in)dignities toward others. As long as the hegemonic song remains the same—label, sell, and conquer by

claiming Native identity as wholly “American”—Natives’ stories are not lost but oppressively muddled.

Second, this article suggests that, given the ways in which mascots complicate Indigenous identity, the *only* solution to the Native American mascot controversy is retiring the collegiate Indian—if for no other reason than to “honor” Native America by, for once, listening to what it has to say and internalizing how it feels about the issue. Cultural scholars and American Indian activists have long presented the arguments for removing the disgraceful symbols. King et. al. summarize these well:

Native American mascots fit within a broader context of control and consent in which the dominant (a) invalidate and silence the histories and perspectives of indigenous peoples and other subaltern groups, (b) undermine and appropriate their cultures, (c) teach systematically the ideology of White supremacy, and (d) prevent Native Americans and other Americans from understanding the heritage, legacies, and significance of indigenous people.<sup>56</sup>

Others, like Robert Jensen, have presented the “fair turnaround” argument to America—whether black, white, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, and so forth—how would *you* feel if racial names, stereotypes, and bastardized features of *your* ethnic group or religion were paraded around as a joke? What, then, if hypocrites told *you* they were “honoring” *your* image and history?<sup>57</sup> Clearly no one wants to be mocked, either privately or in the public sphere—especially minority groups such as African Americans, Jews, and Asians, who have suffered similar white-supported undertakings of slavery, genocide, and colonization, respectively. As a Euramerican I certainly do not want my ancestors’ “identities” brought to bear and “humiliated” any more than they already must be in order to question how acts of slavery, genocide, and colonization still impact us. Undoubtedly no one wants a Birmingham “Boss Mas’ah,” New York “Nazis,” or Indianapolis “Inquisition” team any time soon. And please, never connect me with the white stereotypes of law-boy haircuts, glasses, polo shirts, fear of a black planet, isolation from urban epicenters, khakis, neo-Confederate beliefs, Wall Street envy, a lifestyle of the rich and famous, and limited athletic ability. These caricatured stereotypes are not the way I define my whiteness. Admittedly, perhaps Euramericans deserve a taste of our own medicine. Maybe the recent group of Indigenous students at the University of North Colorado were correct in protesting the ill of mascots by *committing* the ill of mascotting. Their intramural basketball team, the Fightin’ Whites, is quite a fitting strategy for reminding Euramerica of what it feels like to have one’s identity co-opted.

In this article I demonstrated how the mascotting of Native America contributes to white hegemony and how the arguments play out in the public sphere. By examining a composite narrative of Native and university voices—along with the integration of cultural studies approaches—I conclude that the Seminole and Illini mascots contribute to white hegemony by constructing Natives in a generic fashion, reducing Indigenous culture to commodification devices, and blending cultures to the benefit of Euramerica. Throughout the analysis arguments were made to support the idea that Florida State University and the University of Illinois neither commemorate nor honor their respective Native mascots. Rather the universities align themselves with the centuries-old American tradition of oppressing Native cultures by demanding various forms of control over their identities. Infused also is the notion that American Indians have not merely acquiesced to the mascotting of Native America. Rather they have attempted to (re)claim their own Indianness through performance and protest.

#### NOTES

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1. Maurice Charland theorizes about rhetoric as constitutive between individuals and group identity in “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Quebecois,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 133–50.
2. United States Commission on Civil Rights, “Statement of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on the Use of American Indian Images and Nicknames as Sports Symbols,” April 13, 2001, <http://www.usccr.gov/statmnts/ntam001.htm> (accessed November 19, 2001).
3. National Congress of American Indians, “Resolution MID-GB-93-58,” National Coalition on Racism in Sports and the Media, <http://www.aics.org/NCRSM/index> (accessed November 19, 2001).
4. C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, *Team Spirits: The Native American Mascots Controversy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 5.
5. For a detailed discussion of the marketing of Native culture, see S. Elizabeth Bird, “‘Indians Are Like That’: Negotiating Identity in a Media World,” in *Black Marks: Minority Ethnic Audiences and Media*, ed. Karen Ross and Peter Playdon (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2001), 105–22; Ward Churchill, “Let’s Spread the Fun Around,” in *Indians Are Us? Culture and Genocide in Native North America* (Monroe ME: Common Courage Press, 1994), 65–72; C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, “Fighting Spirits: The Racial Politics of Sports Mascots,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 24, no. 3

(2000): 282–305; C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, *Beyond the Cheers: Race as Spectacle in College Sports* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Richard Morris and Phillip Wander, “American Indian Rhetoric: Dancing in the Shadows of the Ghost Dance,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 76 (1990): 164–91; Kent A. Ono and Derek Buescher, “Deciphering Pocahontas: Unpackaging the Commodification of a American Indian Woman,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18 (2001): 23–43; Carol Spindel, *Dancing at Halftime: Sports and the Controversy Over American Indian Mascots* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); and Hillary N. Weaver, “Indigenous Identity: What Is It, and Who Really Owns It?” *American Indian Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2001): 240–55.

6. Ono and Buescher, “Deciphering Pocahontas,” 35–36.

7. See Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Morris and Wander, “American Indian Rhetoric”; Richard Morris, “Educating Savages,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 152–71; and Tzvetan Todorov, *Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1972).

8. Quoted in Al Levine, “American Indian Protests Charges Atmosphere: Demonstrators Tell Fans to Grow Up,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, October 23, 1991, D1.

9. Jackson Miller, “Indians, Braves, and Redskins: A Performance Struggle for Control of an Image,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85 (1999): 188–202.

10. Charles Barnes, “Animals Are Mascots—Seminole Indians Are Symbols,” *Florida State Times* (September 2001): 10.

11. United States Commission on Civil Rights, “Statement of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on the Use of American Indian Images and Nicknames as Sports Symbols,” 3.

12. The collection and conflation of university and Native voices follows the “composite narrative” mode of textual analysis most recently employed by Jim A. Kuypers, Marilyn J. Young, and Michael Launer, “Composite Narrative, Authoritarian Discourse, and the Soviet Response to the Destruction of Iran Air Flight 655,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87 (2001): 305–20. These critics theorize that discourse found fragmented throughout a media-dependent society must be collected, and their “fragments may be combined and read as a composite narrative, the aggregate of smaller narratives and thematic fragments” (307). Due to the fragmented and decentralized nature of American Indian protest on the mascot issue, and the near impossibility of securing “protected” university documents in defense of mascotting, this study collects narratives, commentary, and Web-based activist rhetoric into a body of composite text.

13. Celeste Michele Condit, “Hegemony in a Mass-mediated Society: Concordance about Reproductive Technologies,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 11 (1994): 206.

14. Laura Anne Whitt, “Cultural Imperialism and the Marketing of Native America,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 19 (1995): 1–33.

15. King and Springwood, *Team Spirits*, 6.
16. C. Richard King, Ellen J. Staurowsky, Lawrence Baca, Laurel R. Davis, and Cornel Pewewardy, "Of Polls and Prejudice: *Sports Illustrated's* Errant 'Indian Wars,'" *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26 (2002): 391.
17. See Bird, "Indians Are Like That"; Rayna Green, "A Tribe Called Wannabe: Playing Indian in America and Europe," *Folklore* 99 (1988): 30–55; Devon A. Mihesuah, *American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 1996).
18. Haig A. Bosmajian, "Defining the American Indian: A Case Study in the Language of Suppression," *Speech Teacher* 21 (March 1973): 93.
19. Bosmajian, "Defining the American Indian," 99.
20. Conference on the Elimination of Racist Mascots (CERM), "Resolutions April 3–4, 1998," CERM Web site, <http://www.prarienet.org/prc/anti.html>, 3 (accessed November 8, 2001).
21. Morris and Wander, "American Indian Rhetoric," 166.
22. King and Springwood, *Team Spirits*, 7.
23. Lee Sigelman, "Hail to the Redskins? Public Reactions to a Racially Insensitive Team Name," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 15 (1998): 323.
24. Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). Burke discusses the dialectic of permanence and change as a tool to discover how language enters social realities and either maintains meanings or evolves. With the marginalization of ethnic groups, permanence oftentimes eclipses change because minority concerns find difficulty entering the dominant public. Thus the status quo—in politics and labeling—remains firm.
25. Miller, "Indians, Braves, and Redskins," 189.
26. See Miller, "Indians, Braves, and Redskins."
27. For a discussion of "identification"—the notion that two individuals of variant or competing backgrounds and values can come together—see Kenneth Burke, *Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967). In Burke's schema, Person A comes together with Person B (or vice versa) and in the process A and B combine to form AB—a social pattern having changed due to contact alone. Though basic, this social form of "consubstantiation" explains how simply *viewing* the other aids the dominant public in realizing that another group's identity is not commensurate with the dominant public's false image.
28. Barnes, "Animals Are Mascots," 10.
29. For a detailed discussion of stereotypes based on Plains-style features exploited in American popular culture, see Bosmajian, "Defining the American Indian"; John K. Mahon and Brent R. Weisman, "Florida's Seminole and Miccosukee Peoples," *A New History of Florida*, ed. Michael Gannon (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), 183–206; Morris, "Educating Savages"; and J. Leitch Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

30. Morris, "Educating Savages," 152.
31. Whitt, "Cultural Imperialism," 3.
32. Whitt, "Cultural Imperialism," 3.
33. Spindel, *Dancing at Halftime*, 138.
34. Robert Goldman, Deborah Heath, and Sharon L. Smith, "Commodity Feminism," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8 (1991): 333.
35. Spindel, *Dancing at Halftime*, 29.
36. Clem Iron Wing, "University of Illinois Wipes Its Rectum on the Eagle Feather," *American Comments Magazine* (2000): 1.
37. Honor the Chief Society, "Frequently Asked Questions about the Honor the Chief Society," <http://www.honorthethechief.org> (accessed November 20, 2001).
38. Spindel, *Dancing at Halftime*, 37.
39. Ono and Buescher, "Deciphering Pocahontas," 35–36.
40. Miller, "Indians, Braves, and Redskins," 191.
41. Ono and Buescher, "Deciphering Pocahontas," 35.
42. For more about American paternalism vis-à-vis American Indians, see Drinnon, *Facing West*; Mihesuah, *American Indians*; Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* (New York: Viking, 2001); Ronald A. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975); and Jeffrey Steele, "Reduced to Images: American Images in Nineteenth-Century Advertising," in *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*, ed. S. Elizabeth Bird (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1996), 45–65. Rogin's work on Jacksonian fatherhood and patriarchy is especially useful as a diachronic analysis of primary documents used to demonstrate American exploitation by way of the "parental" metaphor (Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* [New York: Alfred Knopf, 1975]).
43. See Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*; and Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era*.
44. Raymond Magyar, "'Seminole' is Fine," *Florida State Times* (November 2001): 3.
45. Charles Barnes, "Noles Never Give Up," *Florida State Times* (May 2001): 3.
46. Honor the Chief Society, "Frequently Asked Questions about the Chief Illiniwek Tradition," <http://www.honorthethechief.org> (accessed November 20, 2001).
47. Randall Lake, "Between Myth and History: Enacting Time in American Indian Protest Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 129.
48. Mark R. Connolly, "What's in a Name? A Historical Look at Native American Related Nicknames and Symbols at Three Universities," *Journal of Higher Education* 71, no. 5 (2000): 530.
49. Connolly, "What's in a Name?" 530.
50. Whitt, "Cultural Imperialism," 18–21.
51. See Connolly, "What's in a Name?"; Green, "A Tribe Called Wannabe"; King et. al., "Of Polls and Prejudice"; King and Springwood, *Team Spirits and Beyond the*

*Cheers*; Miller, "Indians, Braves, and Redskins"; Sigelman, "Hail to the Redskins"; and Spindel, *Dancing at Halftime*.

52. Morris, "Educating Savages," 155.

53. Morris, "Educating Savages," 161.

54. Charles Fruehling Springwood, "Playing Indian and Fighting (for) Mascots: Reading the Complications of Native American and Euro-American Alliances," in King and Springwood, *Team Spirits*, 304–27.

55. Bird, "Indians Are Like That," 121.

56. King et. al., "Of Polls and Prejudice," 395.

57. See Robert Jensen, "Banning 'Redskins' from the Sports Page: The Ethics and Politics of American Indian Nicknames," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 9 (1994): 16–25.