FAIL MONTEZUMA!
THE LAST VESTIGES OF AN OBSCURED YET STUBBORNLY
PERSISTENT CULTURE OF RACISM AT
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Fail Montezuma!

The Last Vestiges of an Obscured yet Stubbornly Persistent Culture of Racism at

San Diego State University

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10/10/15
Approval Date
DEDICATION

To the QPOCC: Thank you for taking a run at the wall. Now I’ll give it a shot. I wish I could have done more for you all sooner. This is my attempt to make-up for that.

To the HUGE coalition that fought the good fight in 2000-2002. You had ethics and facts on your side. Unfortunately, your opposition rigged the game. Let’s hope that, in the future, there are ethical people sitting in those chairs where you opponents once sat.

To all those who don’t know that they don’t know: this is the kind of stuff that gets in the way of our knowing and finding our way home.

To my Mom: It’s not your fault that you and I both grew-up not knowing. This is the kind of stuff that contributed to that.

To everyone at San Diego State University: students, faculty, staff and administrators - I love you all! So let’s put an end to this nonsense already, ok?
In my judgment, San Diego State's invocation of the Aztecs is not racist.

-Former SDSU President Stephen Weber
from his position paper on SDSU’s Aztec Affiliation, Nov. 16, 2000
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Fail Montezuma! The Last Vestiges of an Obscured yet Stubbornly Persistent Culture of Racism at San Diego State University
by
Ozzie Monge
Master of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences
San Diego State University, 2016

By any measure, San Diego State University boasts a very diverse student body. In fact, SDSU has been the recipient of the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award, a national honor, for two consecutive years (2013-2014). In spite of this distinction, SDSU still maintains a moniker and a mascot that were born during an era when the ideology of white supremacy was the accepted social norm. The school’s appropriation of Aztec culture in 1925 and the manner in which the students and faculty chose to use it demonstrates the ignorance that led to the consequentially racist misrepresentation of not only Aztecs, but of Indigenous people in general, with the most visible example being the school’s mascot. The mascot itself perpetuates the “noble savage” stereotype, reducing Indigenous people to anachronistic objects suitable for use as a good luck charm during sporting events; this is completely antithetical to SDSU’s achievements in diversity.

Many fail to understand why the mascot is racist in nature. This may be due to the fact that the word “Aztec” itself is not as racially charged as the word “Redskin” or any other derogatory racial slur. However, when the history behind the selection of the Aztec moniker is examined within the context of the social climate in which it was chosen, it becomes clearly evident how racism articulated itself during the nascent formation of San Diego State’s identity. Combined with the erroneous and romanticized (mis)understandings of the geographic region and its history, racism influenced the choices made by students, faculty and administrators, which led to the original appropriation of the Aztec culture in 1925. The role that white supremacy and racism had in taking the “Aztec” name, as well as the inevitable introduction of a mascot based on a racialized stereotype that choice dictated, has been obscured by San Diego State (whether this was intended or not I leave for the reader to decide). My intention is to reveal the actual history behind the choice of the moniker and mascot, bringing into the open the facts which have been, over time, obscured, forgotten and perhaps even intentionally hidden.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No one person accomplishes anything alone – to believe so is foolish. And since I’m no fool, I am keenly aware that what you are about to read is not so much a product of my own mind, but of the many minds I have encountered in my life, especially at SDSU. Of course, the first person I need to acknowledge is my Mom! Thank you for birthing me, Mom! I wouldn’t be here without you! I mean, beyond the literal significance of that statement, thank you for all the love and support you shower upon me.

Professor William Nericcio! Your patience, gentle nudging and encouragement got me here in the first place. Thank you for holding the door open for me and not letting “them” rely on those two-dimensional numbers permanently etched on the product of my misspent undergraduate years – my crappy transcript. You knew that piece of paper misrepresented the whole of me, and you gave me the chance to prove it and redeem myself, at least in the eyes of those who hold pieces of paper with numbers on them to be important.

Professor, rather, Associate Vice President Joanna Brooks! Your gentle, yet firm, guidance through this process made this possible. Without you, I would probably still be flopping around trying to figure out what the heck I want to write about, since everything interests me and I want to examine it all. It is your voice that would come into my head, making me think twice, just as I prepared to chase yet another shiny object down a rabbit hole. Also, it was in your class that I learned about the opportunity to teach as a graduate student at SDSU. Can you believe I almost neglected to take that class? Oof! I hesitate to think where I would be right now if I had not.

Professor David Kamper! Thank you for listening to me as I prattled on about the crazy things I found, and for helping me to focus on what to do with those crazy things. But most importantly, thank you for giving me the opportunity to teach for your department as well as giving me the chance to help out with the Native students at SDSU, both current and future!
The Rhetoric and Writing Studies department! Specifically Professors Glen McClish, Richard Boyd, Chris Werry and Jamie Madden: In a very real way, if it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t be writing on this topic. Your acceptance of my application to teach RWS 100 led me to teaching AMIND 120 as well. It was in the teaching of those classes that the inspiration to write on this subject hit me, that inspiration coming directly from the next group of people I need to acknowledge. But beyond that interesting chain of events, thank you for helping me become a better teacher! I’m forever learning, so you may not have seen the last of me.

The students from my AMIND 120 and RWS 100 classes from the Fall semester, 2014! Although I held the title of “teacher” in our class, I learned so much from you all. Without you, I would never have come to the realization that this thesis needed to be written, not just to help me complete my time as a graduate student at SDSU, but as my duty to you and those who will follow you in the future. Thank you for laughing at my corny jokes, for watching all of those 1491s videos with me and loving them, and thank you for being the ones who unwittingly set me on the path to hopefully wash away the last few remaining “cultural skidmarks on the diversity underwear” of San Diego State. You inspire me!

The Staff of the SDSU Library Special Collections and University Archives! Without you, this project would have been exponentially more difficult to accomplish. Thank you for digitizing all of those old yearbooks, school newspapers and photographs, and thank you for courteously listening to my occasional rants and joining me in the headshaking and laughing.

Last, but by no means the least, thank you, Moosey! I’ll never stop thanking you.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

By any measure, San Diego State University boasts a very diverse cultural, ethnic and gender student body, a fact that is a source of pride for the institution. In fact, SDSU has, in the past two years (2013-2014), been the recipient of the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award, a national honor. In spite of this distinction, SDSU still maintains a moniker and a mascot that were born during an era when the ideology of white supremacy was the accepted social norm. The appropriation of Aztec culture and the manner in which the students and faculty chose to use the Aztec culture demonstrates a complete misunderstanding and misrepresentation of not only Aztecs, but of Indigenous people in general - which includes a mascot that perpetuates the “noble savage” stereotype which reduces Indigenous people to anachronistic objects suitable for use as a good luck charm during sporting events. This practice of using a mascot that is misrepresentation of an indigenous culture, a practice that is still in place today, is completely antithetical to SDSU’s achievements in diversity.

Many fail to understand why the mascot is racist in nature. This may be due to the fact that the word “Aztec” itself is not as racially charged as the word “Redskin” or any other derogatory racial slur. However, when the history behind the selection of the Aztec moniker is examined within the context of the social climate in which it was chosen, it becomes clearly evident how racism articulated itself during the nascent formation of San Diego State’s identity. Combined with the erroneous and romanticized (mis)understandings of the geographic region and its history, racism influenced the choices made by students, faculty and administrators, which led to the appropriation of the Aztec culture in 1925. The role that white supremacy and racism had in taking the “Aztec” name, as well as the inevitable introduction of a mascot based on a racialized stereotype that choice dictated has been obscured by San Diego State (whether this was intended or not I leave for the reader to
My intention is to reveal the actual history behind the choice of the moniker and mascot, bringing into the open the facts which have been, over time, obscured, forgotten and perhaps even intentionally hidden. With the obliviousness removed, it is hoped a conversation can begin that will lead to the removal of this tarnished symbol that casts a long shadow on SDSU’s diversity achievements.

What we are going to witness are products of their time. They are what they are and must be considered in the context in which they were created. By no means am I trying to go into the past and bring indictments on specific people, their actions and their words; that would be silly. But their actions and their words offer us some insight into what was going on, socially, at the time, and the manner in which systemic and institutionalized racism influenced these individuals. Their words and deeds must be brought forward and shared because they reflect not only their creators, but a glimpse into the nature of the society which allowed them to form these actions, words and their accompanying images. There is nothing that can change the past or un-do what was done. What we must be do is learn from the past (insert cliche about not learning from history here) and, as I share with my students, to ensure that those “bad” acts are not repeated in the now and in the future.

As we go through this particular story of SDSU, one that has been, at worst, intentionally whitewashed, or at best overlooked and forgotten (in which case, you still must ask “why?”), we will find things that may cause us to wince, even utter the occasional “what in the fluff” - as we gaze into the past with our contemporary eyes, through our learned lenses. Some might accuse this work as being that of revisionist history, of political correctness, or as one that comes from a bias. To which I would offer: isn’t the denial, the obscuring and the dismissal of these unfortunate artifacts itself revisionist, biased and perhaps even smacking of the same sort of narrow mentality from which the actions/words/images we are examining were born?

It is this present-day defense of the indefensible that puzzles me. It is why that, when asked by my students if I am offended by the mascot I reply that it is not the mascot that offends me, nor is it the way the name “Aztec” came to be associated with SDSU that I find offensive - I understand how this came to be and why, given that the racialized assumption of white supremacy was the norm of the time. It is the fact that an institution of higher learning continues to not only perpetuate, but defend and justify the name and mascot that is
offensive, especially if you know how the moniker and mascot came into being in the first place. This is where the true wrong lies. In the words of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, in its statement urging the end of the use of Native American images and nicknames as sports symbols (April 13, 2001):

The stereotyping of any racial, ethnic, religious or other groups when promoted by our public educational institutions, teach all students that stereotyping of minority groups is acceptable, a dangerous lesson in a diverse society. Schools have a responsibility to educate their students; they should not use their influence to perpetuate misrepresentations of any culture or people.¹

Why has the university continued to cling to this constructed relic of racism from the past? Why is it that there is such an emotional response from the alumni, the majority of the student body when the mascot is challenged? Two explanations I put forward in the fourth chapter are “dysconscious racism,” a form of racism that, due to a lack of critical thinking and examination, causes people to accept culturally sanctioned myths and notions created by the dominant white society (which are reinforced through miseducation, popular culture and such things as mascots based on racialized stereotypes) and “imperial nostalgia,” a concept which is touched upon by the epigraph that appears at the beginning of In Whose Honor?:

It has ever been the way of the white man in his relation to the Indian, first, to sentimentalize him as a monster until he has been killed off…and second, to sentimentalize him in retrospect as the noble savage.
– James Gray, “The Illinois” 1940

The argument I put forward in the following pages can be surmised as follows: After the arrival of the first Europeans, white supremacy and racism were (and some may argue, still are) the norm in what we now know as San Diego; this racist ideology, found its way into the early identity of San Diego State and allowed for the appropriation of the Aztec civilization in 1925, an appropriation based on the erroneous belief that Aztecs were actually from the Southwest; that societal acceptance of racism permitted the students and faculty to speak and act out in very racist ways, to include performances in blackface and redface; it was this climate of normalized racism that allowed for the very birth of the San Diego State

mascot “Monty Montezuma in 1941;” that eventually performances in blackface were acknowledged to be racist, yet the nature of racism towards Native Americans permitted the continued performances in redface by students, to include the mascot, with the school’s blessings, to this day; that this particular form of racism needs to come to an end at SDSU, and that the moniker and mascot be replaced.

I do not spend a lot of time on the issue of Native American mascots per se, mostly due to the fact that so much has been written on that topic that to do so here would seem redundant, even futile given that, despite all of this data, knowledge and information, the mascot and moniker at SDSU persist. Rather than address the mascot, I chose instead to

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2The effort to remove harmful and disparaging stereotypes of Native Americans as sports mascots can be traced to the National Congress of American Indians who, in 1968, began their campaign to create public awareness of these stereotypes in print, film and other popular media. Since then, many books, articles and films have been produced that address the use of Native Americans as sports mascots, far too many to enumerate here. Within this body of work are scholarly texts that specifically address the harmful effects and hostile environments that these mascots create in educational settings. While not cited in this particular thesis, several of these texts were extremely valuable in informing my writing and must be mentioned. The first of which is In Whose Honor?, the 1997 film about Charlene Teter’s (ultimately successful) efforts to remove the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s mascot, “Chief Illiniwek.” Having become familiar with the history of the “mascot controversy” at SDSU between 2000-2002,” the parallels in the manner in which the alumni and administrators zealously (and irrationally) defend their mascot at these two institutions (U of I and SDSU) are uncanny, to include the racialized ugliness displayed by the alumni and students who chose to defend their respective mascots. There is evidence that Steven Weber, who was president of SDSU during the 2000-2002 mascot debate actually viewed the film; he was apparently unmoved by the case it made. And if that causes one to wonder why, there is also the highly questionable declaration that Weber made in his letter to the NCAA on January 3, 2003 that Aztecs were not Native Americans (please refer to the San Diego Union Tribune article “NCAA puts limited ban on Indian mascots” by Brent Schrotboer from August 6, 2005, which can be found at this url: http://www.utsandiego.com/uniontrib/20050806/news_1s6mascots.html); begging the question on which continent, precisely, was the Aztec Empire located? Another way of interpreting Weber’s “Aztecs aren’t Native Americans” declaration would be that he unilaterally, albeit by inference, re-defined all Native Americans within the boundaries of the United States as “Native United Statesians of America,” or something along those lines. Whichever way you look at it, it is should be evidently clear to anyone capable of forming a critical thought that Weber’s redefinition is dubious, at best – and completely unethical and underhanded, at worse. However you may want to characterize it, it is clearly wrong. Weber’s unilateral removal of the Aztecs from the continent was later echoed by the NCAA in 2005 when it banned the use of Native American mascots and imagery, which is how San Diego State managed to elude the prohibition (Weber’s position on the NCAA Division I Board of Directors at the time may have had something to do with this, a situation which deserves further investigation as it hints of a conflict of interest). This sort irrational and questionable defense of mascots that are derived from racialized stereotypes is something that C. Richard King specifically wrote about specifically in his article “Defensive Dialogues: Native American Mascots, Anti-Indianism, and Educational Institutions,” which is included in an anthology he edited entitled The Native American Mascot Controversy - A Handbook. King argues that the positions that educations institutions, through the actions of their administrators, promote a climate of “anti-Indianism.” When you come to learn the details of the 2000-2002 mascot debate at SDSU, you will once again clearly see parallels between the examples King offers and the actions of those who sought to defend “Monty Montezuma.” In order to become familiar with this history, you will need to examine the contents of a binder that was created by the American Indian Studies Department at
address the history of racism at San Diego State that allowed it to come into being in the first place. It is not the moniker “Aztec” that carries the stench of racism, it is the manner in which this moniker was used, and the actions of the students and faculty it created, that reveals the racism behind SDSU’s “invocation of the Aztec.”
CHAPTER 2

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The San Diego Normal School was founded on March 13, 1897, although the school building itself had yet to be constructed. In the interim, the trustees of the Normal School rented space in an office building near Sixth and F streets in downtown San Diego. The first classes of the Normal School were convened on November 1, 1898, at this location. Two years after it was founded, the San Diego Normal School would relocate from its temporary, downtown location over a dentist’s office, to its “permanent” location (which would later also prove to be temporary) at the intersection of Park and El Cajon Boulevards in what is now called the University Heights neighborhood. While the selection of this location had more to do with local land speculation intrigue than anything else, the choice of the site on which the Normal School was to be built would expose it to unforeseen, perhaps unintended influences on the formation of the institution’s identity when it opened its doors to students in 1899. To the northeast, about three miles away, were the ruins of Mission San Diego de Alcala, a site that would be frequently visited by students during faculty-led hikes for lessons on history.\(^3\) A little over a mile and a half to the south was the future site of the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in Balboa Park, an event for which both faculty and students assisted in preparing, and in which they would actively participate. A scant three quarters of a mile away from the Normal School, near the intersection of Idaho and El Cajon Boulevards, would be the future home of the Exalted Cyclops of San Diego No. 64, the chapter house of the local Kl Klux Klan, established in 1922.\(^4\) The mission and the park

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will clearly have direct influences on the formation of the school’s identity, while the Klan hall’s location is mentioned here only as an indicator of the overall social climate of the time, one which allowed for the acceptance of an overtly racist organization operating in the open. What these three locations have in common, the mission, the park and the Klan hall, is that the ideology of white supremacy allowed them to come into being. While they came about in different ways and over the span of decades, they all bear the heritage of white supremacy. This is how the Normal School, and later the San Diego State Teacher’s College, would find itself in the middle of a confluence of white supremacy, a situation which could be referred to as a “white supremacy sandwich,” one made up of uniquely San Diego variety of ingredients, but still reflective of a very particular form of Anglo/Euro-American racism.

I have not found (nor hopefully ever will) any direct links between the Klu Klux Klan and the Normal School/State College. But in looking for a link, it was discomforting to find two names associated with the Klan, L.E. French (who formed the Klan chapter in 1921) and V. Wayne Kenaston (who expanded the Klan membership and activities from 1930-31) to be working, quite openly and publicly, within the very core of city and county politics. Both of these Klansmen were very much civically engaged, even more so in the case of L.E. French, who was in the employ of both the state and federal governments (as a quarantine officer). Kenaston was active in the iron workers union, and his son, Wayne Kenaston, Jr., would later go on to attend San Diego State College in the 40s before leaving to join the Army Air Corp in 1944. Later, in the 1980s, Wayne Kenaston Sr. donated his Klan related records and materials to the San Diego History Center, and his son also provided an oral history to the same.

The fact that the KKK was able to operate, first out of an office in the Spreckels Building and later with its own meeting hall near a major thoroughfare in full public view, speaks volumes as to the social and racial climate of San Diego, and the United States in general, in the 1920’s and 30’s. This was the very time period that the identity of the Normal School/Teacher’s College was being formed. Of course, the notion of white superiority in the U.S. has its origins further back than the 20s and 30s. It is the very stuff from which Manifest Destiny and the “civilizing mission” (the White Man’s Burden) is made, it is a part of the justification for the Imperial period of the United States and, lest we forget, the notion of white/christian superiority and domination is the very foundation on which institution
of chattel slavery was built, and which rationalized and justified the genocide of indigenous people; it is at the very core of the legal claim to the land the U.S. occupies.\textsuperscript{5}

To show how ingrained and accepted the concept of white superiority was (and some would argue, still is) during this period of time and how commonplace and casually-uttered racist remarks were, let us consider a cartoon drawn in 1929 by future San Diegan and person beloved by many, Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel), that was recently brought back into the public conscious when it failed to sell at auction. The image, which contains the words “Take Home a High-Grade Nigger For Your Woodpile!” was created for Judge magazine, a satirical weekly published in New York by which Dr. Seuss was employed. Yes, Dr. Seuss was racist. At that time. And so was almost every “white” person – that was the cultural norm of the day in the dominant Anglo-American settler society. Dr. Suess’ later work provides us with the evidence that people can cure themselves of the disease of racism. Unfortunately, the official website for his art obscures this unfortunate chapter in his early career, hiding it from the public eye. I believe that it should be highlighted and brought forward as it shows how he evolved as an artist, as well as a growing, learning human who came to abandon racism; this is a lesson from which we all could learn. Neglecting to discuss it or confront it only contributes to the perpetuation of ignorance, and it is ignorance which enables racism to exist.

In order to further make the point that racism was the dominant societal norm, and very much present in the early formation of San Diego State’s institutional identity, we now turn to an example that is directly relevant to this project. Here are the words of San Diego Teacher’s College President Edward Hardy in his opening message for the 1923 yearbook:

Harper’s Weekly, once the most famous “journal of civilization” in America, now remembered only by the generation that is passing, carried, in an issue of several decades ago, a small cartoon of a colored mammy and a little pickaninny, with a bit of dialogue that ran something like this:

"Chile, how ole you is?"
"Well, if you goes by what my mammy says, Ise six; but if you goes by de fun I se had, Ise a hunderd."

\textsuperscript{5} The “Doctrine of Discovery” is discussed in detail in Steve Newcomb’s book \textit{Pagans in the Promised Land}.\textsuperscript{5}
Figure 1. 1929 - An early image by Dr. Suess for the magazine *Judge*. Racism and the assertion of white supremacy were expressed much more openly at the time.6

Our "State College" child is now only two years old, "going on three," and is chronologically an infant; but, if experiences make for development, it must be counted as at least of adolescent years.

Certainly, President Hardy, being a learned man of letters, could have found a variety of other ways to express the sentiment that he was attempting to share. It is the ease with which he accesses the “mammy” and the “pickaninny” imagery, without offering any more context other than his sadness that younger people no longer read *Harper’s Weekly*, that conveys his ingrained perception towards people of color. Certainly he knew that these words were going to be inscribed into the yearbook, that these words would persist beyond his life. If he was so set on using this specific example, why did he not frame what he was about to share as being somewhat problematic, a symptom of its time? The inference is that he saw no problem using this racist imagery from America’s slaveholding past, as the only problem that he has is the one he clearly shares: what a shame that young people don’t read *Harper’s Weekly* anymore! This is how ingrained racism articulates itself, even from people who are

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deemed to be “progressives” of their time. While Dr. Suess’ and Dr. Hardy’s racism may not be of the “white hoods & robes with burning crosses” variety, it is still racist in its nature. However the introduction of racism and white/christian superiority/dominance into the region we now call San Diego began well before Hardy’s problematic remarks or Suess’ racist cartoon. It is this history that provides the first piece of the white supremacy sandwich.

Figure 2. A typical representation of a mammy and pickaninny. President Hardy’s casual use of this example reveals how racism was so nonchalantly expressed at the time.  

**QUE SERRA, SERRA**

The 1850s were horrible times to be an Indigenous person in Anglo-dominated California. Just a month before the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which brought an end to the Mexican-American War, gold was found at Sutter’s Mill. Already sickened with racism, Anglo-Americans and other European settlers contracted “gold fever.” These two maladies combined lead to some of the most atrocious, genocidal behavior by white people, perhaps the worst displayed since they first set foot on this continent. In San Diego, an article published in the *San Diego Herald* on Oct 7 1853 reported that an

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8 Cutcha Risling Baldy does an excellent job of explaining the perspective of Native Californians during this period in time by using the popular television series The Walking Dead as a lens, paralleling the experience of the survivors in the series, who are contending with the “zombie apocalypse” to Indigenous people in California. Please refer to her blog post “On telling Native people to just “get over it” or why I teach about the Walking Dead in my Native Studies classes... *Spoiler Alert!*” which can be found at http://www.cutcharislingbaldy.com/blog/on-telling-native-people-to-just-get-over-it-or-why-i-teach-about-the-walking-dead-in-my-native-studies-classes-spoiler-alert
Indigenous person walking in the streets was risking his life - apparently white Americans would simply shoot them (because they could?). But these were not the first people to mistreat the Indigenous people of the region. 80 years before the good, upright Anglo-American citizens of San Diego were freely and openly murdering Indigenous people in the city streets as a form of “sport,” or exploiting loopholes in the law that allowed for the imposition a form of temporary chattel slavery of the local natives (all without fear of legal consequences, of course), their European cousins in settler colonialism from Spain were killing and enslaving local Indians in the name of God and King.

1769 saw the establishment of La Misión San Diego de Alcalá by Junipero Serra, a Franciscan priest born in Mallorca, Spain. This would be the first in a chain of twenty-one missions that would extend from San Diego to San Francisco, a project initiated by the Spanish crown to assert its territorial claim, to counter any attempts by the Empress Catherine the Great to claim the land for herself and the Russian Empire. Mission San Diego de Alcala was occupied by the U.S. Army after the Mexican-American War ended. The mission would fall into disrepair and ruins shortly thereafter. It was in this condition that the students of the San Diego Normal School/State Teacher’s College would find the mission during their excursions for history class or casual day hikes.

In the imagined Anglo-American version of the mission’s history, the founding of the mission has been associated with the “birth” of the State of California itself, and is romanticized as such in the various versions of its creation stories. The mission becomes the “birthplace of Christianity” and “western civilization” on the west coast. The Junipero Serra of this narrative is a kind, loving patriarch, bringing enlightenment and knowledge to the backwards, pagan savages by teaching the proper way to live and the right god to which you should pray and the manner in which you do so. In this romanticized myth, hapless, ignorant Indians were even taught the right way to eat when the Spanish showed them how to

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9 Brendan C. Lindsay, *Murder State: California’s Native American Genocide, 1846-1873* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 152.


farm and raise cattle, because clearly the way the Indians have been subsisting on the land for thousands of years was wrong! It is this idealized narrative that is perpetuated, to this day, throughout the State of California’s public school system in the form of the mandatory “Mission Project,” an assignment which almost all fourth graders are required to complete. But before that, it was this inaccurate memory of Serra and the missions that the future teachers at the San Diego Normal School and later Teacher’s College were having instilled into them. Given that they would go on to teach elementary school children, is it any wonder that this warped story of Serra and the missions persists in the California elementary educational system of today?

![Image of Serra statue](image-url)

**Figure 3. Serra the Savior of Indian Souls, as remembered in selective colonial memory, by settlers of both Anglo and Spanish derivation. And yes, this statue very creepy, especially in light of the child molestation scandals that have plagued the Church in contemporary times. It screams “Stranger danger!”**

The mission and Serra were to become so much a part of the school’s identity, that they were memorialized in one of the school’s official songs. This song persisted after the relocation to the current site of San Diego State, when it stopped being sung is unknown:

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One golden day in summer came Junipero Serra,
With all his pious brothers lean and fat;
There wasn’t any school at all in California,
Now what do you think of that?
Now what do you think of that?
He started up the singing just to keep away the fog,
And the naked heathen flocked about his knees,
And he sat there and he taught them, did that good old pedagogue,
Yes, he charmed them with the latest pedagese.
San Diego State College,
We will point with pride to Fra Junipero,
And we’ll ever be thankful
For the day he came from Mexico.
When Father Serra comes again,
He’ll motor up the hill,
And the president will meet him at the door,
And nothing but the meadow larks and sunshine will be still
The same as it was before,
The same as it was before,
For the teachers will be teaching other teachers how to teach,
And the learners will be learning at their ease,
And in the auditorium he’ll hear a thrilling speech,
Of the wonder of the latest pedagese.  

The song was written by Professor Irving Outcault, who taught English at the SDSTC. Professor Outcault would later be invited by George Marston, one of the wealthy “founding fathers” of San Diego, to sit on the Board of Directors of Presidio Park, the Junipero Serra Museum and Library and of the San Diego History Center, when Marston founded all three in 1929. Clearly, Outcault was a Serra booster.

What Marston, Outcault, the SDSTC and pretty much every other Anglo/Euro-American failed (and continues to fail) to remember, or perhaps willfully chooses to ignore, is the brutality of the mission system, of the inhumane treatment of indigenous people at the hands of the Spanish friars and the soldiers who were there to guard the mission. It is a literal whitewashing of history, and fails to take into consideration (or discounts because of the demand for “written” evidence) accounts from the Indigenous people. For example, an


official document from the California Department of Education called “A Look at...4th Grade in California Public Schools and that describes the Common Core State Standards” dated October, 2011 offers this about the mission project:

The historical record of this era remains incomplete due to the relative absence of native testimony, but it is clear that while missionaries brought agriculture, the Spanish language and culture, and Christianity to the native population, American Indians suffered in many California missions.\(^{15}\)

To its credit, the document at least mentions that native people suffered in the missions, but such an understatement fails to identify the activities taking place at the missions for what they were: genocide. It is akin to saying the people interned at Auschwitz suffered terribly at the hands of their captors, and leaving it at that. The truth is that there is no “relative absence of native testimony,” but a failure to accept was should be considered to be testimonial evidence.\(^{16}\) There appears to be a conscious refusal to discuss what really happened to indigenous people during the mission period. Here is an example of the “relatively absent testimony” that the California Department of Education apparently is unable to find:

I was told by my uncle that the Indians were taken to San Diego Mission, San Luis Rey Mission and San Capistrano Mission. Families were separated, forced to work with not enough food, actually starved. They were whipped, beaten and forced to become Catholics.\(^{17}\)

And another:

There are a lot of stories, a lot of stories the people tell about the evil that hit them with the missions and the priests. There’s only one road going out of the reservation. Ti (sic) used to be that people would walk in the night time, down that road, walking, going to town maybe. They used to hear people talking, people crying, people screaming. You could hear them weeping. What they heard was


\(^{16}\) Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (London: Zed, 2001), 34.

\(^{17}\) Rupert Costo and Jeannette Henry, The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide (San Francisco: Indian Historian for the American Indian Historical Society, 1987), 140.
from the people in the missions, weeping and weeping." Eva Pagling (Chumash) from an interview in 1979.18

And another (you get the point by now, I am sure):

I also had a great-uncle. He died in 1856 or 1857. His father came back, they escaped, they never could keep the mountain people in the mission, because they always managed to escape. ...So one of the people they took to the mission came home. But he came home with a collar around his neck, and he showed us that he had pulled plows and he had that collar to pull the plows. I wish now that I would have kept that collar and showed it to people. But we cannot keep things that belong to the dead, and the collar was burned after he died. But I saw that with my own eyes. Yes, it was a collar made of wood. It went around the neck and it had little steel hooks on the back, where you can see where they tied the ropes on it, or whatever they put on it. They were put on the Indians to pull the plows." - Rosalie Robertson (Kumeyaay) from an interview in 1979.19

The reference to “mountain people” above is to those people who lived in the interior, away from the coast. The Spanish and Mexican governments were never able to fully control the Indigenous people who resided in the interior of California; that task would later be taken up all too willingly by the “American” Anglo-European colonizers, the Stae of California and the U.S. federal government. Those genocidal efforts also become “whitewashed” in the Anglo-European creation myth of San Diego and California.

We also have the testimony from other Europeans, in this case documented in the manner in which Western academics prefer (someone wrote it down), of those who witnessed the treatment of indigenous people at the missions first hand:20

...We mention it with pain, the resemblance is so perfect, that we saw men and women loaded with irons, others in the stocks; and at length the noise of the strokes of a whip struck our ears.

“[Indians] were bound with rawhide ropes and some were bleeding from wounds and some children were tied to their mothers. The next day we saw some terrible things. Some of the run-away men were tied on sticks and beaten with

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 151.
20 Thanks to Cutcha Risling Baldy for sharing Costa’s research, as well finding these quotes that she features in her blog post “Pope Francis Decides to Make Father Junipero Serra a Saint or In Which I Tell Pope Francis He Needs to Take a Native Studies Class Like Stat,” accessed November 8, 2015, http://www.cutcharislingbaldy.com/blog/pope-francis-decides-to-make-father-junipero-serra-a-saint-or-in-which-i-tell-pope-francis-he-needs-to-take-a-native-studies-class-like-stat.
straps.” -Russian otter hunter Vassilli Petrovitch Taragkanoff, who also had this to say: “From all I saw, I must say the Spaniards are bad men.”

“The treatment shown to the Indians is the most cruel I have ever read in history. For the slightest things they receive heavy floggings, are shackled, and put in the stocks, and treated with so much cruelty that they are kept whole days without drink of water.” (Padre Antonio de la Conception Horra, 1799)

“There is not a single mission where all the gentiles have not been scandalized, and even on the roads, so I have been told. Surely, as the gentiles themselves state, [Spanish] are committing a thousand evils, particularly those of a sexual nature. The Fathers have petitioned Don Pedro concerning these points, but he has paid very little attention to them.” (Father Jayme, 1772)

Yes, the missions were horrible, inhumane places. Is it any wonder that there would be revolts against the missions? Why is it that the atrocities which were committed at the missions have been obscured and replaced with the romanticized lie that is taught in elementary schools throughout the State of California in the form of the fourth grade mission projects? Instead, we should be teaching our children about the wrongs committed at the missions, so that these acts may not ever be repeated again, with mission projects that should celebrate resistance to inhumane treatment. Instead, we have a perpetuation of a lie, an institutionalized whitewashing of the atrocities committed by European settlers, of both Anglo and Spanish derivation, in the region we now call “California.” What exactly is it that is being taught to our children?

Figure 4. A "typical" product of the 4th Grade Mission project in all public schools in the State of California. Since all the kids have to build them, is this the new version of forced labor to build missions? (wink wink).21

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21 Roosevelt Elementary School, “California Mission Extravaganza,” last modified May 11, 2013,
Pope Francis recently canonized Father Junipero Serra, the founder of the Spanish Mission System in California. Prior to the canonization, his announced intention to do so was quickly met with protests, both on the internet and the occasional physical picketing of a mission, protests which pointed to the many documented atrocities committed against the indigenous populations of what we now know as “California” as reasons to NOT canonize Serra. In addition, a petition was created on MoveOn.org, addressed to the Pope, asks him to “understand that Father Serra was responsible for the deception, exploitation, oppression, enslavement and genocide of thousands of Indigenous Californians, ultimately resulting in the largest ethnic cleansing in North America.”

It goes without saying that these pleas fell upon deaf ears, or more likely, were simply ignored. Serra is now a Saint, which leaves you wondering to what level of inhumanity someone must sink before the Church considers you to be “unsaintworthy.”

There were many articles written on Serra’s then-pending canonization, both pro and con, shared primarily through social media. One of my favorite academics and a

Figure 5. A 4th Grade Mission project that features a far more accurate history lesson than anything the State-imposed lesson offers. This project was made by the child of Inez Sanchez, they are Luiseño from the La Jolla Indian Reservation. My thanks to them for allowing me to use this image.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{22} Inez Sanchez, "More Accurate" Mission Project, emailed to Author July 20, 2015.

\textsuperscript{23} The text of the petition can be read at MoveOn.org, “Urge Pope Francis to Abandon the Canonization of Junipero Serra,” accessed November 8, 2015, \url{http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/urge-pope-francis-to?source=c.em&r_by=12322920}. 

\url{http://roosevelt.dinuba.k12.ca.us/news/what_s_new/california_mission_extravaganza}. 
“sometimes” active blogger, Cutchta Risling Baldy, wrote her own response entitled “Pope Francis decides to make Father Junipero Serra a saint or In Which I Tell Pope Francis he needs to take a Native Studies class like stat,” where she shared many of the eye witness accounts and oral accounts I have in turn shared here. Clearly, Serra has blood on his hands, and so do those who continue to whitewash the true history of what took place at the missions. Despite all the evidence that is offered to show just how unsaintly of a man he was, evidence that we would today deem to make a case for crimes against humanity, he will was still canonized by Pope Francis. The truth continues to be whitewashed, and ignorance has once again been perpetuated by the Church, with the State of California continuing to be an agent in the spreading of lies through its public education system.

Aside from the unfortunate song written by Professor Outcalt, what does all of this Serra and Mission stuff have to do with San Diego State? Perhaps figure 6 will offer a clue. As we have read from those who actually experienced what happened at these places of “teaching,” “civilizing” and “christianity,” the missions had more to do with territorial control, the assertion of European and Christian dominance, and terrible acts of genocide than fatherly acts of teaching and compassion. These terrible acts have then in turn imbued what would otherwise be an inanimate object, the mission buildings themselves, into edifices of horror and inhumanity. By failing to (or perhaps refusing to) come to terms with the actual history of the mission, ignorance is perpetuated. It is that ignorance which lead to the replication of the architecture of genocide to be replicated on the campus of San Diego State. This is not an unfortunate coincidence. It is the result of a willing forgetfulness, ignorance, obliviousness, of a whitewashing that is, to those who are familiar with the true nature of the history of California’s missions, as obvious as the beautiful, whitewashed exteriors of these edifices.

One of the promotional logos used by San Diego State, one which is worn as a lapel pin by its administrators, evokes the mission companario that is reproduced in the architecture of Hepner Hall. Hepner Hall also serves as a popular backdrop for graduation photographs, as well as others wishing to commemorate their time at SDSU as a student, or their visit to the campus. Now imagine a descendent of a survivor of the mission system’s
brutality gazing upon those lapel pins, as they are greeted by a smiling face and an extended, welcoming hand. Or if that descendent were to see people gleefully, playfully posing for that perfect shot in front of that reproduced mission façade. What thoughts might be going through their minds? I have yet to post that question to someone who is descended from a mission survivor, but I can share my perspective, as someone that is fully aware of the true history of the mission system. Those smiling faces, the beautiful blue skies above Hepner Hall, the palm trees swaying in the breeze – they create a cognitive dissonance. What if those people were actually aware of the history of the missions, and how San Diego State, out of sheer ignorance, came to reproduce a building that has more in common with a death camp than a place of learning.

But it is just a building, right? Just like the Battle Flag of the Confederacy is just a flag, except now it has become generally accepted that the “Rebel Flag” has more to do with the institution of slavery and racism than pride and heritage. Would someone who was aware of the true history associated with that flag, which includes enslaving humans and subjecting them to racist treatment, still proudly wear the Battle Flag as a lapel pin? Would they pose beside it, smiling, to commemorate an event or an accomplishment? I would hope not.

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We teach our children why slavery, racism and genocide are wrong in an effort to educate and prevent such acts in the future. It is because we have confronted the truth of the motivations of the Confederacy that it is now generally accepted that the Confederate Flag is a symbol of slavery and racism. But teaching the truth of what took place at the missions, which were essentially slave camps and sites of genocide, does not happen in California’s public school system, in fact the opposite occurs; the history is romanticized and the truth is obscured. What if people were actually taught the truth of the mission system, would they still wear those companario lapel pins? Would they still pose in front of Hepner Hall? Would Hepner Hall have even been designed to look like a mission in the first place?

How the original buildings of the campus came to be fashioned after the mission comes from the another part of the White Supremacy Sandwich, the imprint that Balboa Park made upon San Diego State by during the 1915 Panama California Exposition.

**DEL SUDOESTE: THE INVENTED/IMAGINED SOUTHWEST IMPRINTED INTO SAN DIEGO STATE’S IDENTITY**

While the manufactured (and patently false) memory of a peaceful, altruistic mission that brought christianity and civilization to the west coast may have been germinating in the imaginations of the early Anglo-American settlers, it was the 1915 Panama-California Exposition that allowed this erroneous and whitewashed history to not only take root, but to flourish and make its way into the identity of the San Diego State Teacher’s College. Much has been written about the intrigues between the various “founding fathers” of San Diego that led to the exhibition, a spectacle that was more about promoting the region to draw people to the region to buy land therefore lining the pockets of those “founding fathers.” These are the origins of San Diego’s tourist economy, and also of the land-developer domination of city and county politics that continues to this day. With that said, our purpose is to examine the influence the Exhibition itself had on the early formation of San Diego State’s institutional identity, and to see how the Exposition, too, reinforced the notion of white, european, christian supremacy as it celebrated the culmination of Manifest Destiny, and the glory of the

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nation’s most recent imperial achievement, the opening of the Panama Canal - all while trying to make a buck by boosting interest in land speculation / development and tourism.

The park itself is named after Spanish conquistador Vasco Núñez de Balboa, the man who crossed the Isthmus of Panama and “discovered” the Pacific Ocean. Fun fact about Balboa: he was a fan of “dogging,” the practice of using large, trained war dogs who were “raised on a diet of human flesh” to kill Indians - one account has his favorite dog tearing the head off of a Cuna leader. In another “dogging” incident, just two days before he managed to stumble onto the largest ocean on the planet and claim it for Spain, he ordered a few Indigenous Panamanians, who Balboa had been deemed to be guilty of “unnaturall lechery” (their culture included what some might now call “cross-dressing” - not that Balboa seemed to worry much about having to justify his actions) and had them torn apart and eaten by his dogs. A little over a year after his “discovery,” Balboa himself had his head removed on charges of treason against the crown. When the good citizens of San Diego chose to name the park after Balboa, they chose to remember only his discovery, and not his heinous acts, let alone his fate. Were they ignorant of his inhumane actions? Was that ignorance willful? Or does their attaching his name to the Park reveal an unspoken approval of his crimes against humanity? Whatever the case may be, it serves as yet another example of how some of the most atrocious behavior by a “human” ever conducted on this planet is commemorated, even honored, creating the unfortunate inference that the City of San Diego approves of Balboa’s misdeed, with yet more ignorance perpetuated.

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Prior to the actual construction of the exposition, a great parade was held in San Diego that would wind its way to the site of the groundbreaking. The festivities began on July 19, 1911, with a military mass that took place just three days after the anniversary date of Junipero Serra’s founding of Mission San Diego, again attesting to the role that Serra and his missions/death camps occupy in the whitewashed version of Euro-California’s creation myth. The parade included many floats that romanticized not just Mission San Diego de Alcala, but all of the missions of California. The day’s festivities were brought to a close with a re-enactment of the discovery of San Diego by Juan Cabrillo (whose actual name was João Rodrigues Cabrilho, as he was Portuguese, but the Spanish adaptation of his name suits the California creation myth narrative better), the European “discoverer” of San Diego in 1542 (which he had originally named it San Miguel - another european explorer, Sebastian Vizcaino would change the name 60 years later).” After Cabrillo landed, this time at Broadway Pier (Ballast Point, on Point Loma, is the place where he is believed to have landed), Cabrillo was crowned king of the festivities. After that, he

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made his way to the courthouse where his Queen, Ramona, the fictional character from Helen Hunt Jackson’s eponymous work of social justice literature, awaited him.\(^{29}\)

Wait a minute, what in the heck was Ramona doing there? After all, if historical accuracy was at all a concern (clearly, it was not) to the Anglo-American boosters of San Diego who organized the spectacle, Cabrillo would have been more inclined to enslave her and sell her (she was a “half breed”) than to wed her, that is if we put him in Ramona’s time or vice versa. Given the social justice message that the book *Ramona* was intended to deliver, how did it come to pass that she is present, not only in the form of European-style royalty, but also that she be made the bride-to-be of an agent of European colonialism? In order to answer these questions, we need to pause and consider just how the “truth” of Ramona was intentionally eradicated and replaced with sappy, feel-good sentiment.

![Figure 8. Queen Ramona! Jackson's work, intended to raise awareness about the mistreatment of Indians, gets appropriated and repurposed by San Diego's real estate and tourism boosters.\(^{30}\)](image)


(1881), a detailed critique of the treatment of Native Americans at the hands of the U.S. government since its founding in 1776. Having published that work, Jackson began gathering information on the treatment of California mission Indians, for an article she would publish in *Century* magazine. Her work would draw the attention of the commissioner of Indian Affairs, Hiram Price, who appointed her as a special agent to the Mission Indians. It was from this experience that Jackson would draw when she penned *Ramona*. But Jackson learned a lesson from *A Century of Dishonor* (which was not widely read): that people will more likely read a novel than a serious work of non-fiction. That is why her research appeared in the form of a romance novel, *Ramona*. Jackson’s assumption about the format proved to be true - people ate it up - the story, that is. The social lesson was lost upon the majority of the readers. By the time we see “Queen” Ramona (the character made incarnate) in the opening festivities for the groundbreaking, Jackson’s *Ramona* had been appropriated by the region’s boosters and turned into something Jackson had not intended. Gone was any trace of Jackson’s social critique of the Anglo-American greed and the mistreatment of Indigenous people; all that was retained was a gushy, sentimental story of the tragic romance portrayed in *Ramona*, that, with Jackson’s passing, would be ripe for exploitation:

Sadly, Jackson's book failed completely as a social problem novel. Instead, its importance to history was that it provided the basis for one of the most important early tourist attractions in southern California. Ironically, as promoters turned the fictional places where Ramona lived into real places, the Mission Indians and their problems became increasingly invisible and irrelevant to the larger society. The real tragedy was that the new society coming into being in southern California at the turn of the century could so easily integrate a romanticized version of the history of one of its victims into its own sunny success story.\(^{31}\)

The Ramona who was the queen of the event was no longer recognizable as the Ramona from Jackson’s work, both figuratively and literally (she was “whitened”). She would now become yet another warped and twisted piece in the foundation of what will come to be known as the Spanish “Fantasy” Past that was invented by the early Anglo settlers in California. Thus, when the Exposition opened in 1915, it was a work entirely of the Anglo

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colony’s imagination, with some traces of truth poking out here and there, but presented in a way as to make their true history and meaning obscure.

Elements of the Anglo-fabricated Spanish “fantasy” were evident prior to the 1915 exposition, but the event is what many credit to being the very thing that propagated this warped version of history into the minds of the Anglo settlers, turning fabricated myth into accepted historical fact. The Spanish “Fantasy” Heritage was so fundamental to the nascent identity of Anglo California that its impact still resonates to this day every time a fourth grader builds a mission project, or you drive by any number of suburban sub-divisions with adobe colored stucco edifices and red-tiled roofs. At San Diego State, the influence of the Spanish “Fantasy” Heritage is evidenced by the architecture of the initial campus that was constructed in 1931 on Montezuma Mesa (apologies to H.H. Bancroft) and repeated just recently in the façade of the new Conrad Prebys Aztec Student Union, which opened in 2014; all the good feelings of a fabricated past and its accompanying “traditions” without the nuisance of the actual history of violence and genocide (look, mom - no blood stains)! But just what is this Spanish “Fantasy” Heritage?

The term comes from Carey McWilliams, a socially progressive attorney who had a keen interest in social justice. Mathew Bokovoy, writing about McWilliams, provides the best definition of what the Spanish Fantasy Heritage is:

The fantasy heritage was the invented tradition created by white Californians to interpret the historical legacy of Indians, Spaniards, and Mexicans in the Southwest. Mostly inaccurate, ahistorical, and suffused with excessive sentimentality and romanticism, the fantasy heritage was the cultural gloss for the economic development and promotion of Southern California. The story of the fantasy heritage resembled a harmonious family reunion of benevolent Franciscan Fathers, ignorant but grateful Indians, cruel military governors, deceitful Mexican liberals, and indolent rancheros all united under the thrum of guitars and the click of the castanet at a grandee’s ranch fiesta. Then a productive, enterprising, and confidently superior race of white Protestants turned the milk and honey of the Mexican era into a dynamic capitalist society after 1848. All members of Spanish society lived under a presumed religious egalitarianism. And all citizens lived without disagreement and want. Villainous Mexican liberals and Anglo Americans, with their lust for extravagance and natural resources, had destroyed an ecclesiastical Eden where the scientific revolution and secular individualism
swayed few minds. Spanish society was supposedly one of paternal obligation held together by the holy faith.\textsuperscript{32}

It is this fabricated myth of a romanticized southwest, bolstered by the 1915 exposition, that influenced the nascent identity formation of San Diego State; to borrow from a popular corporate cliché “It’s in the DNA” of the institution. This is why you will find songs that praise Serra’s civilizing of the “savage,” inferior Indians, and why much of the architecture of the school looks the way it does. But before we leave it at that, there is one more sinister influence the exposition had on the students and faculty of San Diego State, this is, after all, the other slice of the White Supremacy Sandwich.

While the Panama California Exposition was not technically a World’s Fair (San Francisco was hosting the World’s Fair in 1915, with which San Diego was, in a sense, competing), it was done very much in the same style as one. And just as was done in previous world’s fairs, San Diego’s was an imperial tour d’force of the successes of American civilization, technology and progress; all attributed to the not-so-thinly veiled assumption of white supremacy.\textsuperscript{33} Everywhere you looked, the notions of social Darwinism and the psuedo-science of eugenics that placed white people at the top of the social hierarchy was on display.

Phoebe S.K. Young, in her article “To Show What Will Be By What Has Been: Thinking like an empire” explains how the exposition was intentionally arranged in a manner that would have the fairgoers experience “a timeline of human progress and conquest, measuring the distance from a supposedly primitive nonwhite past and a romantic Spanish interlude to a modern Anglo empire of technological power.”\textsuperscript{34} Among the initial exhibits the visitors would encounter, was the “Progress of Man” exhibit. On display was the work of Aleš Hrdlička from The Smithsonian, a gentleman who gave us such wonderful quotes like "The real problem of the American Negro lies in his brain, and it would seem, therefore,

\textsuperscript{32} Matthew F. Bokovoy, \textit{The San Diego World's Fairs}, xvi.

\textsuperscript{33} For further reading on this topic, please refer to Robert W. Rydell, \textit{All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

that this organ above all others would have received scientific attention.”

Young describes the sight the visitors would behold:

Entering the California Building, fairgoers found themselves at the very beginning of the timeline. They encountered a display called The Science of Man, trumpeted as a “never-before attempted ethnological and archaeological exhibit” that would unveil a major new piece of the puzzle of human evolution. Mounted by Aleš Hrdlička, a physical anthropologist from the Smithsonian Institution, the exhibit guided visitors to discover “proof” of a natural hierarchy within the human race — the intended conclusion being that white Americans were naturally superior to other “primitive” races. To make his case, Hrdlička meticulously arranged human and animal skulls collected from five continents according to detailed measurements of cranial capacity. Though later recognized as an erroneous signifier of intellectual ability, in 1915 craniometry asserted scientific authority to classify skulls from primitive (African to Asian and Native American) to advanced (European and American). By aligning race with evolutionary progress, the exposition sought to establish a benchmark for its broader historical narrative that led inexorably toward an American empire in the Pacific, which they hoped would run through San Diego.

And that was just at the beginning of the exposition. Other displays would contrast the marvels of modern architecture and industrial farming against the so-called primitive dwellings and lifestyles of Native Americans, with the attribution of this process due to the assumed fact of the innate biological and social superiority of the white man, and the not-so-subtle assertion that the “backwards” ways of Indigenous people doomed them disappear (the “vanishing Indian” myth, which dismissed the role that the genocide of Indigenous people at the hands of the settler-colonizers had in determining their fate).

The fabricated Spanish fantasy past of the southwest and the assertion of white supremacy — these were two huge influences that the 1915 Exposition exerted in the early formation of San Diego State’s identity, when it was still a Normal School. That fictional identity became so internalized as “truth” at San Diego State that President Hardy offered these words in his contribution to the 1922 yearbook:

35 This quote is featured on the website that accompanies the current exhibit on racism that is, at the time of this writing, on display in the San Diego Museum of Man, within the very same walls that once protected Hrdlička’s exhibit. I’ve been told that by a former employee of the Museum that they still have Hrdlička’s collection in storage! Race, “Science: 1890s-1930s: Eugenics and Physical Anthropology,” accessed November 8, 2015, http://www.understandingrace.org/history/science/eugenics_physical.html.

36 Young, “To Show What Will Be,” 72.
Out of the Southwest, the most extreme Southwest of our land, comes this annual, “Del Sudoeste,” the students call it in Spanish, for San Diego lies at the border of the romance land of this continent – Mexico. “Del Sudoeste” – out of the Southwest to all who care to feel the pulse of the newly-born institution, San Diego’s College.37

But these would not be the last contributions the Exposition would offer San Diego State. We are about to see how Balboa Park would offer one more bit of unintended influence, one that would lead to a doozy of an error, but would be consistent with San Diego State’s early and unfortunate tendency of “getting it all wrong,” as it relates to its identity formation. This particular fumbling of facts, as it will turn out, will become the actual “tradition” San Diego State establishes, much in the same manner as the Spanish “Fantasy” History has created a tradition of error built upon ignorance, that will be repeated, decade after decade, generation after generation, for nearly a century at San Diego State.

37 “Del Sudoeste” 1923, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives, 4.
CHAPTER 3

MASCULINITY, MONIKERS AND MASCOTS

As we have seen, the two most significant influences on early formation of San Diego State’s identity were the Mission San Diego de Alcala and the 1915 Panama-California Exposition at Balboa Park, with the most visible evidence of the influence these two sites exerted being expressed in the architecture of the initial campus when it was built in 1931. We have also seen the way in which these two places, which served as the “bread” of the “white supremacy sandwich,” affirmed the notions of eurocentrism, the supremacy of “whites” over everyone else and racism among the student body and faculty of the school, ideas which were quite common and openly expressed in the social discourse of the dominant settler society of the United States at the time. Now it is time to fold in a third factor that determined the school’s collective identity: the marked increase in male enrollment within the student body in 1921. In order to see the impact the introduction of more males into the student body had, and the unfortunate consequence to which it would lead, we will now turn to a story about a cat. As we will see, this was not your everyday, run of the mill cat. The very presence of this feline, much beloved by the students, would lead to a series of events that would prompt a Coach and a Dean to make an unfortunate, and ill-informed, choice of moniker for the athletic teams. That choice, in turn, would dictate a very peculiar, and very “white” practice of appropriating Indigenous culture and “playing Indian,” complete with invented ceremonies, songs and chants, which would inevitably culminate with a student performing racist stereotypes in redface, producing a very problematic “tradition” which the university still defends to this day.

LE COUP D’CHAT

In 1921, two events would lead to the tremendous growth for the San Diego Normal School. The first was the passing of legislation that converted all normal schools in the state
to four year colleges, an effort in which President Hardy played a leading role. Accordingly, the name of the institution changed from the San Diego Normal School to the San Diego State Teacher’s College. The second event was the incorporation of the San Diego Junior College into the SDSTC, which provided the College the ability to offer classes beyond those strictly for a degree or certificate in teaching, to include vocational programs and lower-division classes for those seeking to transfer to a university. Up to this point, the student body of the Normal School had been overwhelmingly female, as teaching was, at the time, considered to be a job better suited for women. The new course offerings would bring a significant increase in the enrollment of male students, the impact of this sudden jolt of testosterone into the school’s student body will be felt in the reshaping of the identity of the newly formed college.

During the Normal School days, the most successful organized sporting activity was the rowing program whose participants were, just as the student body was, predominately female (at one time, there was only one men’s team to the women’s five). Even though they were involved in competitions, the rowing program was primarily social in nature. Those few males who were enrolled in the Normal School did organize baseball, football and basketball teams (well, the basketball team had a short life, as no one was familiar with the game), and these competitive sports did provide for expression of school pride and spirit. But the paucity of males in the student body required that members of the faculty, as well as some students from the training school, were needed to bolster the ranks of the team. The assimilation of the Junior College brought with it a dramatic increase in the male population of the student body, and also included membership in the Junior College Conference, bringing SDTC into the arena of intercollegiate athletics, then the realm of male-dominated sports.

The merger also precipitated a bit of an identity crisis. During the Normal School days, the student teams were referred to as “The Normals” or the “Normalites.” The merger of the JC and the Normal school, forming the College, lead to the question: by what moniker will the sports teams be known? Initially, some of the names included Staters, Professors and “Petersonites,” the latter being a tip o’the hat to coach Charles E. Peterson. But there was one campus denizen, resident since the latter part of 1915, that would briefly enjoy the
honor of being the school’s semi-official mascot, due to its popularity with the student body. This democratically chosen mascot was a cat initially dubbed “The Normal Cat.”

Seth Mallios in *Hail Montezuma* offers the most that has ever been written about this cat, at least on one page. He points us to the first mention of the “Normal Cat” in the pages of the *Normal News*, the student paper of the time. On October 7, 1915, the Normal News shares with us the precise reason why this particular cat drew so much attention:

The Normal cat - incidentally the abnormal cat - has been creating a sensation in the corridors of late, for the reason that he has twenty-six toes instead of twenty, as ordinary cats do. He has eight toes, complete with claws and other accessories on one back foot, seven toes on the other, and six and five, respectively, on his front feet. 38

No paw was like another! Given the cats’ curious claw configuration, the students ascribed some sort of supernatural attribution to the feline:

In keeping with normal ideas, he shows a decided preference for outdoor life, watching with interest all tennis games and the classes in the outdoor school rooms and shops. It is rumored that he is fate in disguise and that his interest in certain lines of work indicates the direction in which the normal school will and should excel; for instance the tennis players of the school should rally ’round the cat, for it has pointed the way to victory and perhaps fame. 39

The students also perceived a threat to the cat from one particular member of the school’s faculty and offered a warning, an echo of an admonishment initially penned a century prior through an opium induced inspiration:

Prof. James G. Wilkinson of the biological department is highly wrought up. He has written to Professor Vernon L. Kellogg of the biological department at Stanford about the cat. Many students, however, think that to give it up would be disastrous and that the normal school would suffer a similar fate to which was visited upon the ancient mariner when he killed the albatross. 40

Thusly did the (ab)Normal Cat find its way into the hearts and minds of the student body of the Normal School, taking on the role of a supernatural bringer of good luck and fate, the classic definition of a mascot.

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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
The next mention of the cat comes 9 months later, on July 16, 1916, after the Normal Cat apparently took leave of the campus for some time. In a snippet with the title “And The Cat Came Back,” the Normal Cat is noted to have returned to campus with a “kittenish creature who sings high soprano.” It was also observed that the Normal Cat’s new side-kick was not as “blessed” in the paw department; it had 20 toes. Apparently, one companion was not enough, as the Normal Cat would once again take leave of the campus. On October 26, 1916, it is reported again that the Normal Cat has returned, but this time with even more companions:

The normal cat has returned from a short vacation with relatives just fifty-four block (sic.) from here. It intended to stay for several weeks longer, but developed a slight touch of asthma. Fearing that it’s (sic.) operatic career might be nipped in the bud - a damper put on it, so to speak - it returned in hot haste to a climate which ever agrees with it and the an audience which is ever appreciative.41

Somewhere along the line, someone associated the (ab)Normal Cat with the wampus cat, a mythical creature, with tales emanating predominantly from the region we now know as the southern part of Appalachia. In some stories, the wampus cat is the Ewah from Tsalagi stories, a woman who was turned into a half human/half mountain lion as punishment for a transgression. In other stories, the wampus cat is more like a half dog/half cat critter that could stand up on its two hind legs and run, with glowing eyes and a terrifying cry that made it a harbinger of death. In yet other stories (and yes, there are many variants), the wampus cat has an extra set of legs; the extra appendages being what associated the Normal Cat with the wampus cat. All of these stories are attributed to being of Cherokee in origin, and are quite old. Clearly, whoever dubbed the Normal Cat as a Wampus Cat had some knowledge of these stories. The supernatural nature of the Wampus Cat fit nicely with the belief that the Normal Cat also possessed special powers, but in this case, it was seen as a harbinger of good luck, and not of death.

At some point, the Wampus Cat was named “Pete” by the students. Exactly when these namings took place (Normal Cat to Wampus Cat to “Pete”), is unknown. But there is a strong inference that the cat was named after C.E. Peterson (for example, at one point, the

men’s teams were referred to as “Petersonites”). Peterson originally joined the Normal School in October of 1916 as an assistant instructor in physical education, when the Normal Cat was enjoying its notoriety on campus - it’s safe to assume that Peterson was aware of the cat, given its popularity and association with the athletic programs. Peterson went on to fight in WWI, and would later return to the campus in 1921 to serve as coach of the men’s athletic programs, as well as teaching all of the physical education classes (the college offered a certification in physical education to accompany its degree in education). Peterson would later go on to be named Dean of Men. It may be inferred that it was during Peterson’s initial years as coach that the (ab)Normal/Wampus Cat was dubbed with the name “Pete.”

During the 1923-24 season, The Paper Lantern (the school paper) did its level best to promote the moniker “wampus cat” for the college’s sports teams. But when your team gets referred to as the “wampus kitties,” well...it’s quite likely that the emasculation of the team moniker probably didn’t sit very well with Coach Peterson, another inference, but one that would offer an explanation behind Coach Paterson’s response to the promotion of the use of the “Wampus Cat” moniker. Before we get to that, let’s sit a moment with Phil Deloria and his grandfather, Vine Deloria Sr., who was once a collegiate football player at a time that is contemporaneous with C.E. Peterson’s return to the State College as a coach. This will give us some insight into the nature of college sports at the time.

Vine Deloria Sr. entered St. Stephen’s College in 1922 (the school would be renamed to Bard College in the 30s). Deloria Sr. would go on to be listed as “St. Stephen’s greatest athletic hero.” In writing about his grandfather, Phil Deloria provides us with the context within which his grandfather lived, and the way it shaped his grandfather’s life. It is this context, the description of the role of athletics in colleges of the day, that is of importance to this project. Grandson Deloria writes: “If sports were an important part of a new Indian world, they were instrumental to transforming and reshaping modern American culture at the turn of the century.”

Football, as Michael Oriard has pointed out, offered a series of narratives for debating - and reaffirming - any one of several competing understandings of an American masculinity in the midst of a crisis of self doubt. Debates over the

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gentlemanly nature of prizefighting and football let fans and critics tell stories that, alternatively, criticized upper-class masculine pretension or denigrated working-class brutality. At the same time, unifying power of spectator sports offered a sense of community to those anxious about the rise of an anonymous mass society. As compelling and meaningful performances, then, sporting events rapidly came to function as powerful commodities, offering meaning, collective identity and sense of self, and entertainment, all for the price of a bleacher ticket.  

Deloria goes on to say that these cultural commodities produced by football were very much needed by the colleges and universities of the day. In the Ivy League, intercollegiate sports “evolved into a crucial signifier of masculine, class, and race identities.” Small colleges and universities throughout the country would copy the model created by the Ivy League, creating athletic programs “in order to boost institutional self esteem, rally alumni, and establish distinctive identities.”

Returning back to the San Diego State Teacher’s college, we see, with the introduction of the Junior college, a marked increase in the number of men enrolled. With this fundamental change in the campus demographics, Coach Peterson actively went on a campaign to create a far stronger athletics program, with a particular emphasis on football. Announcements about his talks on football can be found in the student paper. Coach Peterson also established the separation of men’s and women’s sports programs on the campus, and, as we’ll see, sought not only a unique identity through sports for the College, but to make that identity a very masculine one. And if that is to be the case, the Wampus Kitty had to go. And so, a conspiracy to put the cat into the bag was formed. Or, as Mellios puts in in *Hail Montezuma*: “Dean Peterson urged the students to choose a new official mascot, and asked the school newspaper to solicit student suggestions.”

On October 22, 1924, the following article with the title “Sport Nickname Is Demanded by Staters” ran in the sports section of *The Paper Lantern*:

> Our good institution is sadly in need of a real sport nickname, as the college otherwise seems to be very much on the map this year. Our college, as all good

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43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 119.

45 Mallios, *Hail Montezuma!*, 85. It is not made clear whether this is Coach C.E. Peterson, who would later go on to be named “Dean of Men” or Dean A.G. Peterson.
colleges and prep schools, should have a universally known name. Practically every institution from Yale University (there’s your Ivy League influence Deloria mentioned) to the La Jolla High School have such monikers.

In the past, several names have been suggested and used, but so far none have been used that are emblematic of the San Diego State College spirit that is now cropping out in the student body. A name can mean a great deal to a college, especially in respect to athletics, so we are making a request for all suggestions to be turned into the Paper Lantern mail box.

The suggestions will be printed next week in the Paper Lantern and a committee will be chosen to select the best name. Some of the best known sport nicknames are: The California Bears (Berkley), Trojans (USC), Cardinals (Stanford), Poets (Whittier), Grizzlies (UCSB), Sagehens (Pomona), Tigers (Oxy), Toilers (Manual Arts High), and the Hilltoppers of San Diego High. These are only a few of the well selected names but now it is up to every student to think over and submit a good name. Even if your suggestion looks poor to you it may be a help for someone to work on. Do your bit.

In the October 27 issue, again, in the sports section, there is a quick bit with the title “Will It Be Who’s Who?”

A sports nickname. The story in column 1 tells the tale. The names handed in to date are: Stone Wallers; Go-Getters; Bay Staters; Sea Siders; Spartans; Border Legion.47

The October 27 sports section also provides us with some additional insight, and perhaps further motivation, as to why the need to come up with a “real” sports moniker was so urgent, and why some distance had to be created between the athletics program and the Wampus Cat. There is a story about Dean A.G. Peterson’s (not to be confused with Coach Peterson, who will also become a dean later) application for entry in the Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference. You see, many members of the Junior College Conference were demanding that San Diego State be kicked out of the conference, since the latter had an unfair advantage: students who were enrolled for four years, versus the usual two for a junior college, thereby making San Diego State’s teams more practiced, cohesive and harder to beat. Dean Peterson needed to find a league in which San Diego State could participate and compete fairly, as a story written by Leroy Bonham in the Paper Lantern says:


“Since becoming a four-year institution, State has long felt the need of linking itself to a definite league, and the Southern Conference seems to offer a means to that end.” An announcement of State’s acceptance into the conference is made on December 11, in the Paper Lantern, with yet another story telling of Dean Peterson’s withdrawal of States application due to the fact that “State college at present offers but a two year course,” and the rules of the league would hamper some player’s eligibility to participate. If you’re confused how the school is bouncing between being considered a 2 year college and a 4 year college, worry not, because that’s not what we’re going to be focusing on here - let someone else write a thesis about that. Back to the Coup.

The November 6, 1924 edition of the Paper Lantern features a brief article from Coach Peterson, written “at the request of the Freshman class.” The title brings one to wonder to what was Peterson responding: “The Value of College Athletics.” In his article, the immediate value seems to extend only to the male members of the student body, specifically the football players, as the language and rhetoric he deploys are overwhelmingly male in character. He does mention women once in his piece in the sentence “Successful men and women in all walks of life have kindred experiences that make possible unusual accomplishments” - but quickly returns to football as the activity that “when properly coached and played should contribute toward the equipment of the player for the sterner intellectual conquests of life” (If you’re not on the team, I guess you’re screwed, as a student). The front page of this issue prominently features the image of Bob Frazee, Freshman Class President, assistant Yell Leader, and...oh yeah - he’s the sports editor. He’s also a “candidate” for basketball. I suspect the “freshmen class” that requested Coach Peterson write his article was only our intrepid sports editor, Bob Frazee, in an attempt to ingratiate himself to Coach Peterson, as well as secure his position on the basketball team, but I can offer no evidence as to the validity of this suspicion. The overall editor of the Paper Lantern at this time is Lewis Schellbach, who as will later see, will be another student instrumental in placing the Wampus Cat on the sacrificial altar.

The November 12 issue, again in the sports section - this discussion is taking place exclusively in the sports section of the Paper Lantern, if you have yet to detect the trend - another story appeal to the students for input, entitled “Choose Sports Moniker When Suggestions Are Complete:”
And how about that sport nickname for State’s athletic heroes? Sport writers have just about been persuaded to drop the moniker of “professors,” with which they have been dobbling State College teams, but its absence leaves our fair institution without a suitable sport name. Suggestions are in order. If you can concoct a peppy name, such as “Trojans,” of the University of Southern California, or “The Bears,” of California, by all means turn it in and see your name written in the local hall of fame.

Our school colors, Purple and Gold, may suggest a suitable cognomen to some imaginative persons. Such titles as “Statesmen,” and “Border Legion,” although clever, are either too sedate or obscure to fall into the realms of lively nicknames. “Wampus Cats” was used with fair success last season, but since the identity of this animal was too readily confused with that of other “cats,” it was thrown into discard.

You have the whole animal kingdom, the birds and beasts and fowls; you have the dictionary, the encyclopaedia, in fact, the whole world is your field in this search. Unleash your imaginations for a time and see if, in their rovings, they don’t pick up that much needed sport nickname.

This story appeared directly beneath a picture of the football team that bore the caption “State’s Stronghold.” Also, the headline for the story was featured prominently in the center of the page, with a much larger and bolder font for the headline than the previous stories.

The claim to the Wampus Cat being confused with other cats is a somewhat valid claim, an example being a headline from the Nov 9, 1923 paper with a reference to “Wildcats.”

Applying consistency in pushing the Wampus Cat name that year was somewhat lacking.

The next suggestion mentioned is on November 26. It is the framing of this suggestion that is quite interesting. Under the title “Suggests Panthers” we find:

“Gin” Brecht, celebrated pink tea editor of the Lantern, has been overcome with an inspiration. “Gin” begs to submit the wild and wooly cognomination (which in English means “name”) of “panthers” as a most worthy and appropriate alias for future State college athletic teams. The modest society editor herself admits of the many good points of the title, which will no doubt assure its speedy popularity. How about it, Staters? Where are your suggestions?

Perhaps I am reading too much into the language, but the writer apparently felt the need to heavily apply gender to this suggestion. In doing so, it gives this particular moniker input the
feel of something like “Silly woman. Let the choosing of ‘real’ sport team names be left to
the men.”

On December 5, 1924, we see a story about State’s loss to Fresno during a
Thanksgiving Day match written by Morrison Ball. Morrison was also a sports writer the
previous year, when the paper was pushing for the use of Wampus Cats. As if to show his
allegiance to a moniker under attack, Ball referred to the team as both the Wampus Cats and
Petersonites in his story. Perhaps Ball didn’t get the memo that the Wampus Cat was to go.
Or perhaps Bob Frazee, the sports editor, was asleep at the switch, because the cat came
back, one last time.

The next mention of the moniker comes on January 14th, 1925. The title for this
piece is “Thoroughbreds? Balboans? Panthers?”

The lights shine brightly as a number of sport nicknames for the college athletic
teams have been turned in. While several real good suggestions have been made,
undoubtedly others are somewhere in the deep minds of ye college studes (sic.).
All suggestions handed in before Friday of this week will be listed for the
judges to choose from. Coach Peterson and Dean Peterson, with a member of the
student body, will compose a committee to choose the name.50

Somehow, I doubt that one member of the student body was female. All is quiet for a few
days in the sports section about the choice of moniker. And then, suddenly, on January 21,
1925, a story headline about the school’s debate team appears on page one announcing
“Aztecs Tackle Ancient Rivals in Debate Soon.”

Aztecs? Where in the heck did THAT come from? Nothing even close to that was
ever mentioned as a suggestion in the months leading up to this moment. To misquote
Marcellus, “Something is rotten in the State College of San Diego.” Was that whole exercise
urging input from the students just a smoke screen? Was the “choice” actually a fait
accompli, with the solicitation of input from the students nothing more than “going through
the motions” in order to give the process an air of credibility? Why were the students not
given the opportunity to vote from a selection of monikers, sorted out by the “committee”?
This somewhat unilateral imposition of a mascot, removing a popular one that was adopted

50 “Thoroughbreds? Balboans? Panthers?” The Paper Lantern, January 14, 1925,
by the students, is an interesting chapter in State’s mascot history because a few decades later, a future school President will hide behind the facade of a democratic process to affirm a mascot in order to justify a somewhat ethically challenged decision – we will get to that later on. For now, let us consider from where this “Aztec” moniker came. To do that, we need to go back and re-visit Balboa Park once again and witness a most unfortunate, albeit somewhat humorous given the comically erroneous nature, event that left quite a mark on San Diego State’s Identity.

AZTECS, AZTECS EVERYWHERE!

The 1915 Panama-California Exposition had a huge, lasting influence on the identity of San Diego State, not to mention the city itself (and most of the State of California as well). The pseudo-scientific affirmation of white superiority that set the Anglo at the top of the racial hierarchy; the celebration of the realization of Manifest Destiny with the continent finally subdued and those pesky Indians vanquished; the superiority of industrial progress and technology that enabled the conquest over the Indians and their primitive tools; and, of course, the celebration of the latest jewel in the imperial crown of the United States, the opening of the Panama Canal – these were the primary themes of the attractions at the exposition, with which the students and faculty of the Normal School/State College, not to mention the general population of San Diego and all those who came from afar to visit, were indoctrinated. The setting for these displays of Anglo-American power and prowess was the product of the Anglo-American Settler imagination, with structures and names that recalled a romanticized Spanish past, one that may have been foreign, but at least it was European and not, you know, Mexican (gasp). It was from this imagined Spanish past that the Normal School/State College would come to associate itself with the region and this erroneous, fabricated Spanish myth, and take pride in identifying itself to be “Del Sudoeste,” from the Southwest.

Ten years after the Exposition, its remaining buildings and tourist attractions would have one more fact-challenged contribution to make to the identity formation of San Diego State, a remnant of yet another erroneous belief held by the Anglo settlers that came into the region. This particular settler mistake managed to take an indigenous culture that developed a thousand miles away, in the Valley of Mexico, and place it not only in Southern California,
but the entire Southwest region. This totally inaccurate information was misinterpreted and then appropriated by a San Diego State student, then passed along to another, then repeated to and accepted by a Coach and a Dean, and ultimately the College President, none of which apparently were familiar with the actual local indigenous people, the Kumeyaay, let alone the Aztec culture they were about to appropriate. Nor did they seem to really care, given the absence of a single critical thought such as “Hey, wait a second – the Aztecs aren’t from this region” in the minds of any of these “educated” men. The actions of these men, without the consent of the student government who, in Mallios’ words, “allegedly were not pleased with the way this decision was made,” are what lead to the Coup d’Chat.

As Seth Mallios shares in *Hail Montezuma*, there are two competing stories about the “Aztec” moniker selection, both of them involve a student named Fred Osenberg. In one of the competing stories, one which attributes the choice to a coin toss, there is another student mentioned in this “creation myth,” Lewis Schellbach. The “coin toss” story, shared by Les Ernest (Class of ’28), bears an inaccuracy which Mallios may have unwittingly perpetuated: Schellbach is referred to as “Schellbacker.” The coin-toss that involved Osenberg may very well have happened, but it seems to be just a part of a larger story that involves Osenberg and Schellbach.

Osenberg wasn’t just any student; he also happened to be a part-time writer for the *San Diego Evening Tribune* and was quite active in campus life. The listing besides his photograph in the 1923 yearbook, for which he also worked as the editor, is quite impressive. Something else that is quite apparent in this yearbook entry is Osenberg’s strong affiliation with the College’s sports programs, not as an athlete, but as a member of the supporting staff. This goes to demonstrate that he worked very closely with Coach Peterson, making him an ideal co-conspirator in *Le Coup D’Chat*. Given his role in the media, and what we might assume would be a loyalty to Coach Peterson, he was in an ideal position to publish, as the Soviets would later call it, disinformatzia, in the *San Diego Evening Tribune*.

Schellbach also had access to the mechanisms of media, at the time serving as the associate editor for the school newspaper, *The Paper Lantern*, as well as being employed as a writer for the *San Diego Union*. Schellbach, too, would work with Coach Peterson, around the same time as *Le Coup D’Chat*. Schellbach was also serving as the Editor-in-Chief of *The Paper Lantern* at the time of the Coup, and likely played a key role in squelching any
reference to the Wampus Cat in the *Paper Lantern* (although one story did manage to slip by on his watch right after Christmas break). Shellbach himself may not have been as intolerant of the Wampus Cat moniker as others may have been, as he himself wrote a story in the San Diego Union on October 18, 1924 with the headline “Northerners Boast Heavy Squad; Wampus Cats Promise Fight.” Perhaps when the Coup d’Chat was initiated, he went along as a favor to his friend Osenburg, or succumbed to peer pressure, or simply didn’t want to alienate Coach Peterson. Whatever the case may have been, he also would help in spreading the disinformation about the selection of moniker, prior to it being officially adopted by the institution.

Turning again to the moniker “Aztec” and how it came into play, we return to Mallios:

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51 “Del Sudoeste” 1923, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.

52 “Del Sudoeste” 1925, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
(Dean) Peterson formed a committee to evaluate the nominations, which rejected every one of them. It was then, according to standard lore, that student Frederick Osenberg (Class of 1926), while walking by the California Tower in Balboa Park, became inspired by various murals of indigenous people from Latin America and came up with the idea of the San Diego State Aztecs.\textsuperscript{53}

While this explains where Osenberg got his Aztec Inspiration, it doesn’t explain what the murals were doing there in the first place. The explanation is both simple and complicated at the same time. The simple version: In the Anglo-American mind, the Aztecs were erroneously thought to have been from the Southwest, which, we can say with absolute surety, clearly is not the case (nor has it ever been). To continue the “simplified” explanation, please grant me the artistic license to present to you my conceptualization of the line of reasoning that was employed to explain the absurd Aztec presence, a logic which bears a striking resemblance to the deductive thought process featured in the “She’s a Witch” scene from \textit{Monty Python and the Holy Grail}. It goes something like this:

- The Spanish defeated the Aztecs, who once ruled an empire in “Mexico”
- The land which the U.S. acquired after the Mexican-American war was once Mexico
- If the Aztecs ruled Mexico, and this land was once Mexico, then the Indians from the Southwest and Mexico must be Aztecs.

Yes, more than a few of the early Anglo settlers genuinely believed that the Southwest was once inhabited by the Aztecs. To prove the point, there is a national monument off the highway between Flagstaff and Phoenix that is called “Montezuma Castle.” How did it get that name? Josh Protas, in his book \textit{A Past Preserved in Stone: A History of Montezuma Castle National Monument} shares an account of the earliest known Anglo-American expedition to the region, led by Lieutenant A.W. Whipple, from 1853-54. He was sent to the region to survey the area, after it had been annexed by the United States subsequent to the Mexican American War and the Gadsen Purchase. One of the guides on the expedition, Antoine Leroux, attributed the structures they encountered to the Aztecs, which Whipple then incorporated into his report. Protas writes:

The mention of "some Montezuma town" and "Indian traditions of the Montezuma era" in Whipple's report reflects the popular belief of the time that

\textsuperscript{53} Mallios, \textit{Hail Montezuma!}, 85.
Aztecs constructed the ancient ruins of the Southwest. Allusions to the Aztec leader in the naming of prehistoric ruins appeared as early as the eighteenth century. A report of a 1762 visit to the Casa Grande ruins in southern Arizona contains the first of many subsequent references to the "house of Montezuma." The widespread use of this name is evidence of the commonly mistaken interpretation of southwestern ruins that persisted until the twentieth century. Around the 1850s, the name Montezuma became even more popular for places in the Southwest after veterans of the Mexican-American War marched home from the Halls of Montezuma [in] Mexico City. Bostonian Walter Hickling Prescott's publication of his popular history of the Spanish defeat of Montezuma's Aztec empire also encouraged the use of the name. In his 1843 Conquest of Mexico, Prescott suggested the possible Aztec origins of the ruins of the Southwest when he mentioned that the Aztecs and Toltecs had come from the northwest, "but from what region is uncertain."

In the 11 May 1864 edition of the Arizona Miner, an editorial written by a chief justice from El Paso exemplified the widespread acceptance of Prescott's theory of the Aztec's southwestern origins. The author recommended that the capital of the Territory of Arizona be named Aztlan in memory of the ancient Aztec empire that, he claimed, occupied the present location of the territory. His suggestion, however, was not accepted. Yet when New Englanders arrived to establish the new government of the Territory of Arizona in 1864, territorial officials platted a capital town that they named Prescott, "an appropriate commemoration of the great American authority upon Aztec and Spanish-American history." The officials stuck with this theme when they named the main streets of the new town Cortez and Montezuma. Nearby, miners in the Agua Fria River Valley called their gold camp Montezuma City, and soon other miners gave the name to ruins to the east. By the late 1880s, however, historian H. H. Bancroft wrote in an infuriated tone that the haphazard misnaming of places in Arizona should be discontinued because evidence indicated that the prehistoric peoples of the Southwest were not the ancestors of the Aztecs. Bancroft attributed the origins of the Montezuma myth to the Spanish but noted that his and others' research dispelled this myth by pointing to the cultural differences between the Aztecs and the Pueblo communities.54

It would appear that H.H. Bancroft’s appeal to put an end to the “haphazard misnaming of places” fell upon deaf ears, since the National Monument is still known as Montezuma Castle, as well as a whole lot of other Montezuma named places scattered throughout the Southwest that were haphazardly misnamed, to include Montezuma Mesa, which is the current site of SDSU. This “haphazard misnaming” should not come as a surprise – it’s been

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a favorite activity of settler-colonials since the beginning: rename places, things and even people, even when they’re told that isn’t the right name. Comedian Louis C.K. provides perhaps the most relatable, if non-academic, example of this tendency in a performance at the Beacon Theatre in New York (2011):

> Everything we introduce to the world is shitty – meaning white people. Because I really think that white people are from another planet because when we came to America, it was so nice. It was just Indians. And they weren’t even Indians. We called them that by accident. And we still call them that. We knew in a month that it wasn’t Indians but we just don’t give a shit. We never correct it. We came here. They’re like, “Hi.” And we’re like, “Hey, you’re Indians, right?” And they’re like, “No.” “No, this is India, right?” “No, it’s not. It’s a totally other place.” “You’re not Indians?” “No.” “Nah, you’re Indians, you’re Indians,” for hundreds of years after…

That said, before we lay all the blame at the feet of the Anglos for casually tossing the words “Aztec” and “Montezuma,” all over the landscape of the Southwest, we need to also consider the contribution of another group of settlers to the region who also appropriated the Aztecs for their own purposes – the Criollos, people of Spanish descent who were born in “New Spain” who were essentially the landed, ruling gentry. When they chose to rebel against their homeland and declare independence, they appropriated the Aztec in a manner that has striking parallels to the way that Anglo Americans appropriated “Indianness” in the United States during their rebellion, as Phil Deloria describes in his book *Playing Indian*. In both cases, the rebellious European settlers donned the mantle of Indianness to assert their difference from their European progenitors, while simultaneously anointing themselves to be inheritors of the land they forcibly appropriated from its original inhabitants. However, in their respective declarations, the rebels in Mexico actively identified themselves, by inference, with the Aztecs, whereas in the U.S., they labelled the Native Americans as “savages.” We will return to Anglo-Americans playing Indian later. For now, let’s return to the Criollos, specifically the Gente de Razon in California, and their appropriation of the Aztec.

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In the essay "The Child of the Wilderness Weeps for the Father of Our Country' The Indian and the Politics of Church and State in Provincial California," featured as chapter six in *Contested Eden: California Before the Gold Rush*, Michael J. González writes:

Some Mexican criollos (people of European ancestry, born in America) tired of the prestige attached to the Old World and embraced the Indian, not the Spaniard, as their hero. The native they imagined, however, little resembled the ignorant, degraded mass crowding the countryside or streets. Rather, they invoked the Aztec warrior who had once defied the Spaniard and possessed qualities the criollos wanted to see in themselves. The exiled Jesuit Francisco Clavijero claimed in 1781 that the Aztecs' triumphs eclipsed the glories of Greece and Rome. At the beginning of the Mexican fight for independence, the clamor for Aztec idols increased. Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, a Dominican exiled to London, urged his compatriots to summon the shade of Cuauhtemoc and restore the tranquility that prevailed in Mexico before the conquest. Around the same time, Carlos Maria Bustamante, one of the rebellion's ideologues, exhorted the insurgents "to re-establish the Mexican [i.e., Aztec] empire."

As did the rebellious Anglo settler colonials would deploy “Indianness” in order to separate themselves from their true land of origin and assert a claim to the one they had come to occupy, so did the Spanish criollos in Mexico when they rebelled against their ancestral homeland. In both cases, in their respective declarations of independence, there is a reference to Indians – unfortunately, in the U.S. it was to label them as savages. In Mexico, the reference can be found in the line (translated) “The Mexican Nation, which for three hundred years had neither had its own will, nor free use of its voice, leaves today the oppression in which it has lived.” The “Mexican Nation” to which they refer, and from which they imagined they were, are the Aztecs, the dominant ethnic group within that polity being the Mexica (hence “Mexican”). If there is any doubt of this, just do the math: the declaration takes place in 1821; subtract 300 years and you get 1521, the year Tenochtitlan fell to the predominantly indigenous army that was led by Hernan Cortez and his small group of conquistadores (backed by a few thousand local Indigenous people who had an axe to grind with the Aztecs). Bear in mind, the people who wrote the declaration had absolutely no claim to indigenous ancestry. If they did, they hid it well because the very racist casta hierarchy would never have allowed them such a high position in colonial society. Their

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ability to lay claim to a vanquished foe for their use, in essence their ability to don the “Indianness” of the Aztec, is derived from the power imbalance between the settler and the indigenous, the very racist structure of that colonial society was designed specifically to oppress the Indian. They summon forth the image of an oppressed Indian as justification for rebellion against Spain, with the irony being that these landed criollos elites were themselves very likely benefitting from the subjugation of Indigenous people. This also parallels the irony of the Declaration of Independence the rebellious Anglo-American colonists made, also led by another group of wealthy, landed elites, many of who owned slaves while talking the language of freedom and inalienable rights. It may seem that I am digressing, but the appropriation of the Aztec, and of “Indianness” in general, by European settlers and their descendants, has a long history. The criollos appropriation of and identification with the Aztec would eventually find its way to California as well. Again, González:

The gente de razon, for example, invoked the Aztec past to claim kinship with ancient Mexicans. In 1827, the California diputación, the body of citizens elected by the municipalities to advise the governor, proposed to rename California "Montezuma.” The members also suggested a new coat of arms for California, in which an Indian with a plume, a bow, and a quiver would stand inside an oval bordered by an olive branch and an oak. Neither idea came to pass, but the Indian romance continued. Governor Jose Figueroa told the diputación three years later that in "California you will recognize the country of our ancestors. You will see the original homes where the Aztecs lived before they moved onto Tenochtitlan and founded the empire of Montezuma.” Other times, prominent Californios did not drape themselves in Aztec regalia, but they sympathized with their Indian neighbors. Mariano Vallejo and Pio Pico, among many distinguished locals, lamented the neophytes' servitude under Franciscan "fanaticism" and said that California's natives had a right to be free.57

So, as you see, the Anglos were not the only ones who were happily engaging in “haphazard misnaming, the criollos of New Spain/Mexico/California were at it as well! But it would be the Anglo’s haphazard misnaming that would endure, and the 1915 Panama California Exposition in San Diego would serve as the vehicle to perpetuate this egregious error to yet another group of colonizing settlers.

Previously, we turned to Michael J. Bokovoy and his work on the 1915 Panama California Exposition, when we were considering how the event worked to embed the mythic

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57 Ibid.
Spanish “Fantasy” History into the identity of San Diego State. We now turn to Bokovoy again, as he provides us with additional evidence of how this haphazard affiliation of the Aztec with the Southwest was further reinforced by the 1915 exposition. He cites an article with the title “Pageantry of the Ages in San Diego Floats” written by John S. McGroarty that was published in the July 21, 1911 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*. In his article that describes the parade that took place during the festivities that marked the groundbreaking for the construction of the exposition, McGroarty makes specific references to Aztecs in his story that demonstrate just how factually misinformed he and almost all Anglo-American settlers were (with the notable exception of H.H. Bancroft, of course) by the whole “haphazard misnaming” of places and associating them with Montezuma and the Aztecs. From two separate, yet related, pieces of Bokovoy’s work, here he is quoting McGroarty:

The "Historical Pageant" led the celebration on July 20th and showed audiences the "march of time in the magnificent Southwest, the land of sunshine, of wastes redeemed by living waters from immemorial deserts." McGroarty reported that the eleven floats of the parade represented a "tribute to the ancient art and skill in engineering which displayed not only the Franciscan Padres of nearly a century and a half ago, but also acknowledged the greatness of the old Aztecs, “who made the Southwest their place of dwelling longer ago than the memory of man.”

The parade also “acknowledged the greatness of the old Aztecs,” said McGroarty, “who made the Southwest their place of dwelling longer ago than the memory of man.” The third float presented the conquistador Hernán Cortés standing triumphantly over a defeated Montezuma, with his fallen warriors lying about him, which represented “the tragedy of the years that saw the fall of Aztec dynasties and the rise of Christian rule.”

The Anglo-Americans imagined, quite erroneously, Aztecs to be everywhere in the Southwest. With that mistaken affiliation, there is an inference of a “hierarchy of primitives,” one that implies that the local Indians couldn’t have possibly constructed these amazing structures - since they were so primitive, they were incapable of building things like Montezuma Castle, so it had to be the Aztecs! This romantic, idealized Aztec was viewed as “better” than those “other Indians” because of the things they built, but even given that, the

58 Michael Bokovoy, "Humanist Sentiment."
Aztecs were considered to be only “semi-civilized,” as the editor of *The Paper Lantern* will write in an article will celebrate the newly adopted moniker.

And so, the stage is prepared, or perhaps, rather, the trap was set, for Fred Osenberg to wander onto the grounds of Balboa Park and into the California Building, where he would gaze upon the murals that were painted by Carlos Vierra, a Portuguese immigrant who was commissioned to paint the panoramas on the walls of that edifice. This is an example of what Fred Osenberg most likely viewed, a mural which is still on display in the Museum of Man, which currently occupies the California Building:

![Figure 11. Mural of Uxmal by Carlos Vierra in the California Building, now the Museum of Man in Balboa Park.](http://www.reed.edu/uxmal/galleries/Mid/Uxmal/GovPalace/Uxmal-GovPalace-6.htm)

Other murals on display that were also painted by Vierra included panoramas of Copan, Uxmal, Quirigua, Palenque, Chichen Itza, and Tikal. If these were indeed the murals that inspired Osenberg to consider the moniker “Aztec,” then we have a doubly compounded error: these scenes depict Mayan structures, not Aztecs. Oops.

Recalling the Osenberg/Schellbach “coin toss” story, the choices were between Aztec and Inca, which seems to indicate that these two exemplary students could not tell an Aztec from a Maya from an Inca, even if they were about to be offered as a ritual sacrifice; nor could Coach Peterson, nor Dean Peterson, nor ultimately President Hardy. Given the manner by which they imposed their choice on the student body, no one really had the opportunity to

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point out the error. Where was H.H. Bancroft when he was needed to set these ignorant 
people straight? Unfortunately, he passed in 1918 in Walnut Creek, CA and was not around 
to point out the erroneous affiliation of the Southwest with the Aztecs that San Diego State 
College would assert. Had any of the men who were behind the selection of the “Aztec” 
moniker actually spent some time reviewing Bancroft’s works, then perhaps this whole 
“Aztec mess” could have been avoided and I would have had to select another topic for my 
thesis. But, for better or worse, they did not, and now I get to share how their collective 
appropriation, misnaming, misrepresentation and miseducation of all things Aztec would find 
itself etched on the very face of San Diego State. To be fair, what we will see unravel next 
actually has nothing to do with Aztecs, and everything to do with white, Anglo-American 
males, to include Coach Peterson, performing their imagined Indianness in redface. Let the 
show begin!

Figure 12. Herbert Howe "No, That Is Not Aztec" Bancroft could have spared us all 
from this entire “Aztecs are from the Southwest” hooey at San Diego State, had he only 
lived longer. On quiet nights, if you stand in the old quad where Donal Hord’s Aztec 
statue once sat, you might hear a ghostly “noooooo!” carried on a breeze from the 
north.61

61 University of California Berkeley Library, “The Early Years,” last modified June 6, 2002,
SAN DIEGO STATE’S AZTEC APPROPRIATION OR H.H. BANCROFT’S EVERLASTING FACEPALM

With the adoption of the Aztec moniker, the long-standing Anglo-American settler practice of “Playing Indian” was about to go into high gear for both the students and faculty of San Diego State College. But before anyone could don a feather, slap some paint on their face and make “woop woop” war cries for the sake of cheering on the school’s athletes, the editor of The Paper Lantern and fellow Coup D’Chat co-conspirator, Lewis Shellbach, immediately expressed his opinion in an editorial from the January 21, 1925 edition with what he believed the moniker would mean for the institution:

What’s in a name? Exactly what you put into it. If George Washington had labored under the monicker (sic.) of John Smith, he would be reverenced today as th (sic.) father of his country despite the handicap. If Leopold and Loeb had been called Harold and David, they would doubtless have committed the same crime.

We have been called Aztecs and will be called Aztecs in the future. The name has been used to denote a nation of semi-civilized inhabitants of central Mexico. What it will mean in the future remains for us to say. If we build an institution famous for its scholars, for its athletes, for its faculty; if we build a reputation for broadmindedness, for honesty, and for sportsmanship, these attributes will be incorporated into the same Aztecs. On the other hand - but there is no other hand in this picture. We are oing (sic.) to make Aztecs mean all these finer things. Tradition will know Aztecs as something more than a tribe of semi-civilized inhabitants of central Mexico.

What will we use to fill up space now that the carnival is called off? One more week and we can turn the next page in the history of State college and see what the new semester has to offer. From all indications, it will be a bright page, full of the story of progress, full of the tale of achievement and the announcement of success.

But enough of that. There are still seven days in this term. We have already noticed a mental letdown. Students fail to do their work. Even our faithful reporters had trouble in turning in their stuff with customary promptness (bug-house fables). We should remember that the home stretch is the hard pull and that it is vitally necessary that we do our best in the next few days.62

A couple of things are obviated in this piece: one is that the paper was in dire need of a better editor, or at the very least, proofreader. The other is the ingrained white supremacy

http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/Exhibits/bancroft/early/early.html.

that has been reinforced throughout the life of this individual and almost every settler of European descent on this continent for that matter, through (mis)education, popular media and, in the case of the good students from San Diego State, the influences of Balboa Park and the Mission that crept into the school’s identity. The language of taking something that is “semi-civilized” and making it “finer” smacks of the notion of “lifting-up” the savage from his sorry state, the “white man’s burden,” as only the European can complete the transformation from semi-civilized to civilized. Even the term “semi-civilized” reminds us of the exhibits at the 1915 expo, with their psuedo-scientific assertions of social Darwinism and the hierarchy of race, from brown primitives to civilized whites. But on the bright side, we least we see here the demarcation between the actual Aztec culture and what will soon become the fabricated, ersatz aztec that is the product of the white settler imagination, an artificial, lower-case “a” aztec.

Before we move on, a bit more on this concept of being “semi-civilized. This very same year, 1925, another text will be published in the land where the Aztecs actually did reside that talks about lifting up the African and the Indian through the injection of European blood, La Raza Cosmica. While some consider this work, written by Mexican philosopher and politician José Vasconcelos, to be an idealistic piece about creation of a new, “cosmic” race through the mixture of European, African and Native American blood (mostly because of what the title infers), an actual reading of the book will reveal the inherent white superiority that allows for the recuperation of the African and the Indian. It is the addition of European blood that will save non-Europeans from their “depressed” and sorry state. In other words, by mixing in the “white” the “red” and the “black” will, to use a word from Schellbach’s editorial, make them “finer.” La Raza Cosmica was yet another piece of racist, pseudo-scientific nonsense from its era, a point in time which, as you will recall, saw the rise in eugenics in the U.S. and its psuedo-science of white racial superiority that would eventually find its way back across the Atlantic and later take root in mind of a failed Austrian painter (although Vasconcelos approach of mestizaje differs significantly from

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63 José Vasconcelos and Didier Tisdel, Jaén, The Cosmic Race = La Raza Cósmica (Los Angeles: Centro De Publicaciones, California State University, Los Angeles, 1979). Most are familiar with the seemingly mushy sentiment the title infers, but few have taken the time to read this work and see the racism it spews.
others seeking to create a “pure” race) - that is what the language in this editorial brings to my mind. But if this “editorial” isn’t enough to convince you, gentle reader, of the racist things to come with the choice of this moniker, you need only proceed to the sports section of this same issue of the school paper. Suddenly, the writers are imagining the athletes as not only Aztecs, but they are beginning to apply the standard stereotype of an “Indian” in the Anglo-American mind: the fabricated tipi dwelling plains Indian of the white imagination.

That Aztecs were from the region we know as Mesoamerica and not from the plains of North America seems to be lost on the students, faculty and administrators of San Diego State Teacher’s College. All Indians are the same, right? In the article “State Adopts New Monicker (sic.) For Athletes,” the author writes:

“Rah for the Aztecs! What a name! What a name! Did you say Ash Cans? Say, I thought those cannibals were all dead! Whaddya think this is, an Indian reservation? I’ll bet Hopi is responsible for this!”

And so San Diego State College has acquired a name. The school without a title is no more. No longer will we be dubbed as “teachers” and “Profs” through lack of a suitable sport moniker. Various and sundry cognomens have arisen, struggled feebly for existence and sunk into oblivion. Wampus Cats, Wildcats, Bearcats, in fact all kinds of cats were presented to the public and failed to make a hit.

And now comes the Aztec, long may it live! Not only is it the most original and suggestive of the proffered titled but it is admirably (sic.) adapted to newspaper use which fact pleases the sport writers beyond words. Aztec will get into the headlines where a longer title would have to be shelved.

A name should stand for something more than a combination of letters. It should bear traditions, should call up thoughts of courage and fighting spirit. Such a tribe were the Aztecs. Noted for their fleetness, strength and bravery, they were seldom downed in physical encounters. The Aztecs are gone but their spirit and name remains, waiting all these years for State College to assume its burden. Vive la Aztec!64

Oh my. Where to begin… Cannibals. Dead (vanished) indigenous people. The ability to freely take said dead/vanished people’s culture/identity for use by the settler. Inference that an Indian reservation is something “less than.” The deployment of the “savage warrior” stereotype. The conflation of Aztecs with the Spanish language, with poor conjugation and a mismatch between a feminine definite article and masculine noun to boot. I wonder why this

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particular passage isn’t proudly shared on SDSU’s “Go Aztecs” web page that talks about “traditions.” Hmmm.

One thing was accurate about this piece: it foretold the use of racialized stereotypes in the writing of the stories for the sports section. The choice of moniker in 1925, an appropriation of indigenous civilization by a settler colonial educational institution, would open a Pandora’s Box of racialized stereotypes, rhetoric and behavior that persists to the present day. In just the sports section of the student paper alone, the coach becomes the “chief.” The athletes become “warriors” or “braves.” When the “chief” gathers his “warriors” before a game, it’s now a “powwow.” When the team leaves town for away games, they “go on the warpath.” And when they are victorious, they “massacre” the opposition. The examples are far too numerous to cite individually, and are so profuse, given the decades that have passed since. However, in order to prove the point, let’s take a look at a story that will appear sixteen years later, in 1941, a year that I have chosen for reasons that will be made clear soon enough. The date is October 10, and the story is “Undefeated Reds Seek Upset Win Over Northerners” (yes, they were just *this* shy of referring to themselves as “redskins”):

Montezuma dons all his war paint tonight in preparation for his tussle with the veteran-scarred San Jose Spartans who invade Balboa stadium at 8 with visions of a win. Chief Leo Calland called his medicine men together and the wizards declared that the Aztecs were to prepare for their toughest war dance this year if they wanted to have their victory song after the battle.65

The story goes on, but frankly, I don’t think we need to continue. The point ought to be made clear by now: this stuff is racist. Thus begins San Diego State’s unfortunate legacy of institutionalized racism. In just a few years, with its move to its new location on what is now known as “Montezuma Mesa,” the white supremacy will literally set itself in concrete with the accidental reproduction of the architecture of genocide, as discussed previously. Now we have an added twist - the conflation of Aztecs with the Southwest region of the U.S., a factual error that would continue to be repeated for decades by a public institution of higher learning; a mistake that, to this day, its administrators refuse to admit. It’s likely that the

campus would take on the mission architecture that it did, regardless of the moniker choice, because of the influence of Balboa Park’s buildings. The fact that “Aztec” was chosen as being represented of the Southwest makes the match of building style to moniker almost comical (the pairing of Indians with a decidedly anti-Indian institution, Serra’s missions), if it were not for the fact that it had the tacit approval of people who were supposed to be educators. Maybe we should be thankful that the Coup d’Chat took place when it did, for had it happened after the new campus was built, and the minaret that houses the water tower next to the library that is really a quasi-mosque had any influence in the choice in moniker, we might have been the SDSU Moors, Almohads or even the Fighting Arabs. If that had been the case, I’m willing to wager that the university’s alumni would have demanded a moniker and mascot change after the attacks of 9/11, with the administrators willingly accommodating their demands.

With that said, we have yet to get to the really juicy stuff, where the students, and even Dean (Coach) Peterson “turn injun” and slap on the redface and warpaint, in order to play the roles that the moniker choice dictated to them. These actions, born from racism, notions of white superiority, produce the consequentially misconceived stereotypes of Native Americans would be repeated and repeated and repeated for decades to come at San Diego State, continuing to the present day, as we will see. For now, let us “paws” and take a moment to mourn the passing of the Wampus Cat, as an official moniker and mascot. If it had survived, the institutional racism at San Diego State might have been something discussed only as a regrettable memory from the school’s history. The unfortunate choice of “Aztec” as moniker ensured that racialized performances of Native Americans would be unavoidable, thus perpetuating the stench of a racist climate that existed during the time it was chosen into the present day.

**MONTY INCARNATE: THE ACCIDENTAL BIRTH OF A RACIST MASCOT**

You won’t find any information about the history of the Aztec moniker or mascot on the main San Diego State University web page. For that you have to go to the official web site of SDSU Athletics Department: GoAztecs.com. From there, you have to go the “Athletics” menu, find the link to the “Traditions” page and then to the link that says “Aztec
Traditions/Spirit.” This bit of university history does not appear to be readily obviated by the university; whether or not that is intentional is a matter of speculation. What is certain is that it is quite appropriate that the few words the university officially has to offer about the origins of its mascot are in the “sports” section of its online presence, much as the Coup’d Chat that exiled the Wampus Cat to make room for the “Aztec” was instigated on the behalf of the fledgling athletic department, with the so called “debate” taking place in the sports section of the student newspaper, The Paper Lantern.

Here is what the university presently offers as the origins of the Monty Montezuma Mascot (renamed the “Aztec Warrior” in 2004):

It has been six decades since Montezuma, the first Aztec Warrior figure associated with the university, initially appeared at a San Diego State athletic event. Art Munzig played the original role in a skit during halftime at the San Diego State-Pomona football game kicking off the 1941 football season. The school’s Rally Committee came up with the idea based on the ruler of the Aztec empire in the early 1500’s, Montezuma II. The character, affectionately known as "Monty" to generations of SDSU alumni, evolved through the years to become emblematic of San Diego State's athletic teams.66

Seth Mallios, in *Hail Montezuma!* offers a bit more color to Art Munzig’s interpretation of Monty Montezuma:

The first student to dress up as Monty was Art Munzig, who played the role during the opening football game of the 1941 season. He and four scantily clad cheerleaders in Plains Indian costumes secretly hid in a makeshift teepee on the sidelines and emerged at halftime with Montezuma chasing the maidens down the track in front of the stands. There was absolutely nothing historically accurate, politically correct, nor culturally respectful about this inaugural 1940’s skit, but the fans loved it, and Monty Montezuma quickly became a mainstay at Aztec sporting events.67

Mallios does offer through inference that the skit was not exactly respectful of neither Aztecs nor Native Americans in general, but falls short of characterizing the performance as having any racialized connotation, yet another indication of the dysconscious racism that that seems to linger in the minds of most people in the United States when it comes to Native Americans. The fact that the “fans loved it,” also speaks to the general attitudes, perceptions

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67 Mallios, *Hail Montezuma!*, 86.
and stereotypes most non-Natives have about Indigenous people, and foreshadows how this continued ignorance, fostered by the university by the sheer fact that it doesn’t address it, will play a direct role when the moniker and mascot are challenged 59 years later in the year 2000, and the students overwhelmingly vote to continue their use shortly thereafter. Mallios omits from his re-telling of the mascot’s birth what I characterize as the “smoking gun” of Munzig’s very performance, which clearly shows it as a mocking, racist caricature, one that places Native Americans in the past, as well as portraying them as brutish, hyper-sexualized beasts. We’ll get to that in a minute. Before we do, I want to take a moment and consider Art Munzig, the human being.

What little I gleaned about Art Munzig and his character comes his unpublished memoir *The Spy in the Red Pants*, specifically chapter 5, appropriately entitled “Montezuma.” This chapter is about his brief period of time at San Diego State College between 1941 and 1942. He would spend only three semesters at SDSC before he went on to transfer to UCLA to complete his baccalaureate degree (while he was at UCLA, he would become a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity - why this little detail is of any importance will come later). The war had other plans, however, and Art was selected, along with about 40 other students who, in the Navy’s estimation, had enough credit hours to be commissioned as ensigns in the U.S. Navy reserves. Art would spend his time in the war in the submarine service and would later return to UCLA for the last 6 units he needed to earn his BA.

Maybe it’s the shared experience that Art and I have of being former commissioned officers in the Navy during a war that brought me to consider Art Munzig beyond the offensive stereotype he created and performed. Maybe it’s the playful and somewhat flowery way that he writes that endeared me to him. Or it might be the stories he shared while he was at SDSC and the hijinks in which he engaged with his best friend that he met at State, a friendship he would maintain for life, with a student named Bob Rivera. But as I read his words, I thought to myself “was this person really a racist?” I really don’t think so. Unfortunately, the way in which institutional racism functions is that you still get the bigotry and racist actions, but without the white hoods and burning crosses nor the awareness of why what you are doing is wrong. I don’t fault Art Munzig, I’m sure he was a nice man. But history is filled with “nice” people doing terrible things, as Cutcha Risling Baldy points
out in her writing about the genocide of California Indians at the hands of Anglo Settlers during the Gold Rush:

The atrocities of genocide during this period of time, they were not committed by monsters -- they were committed by people. By neighbors. By fathers, sons, mothers, and daughters.\(^68\)

There is a history of apparently “nice people” killing Natives, of upright citizens committing terribly inhumane actions. No, Art Munzig didn’t kill any Indians - but he, along with all other settlers, did benefit from previous attempts to wipe-out Natives. His mocking, buffoonish performance of a racial stereotype also makes evident that he was conditioned by his society, and by his education, to consider Indians as something “less than” human. If the right set of circumstances had presented themselves, he was conditioned to kill Indians, just as he was prepared to go kill “Japs” in the Pacific, given the manner in which they, too, had been dehumanized by the war propaganda of the time. So no, I don’t fault Art Munzig for what he did, I fault the institution for creating the circumstances that allowed for what he did to continue being acceptable, a situation which still persists to this day. And now, without further ado, I present to you the accidental birth of a racist mascot, in Art Munzig’s own words.\(^69\)

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\(^{69}\) From a portion of Art Munzig’s unpublished autobiography The Spy in the Red Pants, which can be found in the SDSU Library’s Special Collections: Arthur Munzig, “Montezuma,” The Spy in the Red Pants, 11-12, Manuscript Collections, San Diego State University Archives, Biographical File, 1898, Box 5, Folder 98, Special Collections and University Archives.
I'm not sure who came up with the idea, but it ended up that we built a teepee, and located it in front of, and just to the south of the stands, so as not to impair the view from the stands. We had four girl cheerleaders, headed by Meredith Shelton, who, along with me, were the total cast. (Meredith later married Aztec basketball star Jim Ahler). We put some kind of smoke generator in the teepee (maybe wet charcoal), and the four cheerleaders in their scanty Indian costumes, along with me, dressed as I thought Montezuma should be, esconced (sic) ourselves in the teepee before the stands started to fill. This way, our exit, at half time, would be a surprise. It was a surprise to us in the teepee that the space was so limited and that it took so long until halftime. When we started to warm up the smoke generator, it became so uncomfortable that we were not sure we could wait for our halftime cue from Bob Menke for the Indian maidens to run out of the teepee with me chasing them. That's about the extent of the plot, and the planning, for our entertainment for our Homecoming game with the Pomona Sagehens. I don't recall whether we were able to wait for our cue, or whether we just took off because of the heavy smoke build-up, but we finally exited are smoking teepee - four Indian maidens followed by Montezuma chasing them. As we ran down the track in front of the stands and M.C. Bob Menke, standing in front of a

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microphone, Bob reached out and grabbed me. This wasn’t in the script. In fact there was no script. Bob, with a good grip on me, asked me on the microphone,

“Montie, why are you chasing these young maidens?”
I knew I had to say something so I blurted out,
“Me thinkum those mighty fine sage chickens.”
The stands thinking, thinking this is a well-rehearsed the skit, roared with laughter. Bob Menke, probably as confused as I was said,
“Montie, what are you doing here? I just saw you over in the quad.”
Without me thinking I immediately replied,
“Me movem fast.”

Again a roar of laughter from the stands, and with Bob loosing his grip on me, I was off like a streak, much to my, and I'm sure Bob's relief.

The next day the whole campus was talking about the great performance we put on at halftime. For the rest of the football season, at teepee was erected on the SDSC sideline and a Montezuma, me, dressed appropriately, set beside his teepee, or roamed the sidelines, as appropriate, to the apparent delight of the student body. By the next football season I had transferred to UCLA to enter the Naval ROTC program, which was not available at SDSC. Another Montezuma took my place. I understand a Montezuma mascot has appeared at SDSC football games ever since, for nearly 50 years. I hope they were better organized than we were.

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What we just witnessed is a classic, text book example of a racialized stereotype of a Native American – an over-sexed, dimwitted savage. In addition, we have the San Diego State “tradition” of getting things terribly wrong when it comes to understanding the region and its Indigenous inhabitants; it is clearly ignorant to affirm that Aztecs were from this area, but the plains clothes dress and “tipi” clearly demonstrate that these students had absolutely no knowledge of any actual cultures Indigenous to what we is now commonly referred to as the Americas. It is evident that all they were familiar with is the imagined, psuedo-Indian that had more to do with the nature of their own settler-colonial culture than that of any

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71 Arthur Munzig, “Montezuma,” The Spy in the Red Pants, 11-12, Manuscript Collections, San Diego State University Archives, Biographical File, 1898, Box 5, Folder 98, Special Collections and University Archives.
actual Native Americans. The first “Monty” mascot most likely bore no resemblance to an Aztec. But I will grant this: it is precisely what an imagined, lower-case “a” aztec looks like, one born from racism, notions of white supremacy, along with a healthy dose of ignorance and a complete lack of empathy for actual, living, breathing Native Americans. Just as the choice in moniker inevitably lead to this racist performance, so would Munzig’s cartoonish antics ripple through time as it became adopted as a “tradition” at San Diego State, a tradition that is marked by the racism and ignorance which brought it into being.
CHAPTER 4

ACTS OF IMPERIAL NOSTALGIA AND
DYSCONSCIOUS RACISM

PLAYIN’ INJUN AT SAN DIEGO STATE

"They came for our land, for what grew or could be grown on it, for the resources in it, and for our clean air and pure water. They stole these things from us, and in the taking they also stole our free ways and the best of our leaders, killed in battle or assassinated. And now, after all that, they’ve come for the very last of our possessions; now they want our pride, our history, our spiritual traditions. They want to rewrite and remake these things, to claim them for themselves. The lies and thefts just never end."

-Margo Thunderbird, Shinnecock Nation

Art Munzig’s “playing Indian” was not the first performance of its nature at San Diego State, nor would it be the last. If we go back to the days of the Normal School, we will find images of students dressed as Indians for a production of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s Hiawatha. We also find images from the training school, where young, elementary school students are being versed (I really feel like saying “indoctrinated”) in the fine art of white-people-dressing-up-like-Indians, usually for the lesson on the Thanksgiving Myth (now that IS indoctrination).

Donning the signifiers of Indianness has a long tradition in the United States that dates back at least to the revolution of 1776, so the practice of playing Indian at San Diego State College should not come as a surprise. In fact, the appropriation of Native American cultures and heritage was enjoying its heyday at many colleges and universities in the U.S. in the 20’s, and San Diego State simply joined in on the action. The choice of the “Aztec” moniker would lead to the inevitable misuse of cultural and ceremonial items (or rather, cheap imitations of them) that were used by some Native American nations, many of these items having deep, significant spiritual meaning to their respective people. The moniker
choice also dictated the enactment of racialized stereotypes that demean and mock Native Americans, as a group, for the sole purpose of entertainment at sporting events, as we witnessed in the previous section.

But before we get too far along on the historic “playing Indian” shenanigans at San Diego State, I want to take a quick side-journey to consider another racialized performance that took place at the school: students in blackface. Bear in mind that this is not going to be about the history of blackface at SDSU, nor is it a critique on the practice of blackface, its

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72 “Scene From ‘Hiawatha’,” 1915, University Archives Photograph Collection, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.

73 “Training School Thanksgiving Celebration,” 1926, University Archives Photograph Collection, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
connotative racism and the way it was used to reaffirm whiteness – plenty has already been written on that subject. My purpose here is to simply demonstrate that this particular form of racist performance did take place at San Diego State, just as it also took place in many other parts of the country in other schools and other performance venues. The presence of blackface performances at San Diego State reaffirms the fact that the notion of white supremacy and its requisite ideology of racism were commonly held beliefs by the students and faculty at San Diego State, just as they were commonly held beliefs of the dominant society in general. These beliefs enabled the racialized performances of the “other” by white people, a practice that was commonly accepted and quite popular, given its preponderance. Consider these images, one of which is from the very same yearbook which President Hardy chose to introduce with his nostalgic memory of a pickaninny and a mammy:

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 16.** From the 1922 yearbook. The maid, who is the person is sitting on the floor, is a student in blackface.\(^74\)

\(^{74}\) “Del Sudoeste” 1922, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
Figure 17. Also from the 1922 yearbook, more students in blackface.\textsuperscript{75}

Figure 18. From the 1923 yearbook. The caption “Les Negres” speaks for itself.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} “Del Sudoeste” 1923, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
These images are from the two different yearbooks; 1922 and 1923, specifically in the section that highlights student activities, in this case, the “Kollege Kut-Ups.” The Kollege Kut-Ups was an annual variety show style performance put on by both student organizations and individual students. It is worth noting is that these performances had to be reviewed and approved by a committee, which usually included a member of the faculty. For example, figures 15 and 16 were from the 1922 yearbook, for which the reviewing process for the acts began in December, 1921. There is a story in the December 13, 1921 edition of *The Paper Lantern* with the headline “Kollege Kut-Up Acts to be Put On For Approval” with the accompanying byline reading “Stunts to Be Reviewed By the Committee in Charge of the Proposed Performance.” The story goes on to name exactly who those committee members are: Dean (of the Junior College) Peterson, Mildred Bergen, a Junior College student and Helen Hale of the Teacher’s College form the committee that is responsible for the overall supervision of the show, while Coach Peterson was in charge of the committee of four students who were responsible for the screening and selection of the acts. The implication is clear: the acts that featured students in blackface, acts which we can say with some confidence also portrayed some form of mockery, clowning or buffooning behavior that typically accompanied the racialized stereotypes they portrayed, were approved by members of the San Diego State College faculty, to include a dean. We are reminded again of the nature of the social climate of the time, where racism was worn so easily on the sleeves of the members of the dominant society, and white supremacy was considered to be a scientifically proven fact.

Fortunately, performances by students in blackface would eventually fall out of favor at San Diego State, although we can find students in blackface into the mid 50’s, while actual students with African ancestry were in attendance. When and why, exactly, did the practice of blackface actually stop at San Diego State is not known. But what is known is that it clearly came to an end at some point because we no longer see it happening on campus, nor anywhere else in the U.S. for that matter (unless it is done to make a point, such as in Spike Lee’s film *Bamboozled*). The cultural norms of our society continue to evolve, and we have come to recognize that performing in blackface is racist and wrong. The practice of dressing up in redface, however, is another story altogether, as evidenced every Halloween. At San Diego State, not only has the practice of redface persisted on campus to this day, it still
enjoys the tacit approval and sanction of the university’s administration, specifically in the form of the school’s current mascot, “The Aztec Warrior.” The current mascot is simply the latest iteration of the racist “tradition” of performing in redface to amuse and entertain the spectators at athletic events that was initiated by Art Munzig. The fact that this racialized, stereotyped mascot is still around can be credited to the defense of the mascot by former university president Stephen Weber between 2000 and 2002, the one time the mascot was viably challenged and almost retired.

Munzig’s mocking portrayal of an Native American stereotype falls into the tradition of “Playing Indian” that Phillip Deloria examines in his book that, not surprisingly, is entitled Playing Indian. Deloria tells us that the very ability to play Indian rests on the assymetrical relations of power between the dominant Anglo-American society and Native Americans. Deloria further explains:

In every instance, playing Indian represented, evaded and perpetuated those relations. Indianness was the bedrock for creative American identities, but it was also one of the foundations (slavery and gender relations being two others) for imagining and performing domination and power in America. At the very same moment that it was suggesting Indians’ essential place in the national psyche, playing Indian evoked actual Indian people and suggested a history of conquest, resistance and eventual dependency. Struggles for native land defined and

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77 “Del Sudoeste” 1955, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
transformed the ways in which Americans viewed their nation, themselves, their Indian opponents and the webs of power in which all were situated.  

Deloria also discusses the “ascendant ideology” of the “vanishing Indian,” the belief that the last Indians were dying off, since progress would bring their way of life to an end. This is the sort of stuff that was on display in Balboa Park during the 1915 exposition – the ascendancy of the white man due to his superiority in the realm of the physical, cultural, religious and industrial technology; the inevitability of Manifest Destiny, ensured because of said white supremacy; and the consequential, if not requisite, demise of Native Americans. This belief in the “vanishing Indian” also serves to, in their own minds, absolve the European settlers and their descendants of any complicity in the genocide of Native Americans, since Indians were “doomed” to disappear as civilization made its way westward. With the Indian out of the way, the settler can now lay claim to the land, even saying that they are now “native” to the land themselves, as well as grant themselves license to use and abuse those things left behind by the original inhabitants, to include their songs, ceremonies and even their bodies (both literal and metaphorical).

Something else that enabled Munzig, and those who will follow the example he set at San Diego State, to so casually perform a racial stereotype is the concept of “dysconscious racism.” In her essay “Dysconscious Racism: Ideology, Identity and the Miseducation of Teachers,” Joyce E. King defines dysconscious racism in this way:

Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness. Uncritical ways of thinking about racial inequity accept certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths, and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages White people have as a result of subordinating diverse others.

In the case of San Diego State, the dysconscious racism takes the form of the reaffirmation of those things which it, as an institution, dysconsciously incorporated into its nascent identity formation between 1921 and 1931: white supremacy; Manifest Destiny and the “vanishing

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78 Deloria, Playing Indian, 186.
Indian;” a romantic “dyshistory” about the genocide of Native Americans at the hands of both Spanish missionaries and Anglo-American settlers in California; the general whitewashing of the history of violence that shaped the very character of the United States, that is to say genocide of Native Americans and slavery. These are the assumptions that are reaffirmed when the students performed in blackface and redface, with the institution’s blessings. When performances in blackface finally reached critical consciousness, it was clearly seen as racist and came to an end. However, the history of how Native Americans are viewed and treated, how they are portrayed in popular culture in film and television, reaffirms the dysconscious racism towards Native Americans. Further, this dysconscious racism towards Native Americans plays itself out in the streets when you see children wearing painted chicken feather headdresses on Halloween, and in the classroom before Thanksgiving, with papersack indian vests and construction paper headbands. The very fact that the “Aztec” moniker and mascot persists demonstrates how this dysconscious racism still haunts SDSU.

Deloria also attributes certain acts of playing Indian to the concept of “imperialistic nostalgia,” a term he credits to Renato Rosaldo. Deloria cites Rosaldo in a manner that focuses on the “disingenuous” nature of those who use the “vanishing Indian” myth in a manner that laments the inevitable fate of Native Americans. Turning to Rosaldo for his definition of imperialistic nostalgia, he sums it up briefly by saying it is the “mourning for what one has destroyed.” But to add a finer point to that definition, he writes:

Imperialist nostalgia thus revolves around a paradox: a person kills somebody and then mourns his or her victim. In more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a form of life and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to his or her intervention. At one more remove, people destroy their environment and then worship nature. In any of its versions, imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of “innocent yearning” both to capture people’s imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination.80

As well put as that is, I would like to add one more touch to the lenses through which we are about to view a set of images from San Diego State’s past. For this last tweak, we turn to bell hooks and her take on imperialist nostalgia:

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In mass culture, imperialist nostalgia takes the form of reenacting and reritualizing in different ways the imperialist, colonizing journey as narrative fantasy of power and desire, of seduction by the Other. This longing is rooted in the atavistic belief that the spirit of the “primitive” resides in the bodies of dark Others whose cultures, traditions, and lifestyles may indeed be irrevocably changed by imperialism, colonization, and racist domination. The desire to make contact with those bodies deemed Other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the past, even takes the form of a defiant gesture where one denies accountability and historical connection. Most importantly, it establishes a contemporary narrative where the suffering imposed by structures of domination on those designated Other is deflected by an emphasis on seduction and longing where the desire is not to make the Other over in one’s image but to become the Other.  

Did/do the students and faculty of San Diego State embrace their imperialist nostalgia and reenact and reritualize? Oh, you betcha! And how! Continuing to (mis)appropriate the “Aztec,” they extend their comedy of errors inspired by the adoption of the geographically challenged “Aztec” moniker by adapting their initiation rituals with the “spice” that (mis)naming demands. They invented whole rituals, where they dressed as “primitives,” to mark the passage of freshmen athletes into becoming “real Aztecs.” These elaborate and invented rites included Coach Peterson donning a feathered headdress, becoming the “other,” and presiding over the proceedings. It is important to bear in mind that, while the students and faculty of San Diego State were engaging in their redface Indian play that included invented rituals and songs, many actual Native American peoples were prohibited from practicing their own ceremonies, from dancing, and in some cases, from gathering as a group altogether. While those at San Diego State appropriated items of spiritual significance to Native Americans (or more accurately, their cheap copies of these items), many Native Americans were actively being denied access to their sacred sites and the use of their sacred items. It wasn’t until the passage of the Native American Religious Freedom Act in 1978 that Native Americans were able to enjoy freedom of religion, in a country that professed to have that freedom as one of its very foundational pillars.

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82 A reference to bell hooks again: “Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.” hooks, *Black Looks*, 21
The echoes of the old elaborate “playing Indian” initiation ceremony persists to this day, in the form of “Aztec Nights” and the “Templo del Sol” event where students are invited to “take the ceremonial walk through the Hepner Hall arches where you'll be greeted by current students, alumni, faculty and staff.” Continuing to address the new, incoming student, the university informs them that “This is your first official night as an Aztec!” The event is described by the university as “An annual fall semester initiation for new Aztecs, to welcome new students into the SDSU family. Learn the fight song, meet new friends, and get into the Aztec groove!” Speaking of the fight song, SDSU’s current Alma Mater, “Hail Montezuma!” has instructions on the original sheet music that it is to be sung at “an Indian chant tempo” – whatever that might be.

With all of this in mind, it’s time to now bear witness to the various forms of Indian play that took place at San Diego State. From the “solemn” redface they donned for their initiation rituals, to the mocking enactment of racist stereotypes, this is the true “tradition” that ought to be recalled when someone wants to understand the significance of the moniker “Aztec” at San Diego State.
Figure 20. (1929) Students show their "Aztec Spirit" by forming the shape of a running man wearing a feathered headdress holding what appears to be a tomahawk.  

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83 “Del Sudoeste” 1929, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
Figure 21. (date unknown) In stark contrast to Munzig’s “clownish” Monty, this student chose a decidedly different interpretation of the (mis)chosen “Aztec” moniker.84

84 “Del Sudoeste” 1949, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
Figure 22. (1937) The dedication ceremony for a sculpture of an imagined Aztec. Donal Hord, the artist, admitted as much, having confessed to only having one actual Native American model for him – and it was not for this particular project). Part of the festivities included a "ceremony" featuring people who are ostensibly students performing in redface (the two top images). Note the caption "another redskin bit the dust..."\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{85} “Del Sudoeste” 1937, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
Figure 23. (date unknown) Suprise! It's another student dressed-up like an Indian and acting the fool. What is interesting about this screen capture is the logo that special collections were using - one that SDSU had deemed inappropriate. I pointed that fact out – they were unaware that it was still there - and it has since been replaced.  

86 "Assorted 1930s Footage (a.k.a. SDSU#5, San Diego State University)," YouTube Video, last modified December 9, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sT0FuYQwCP8.
Figure 24. (1950): I like to call this “how many ill-informed and mis-educated students does it take to form images of racialized stereotypes of Indigenous people at a football game?”

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87 “Del Sudoeste” 1950, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
Figure 25. (1942 and 1945): There were some elaborate ceremonies created which allowed administrators, faculty and students to “Play Indian” together. The images showing the Dean and the students doing who-knows-what to that statue are from what is labeled as the “frosh induction” ceremony. Today, this “induction” lives on in the form of “Templo del Sol” event during “Aztec Nights.”

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88 “Del Sudoeste” 1942 and 1945, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
Figure 26. (1945) These two images may be from the same ceremony, but held in 1945. No context was given, but the creepy statue seems to tie these two events together. Bear in mind that these imagined, appropriated pseudo-native ceremonies were being conducted by these settlers while actual Indigenous people faced religious oppression. 

89 “Del Sudoeste” 1945, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
Figure 27. (1945) After Munzig's "tipi" escapades, San Diego State readily and openly adopted its majorettes, song leaders and flag twirlers dressing-up in redface. That tradition continued into the 60s. Note the big “X” stitching down the side – affirming the notion that Native Americans were too “primitive” to sew “correctly.”

90 Ibid.
Figure 28. (1958) San Diego State apparently cared little for the use of what is considered to be a sacred item to many of the Indigenous nations from the plains, the feathered headdress or war bonnet. To many of the Indigenous nations of the plains, this act is a great insult to their culture and spiritual practices.91

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91 “Del Sudoeste” 1958, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
Figure 29. (1950) The pattern of speech that Munzig affected during his debut of the Monty Montezuma mascot is echoed once again.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{92} “Del Sudoeste” 1950, Yearbook Collection, Digital Collections, San Diego State University Library and Information Access, Special Collections and University Archives.
Figure 30. From 2006. On the left is a close-up of an image that was featured in an official university publication, the SDSU Men's Basketball Team Media Guide for that year. The image was on the inside back cover of the guide (right). Isn’t it funny how the school’s colors allow these students to be in both red and black face simultaneously?93

Sadly, there are a lot more similar images where these came from. I believe the point has been made: San Diego State has a long “tradition” of tacitly approving the racist practice of its administrators, faculty and students dressing in redface, a “tradition” that continues to this day.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THE CONSEQUENCES OF SETTING A BAD EXAMPLE OR “SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY: LEADERSHIP STARTS...SOMEWHERE ELSE?”

In order to bring this particular project to an end, I thought I would explain how this all began for me. During the 2014 Fall semester at SDSU, I had the distinct honor and pleasure of working as a Graduate Teaching Associate for both the American Indian Studies Department and the Rhetoric and Writing Studies Department. My mission: to teach developmental writing, a general education requirement for almost all students, while also introducing students to perspectives and histories with which they were likely not familiar, given the general nature of K-12 education in the U.S. For me, it was a big deal to be able to work with not just any group of students, but incoming first-year/first semester students who still have that “new student” wonderment, a combination of excitement and fear, with a dash of eagerness that lasts, oh, about half way through the first semester. As it was my first time teaching, I had to stick to the script of what the RWS department wanted me to teach (as is the case with all new, first time graduate teaching associates in their program). However, for American Indian Studies, I was free to do as I saw fit. To keep it easy and to maintain some degree of sanity, I paralleled the two courses, in terms of the nature of what is being taught (spot the author’s main argument and supporting evidence, name the Aristotelian appeal being used, etc.).

The first subject we engaged in my American Indian Studies Class was that of identity. We read a variety of texts, all dealing with the concept of identity, authenticity, who was a “real Indian,” who was a “legal Indian,” who wasn’t and why - you get the picture. I tend to use a lot of short videos in my teaching (this is a more “visual” generation of humans)
to accompany the texts we read. It was during this unit that we watched the 1491s’ “Halloween Responsibly PSA” - it was the fall semester, and Halloween would soon be upon us, so I thought it appropriate to examine how the 1491s constructed their argument, with satire and incongruity as rhetorical tools. In the video, the 1491s make use of “blackface” to drive home the point: if you see blackface as clearly offensive, why do you not see people who dress in “redface” equally offensive? The video ends with the message “Think Before You Indian” superimposed upon the person in blackface. Unfortunately, the message did not get through to many people, as they were too offended by the use of blackface. Consequently, the 1491s were compelled to produce a follow-on video, to address their critics.

Figure 31. The 1491s driving the point home - if you see blackface as racist and offensive, then you should also see redface, that is dressing-up as an Native American stereotype, as equally racist and offensive.

That follow-on video, called “The 1491s on Blackface” provided an excellent rebuttal to their critics. They offered an analysis of what they were doing in their earlier version and reminded everyone who had apparently missed the point:

“We were pointing out an incredible sadness. It's a horrible truth that in today's society, you can go to a Halloween party dressed as Tonto and nobody will give

95 Ibid.
two shits. But if you go dressed as Sambo, you get all the shit in the world. We're just looking for an equal amount of shit-giving.”

The video concludes with an exchange between one of the members of the 1491s (who can be heard from off camera) and a young student who identifies as both African-American and Navajo who was working in what appears to be a beer pong booth set-up at a University of Utah (the “Utes”) sports event. She’s wearing a headband, with white feathers, and “war paint” in the school colors on her cheeks, just below her eyes. The exchange is worth sharing:

**Student:** We represent the Utah Utes and they’re Native American, so…

**1491s:** Are you Native American?

**Student:** Yes. I’m half, actually. I’m half Navajo and half African American. Like, I just recently like saw like how much people are making a big deal about it like having Native American people as mascots for school football teams and school basketball teams and honestly I don’t see a problem with it. I really don’t. I mean I don’t take offense to her (referring to another female student in the booth who is dressed in a similarly mock-native outfit, but with a horribly garish multi-colored chicken feather “headdress”) like she was like ‘Is this ok? Am I going to offend people?’ And like, like I don’t personally take offense to it, but I know there are probably other Native Americans who do.

**1491s:** Would you, um, would you put on black face? If it were like a part of the team tradition?

**Student:** (looking downward, pausing momentarily to think) No.

**1491s:** So why is, why would this be ok (referring to her costume choice) and that not?

**Student:** (more thinking, a knowing smile appears marking the moment that she “gets it”) I have absolutely no idea. But now that, like I said, it’s put in perspective, it’s something to think about.”

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96 Ibid.

The video brought forward a very constructive discussion in class, with the lesson in rhetoric and argument learned, with the added (and intended) bonus of raising awareness of this persistent racist practice of redface, in this case in the form of Halloween costumes, sports team mascots and the way a team’s moniker can bring an otherwise non-racist person to behave in a racist manner.

A few weeks after having shown this video in class, in what I can only describe as the moment of sheer joy a teacher experiences when they realize that someone may have actually learned something from their teaching, one of my students came up to me after class and said, “I just wanted to let you know that I didn’t dress-up like an Indian for that party last week, because of what you taught us.” I stood there, basking in the glow of having facilitated the growth of another human being, of helping them to think critically, of...wait a minute! What party?!!

I asked the student that very question, but they instinctively withdrew, perhaps believing that maybe they had done something wrong by sharing that information with me, a sentiment I could completely understand given the nature of the social pressures first-year students face, especially those who wish to rush a fraternity/sorority, as this person was doing. I’ll spare you the details of how I came to learn about “the party,” save that it was the result of some minor sleuthing, inference and a Jedi mind trick or two (skills I had developed in my previous iteration as a legal international arms dealer). It was called a “Cowboys and Navahoes” (emphasis on the “hoe” - the slang term derived from the word “whore”) party, a theme that is, sadly, apparently far too common throughout college and university campuses in the United States, to include Harvard which once has a “Conquistabros and Navahoes” party to commemorate Columbus Day in 2010 on its campus. The party had been organized by the Sigma Alpha Epsilon (ΣAE') fraternity. When I began my own internet investigation into this “event,” I learned that ΣAE had previously been censured by SDSU four years prior for throwing a party with this same exact theme. The reason: the theme called for the use of racialized stereotypes of Native Americans, a behavior which runs counter to SDSU’s diversity/inclusion efforts and policies. I could not find any photographs of the party which

98 Ibid.
had just occurred, but thanks to the magic of the internet, I was able to locate some images from the SAE party in 2009, forever preserved in digital amber on the Rockstar energy drink’s facebook page.

When I learned that SAE had been censured for having previously thrown this party, it made me stop and think, the classic “so let me get this straight” line of thinking when an incongruity is encountered: the university punished students for dressing like Indians, when the official mascot is a student dressed like an Indian, and the institution has a “tradition” that goes waaaaaay back to at least 1925 of students and faculty dressing like Indians. Hmmm. The hypocrisy detector comes alive.

![Images From SAE's 2009 "Cowboys and Navahoes" party - Students dressed as Indians. The fraternity was sanctioned for having a party that encouraged dressing-up as racialized stereotypes by an institution that has a mascot which is essentially a student dressed as racialized stereotype. (Huh?) But some progress is evident: SDSU sees this behavior as wrong; now it needs to look in a mirror.](image)

A brief tangent to point out an eerie coincidence: remember Art Munzig, the student who started the whole “Monty Montezuma” redface mascot mess back in 1941? He joined SAE when he transferred to UCLA in 1942 after having completed three semesters at SDSC.

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Another creepy tangent: ΣAE would make national headlines in March of 2015 when members of its chapter at Oklahoma University were caught on video singing a song that featured the lyrics “there will never be a nigger SAE,” ironically sung to the tune of “If You’re Happy and You Know It.” At the time of this writing, the ΣAE chapter at SDSU has been placed on probation, as a result of “consistent pattern of violations related to health and safety and alcohol policies.” SDSU never made any direct mention of the party, perhaps because it is aware of the incongruity it presents to its mascot - but that is speculation. The only indirect “official” reference to ΣAE’s party can be found in President Elliot Hirshman’s blog post of April 3, 2015, entitled “Many Identities - One SDSU Community”:

Recent events at the University of Oklahoma and UCLA have highlighted something that, in our hearts, we already knew. We have a long way to go in achieving fair and equal treatment of every person on our college campuses. To the good, there has been near-universal condemnation of the blatant racism at Oklahoma and of the anti-Semitism at UCLA. Further, many students, faculty and staff have emphasized that these hateful and discriminatory actions represent the views of only a very small minority on our campuses.

Yet, these atavistic, insular hatreds persist. They are part of a powerful set of forces that are dividing Americans and our university campuses into ever smaller groups based on our race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation and their intersections. Such divisions reinforce old hatreds and create new ones. For example, cultural appropriation (my emphasis), in which one group mocks the cultural identity of another group, and identity politics, in which groups support political positions based solely on their identity, further divide us.100

I was thankful that I was not actively sipping my coffee when I read President Hirshman refer to cultural appropriation as an example of something that is a “part of a powerful set of forces that are dividing Americans and our university campuses.” The very nature of the use “Aztec” by the university, the birth of its mascot, all of the performances of racialized stereotypes by faculty and students, baton twirlers in feathered headdresses, students dressed as imagined Indians, faux ceremonies, chants, songs, the names of the dorms, the names of the rooms of the new student union, t-shirts and banners proclaiming “We Are Aztecs”...these are all born from the initial act of cultural appropriation that took place in 1925. President Hirshman’s solution to addressing those divisive “powerful set of

forces” he mentioned: The “Aztec Unity Project.” I will do you the courtesy of removing the text that resulted from me pounding my forehead on the keyboard.

That was a long digression. Where were we? Oh yes, the student telling me about the party. The fact that she came to understand that the act of dressing-up as a racist stereotype was wrong speaks volumes about what it is we ought to be teaching our students at SDSU. This person understood it. They learned. They thought critically. They altered their behavior. They refused to participate in the act. And they told someone, in this case, me, that it was still occurring on campus. Their bravery should be applauded!

Concurrently and coincidentally to the discussion between this student and myself, there was a resolution submitted on October 2, 2014 to the Associated Students by the Queer People of Color Collective to remove the moniker and mascot. For reasons which are unknown to me, QPOCC chose to “go it alone,” without the support of other student organizations on campus, such as the Native American Student Alliance (NASA), Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan (MEChA), the Association of Chicana Activist (A.Ch.A.), I can go on to list campus groups that represent people who have been historically marginalized which might take an interest in removing racialized stereotypes from campus. I myself was approached a bit late into the process, and was able to only lend my support in the form of making everyone aware of the rather large three ring binder in the American Indian Studies Department with an archive of information from the 2000-2003 effort to retire the mascot. QPOCC’s attempt was valiant; their argument about the harm that stereotypes create was sound. But I knew that it was a quixotic effort, as the process of educating the student body about the history of the mascot, the WHY of its racism, as well as forming a coalition of students wishing to bring about this change, were missing. I knew the resolution would not pass, but I admired the effort, one which resulted in a couple of light bulbs coming on in the minds of the Associated Students committee examining the issue – but they, too, were ill-equipped to take on the dysconscious racism that causes the majority of the student body to not see WHY a student dressing-up in redface is just as unacceptable as a student dressing-up in blackface.

Confession time: up to this point in my time at SDSU, the mascot, and all those Aztec references on buildings and t-shirts, only brought me to shake my head and chuckle in mild amusement at the persistent ignorance that the university perpetuated. It took my
student, and their bravery in speaking to me, to make me clearly see the harm that the school’s moniker and mascot creates by producing “accidental racists.” I learned something from that student as well, and I thought it was important to share that lesson. I also realized, watching QPOCC’s proposed resolution be rejected, that the real history of the moniker choice and consequential mascot was obscured to virtually everyone. That’s when I decided to research that history.

Believe me, when I began to look into the moniker and mascot history, I was floored by what I discovered. Why hasn’t this stuff been made more well known? Was there some sort of effort to intentionally obscure it? And frankly, I don’t know why this information was not brought to the forefront when the mascot faced its most serious challenge in 2000 - the assertion by its supporters that the mascot was not racist would have been dashed into a pile of teeny pieces. “Me thinkum. Me Movem.” That sounds pretty racist to me! And THAT is the birth of the mascot at SDSU!

As I may have mentioned before, it isn’t the mascot that offends me, it’s the fact that the university still chooses to maintain it that is offensive. But the times, they are a changin’. This summer, while I was writing this thesis, three things happened that I never expected to see in my lifetime, let alone happen within the span of a week:

- July 8: A Federal judge upheld the decision to repeal the Washington Redskins’ trademark, re-affirming that it is disparaging and degrading to Native Americans, that the term is racist.

- July 9: The Pope apologized for the church’s “grave sins” against the Indigenous people of the Americas by saying “I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offense of the church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America.” We should recall that we have an accidental homage to those “grave sins” in the form of the architecture of SDSU’s original campus, specifically Hepner Hall, and the dysconscious reproduction of that architecture of genocide in the new Student Union’s “mission revival” style.

- July 10: After an act of terrorism in Charleston, South Carolina that took the lives of nine innocent lives, the confederate battle flag was removed from the grounds of the capital of South Carolina; it was finally seen as the symbol of hate that it is, since it was used by the terrorist who committed the act.

That a growing number of people are beginning to challenge the remaining symbols of hate and racism that persist in this country is promising, but we have a long way to go. That the Pope acknowledges what the Church did during the first phases of colonization as “grave
sins” is also a good start, but we still have a long way to go (I never imagined that the Church would ever admit to this).

Another fun fact, and this: The San Diego Museum of Man, which is housed in the California Building at Balboa Park, presently has an exhibit on race and racism. Within that exhibit, there is a section that specifically addresses the use of Native Americans as mascots and the practice of playing Indian. That the very site that Fred Osenberg (remember him from 1925?) got his misinformed inspiration for the moniker “Aztec” is currently hosting an exhibit explaining why the use of Native Americans as mascots is racist and wrong should really serve as a wake-up call to those who still support the Aztec moniker and mascot at SDSU. The trend is clear: symbols of racism, to include racist sports mascots, need to go into a museum, right alongside the confederate flag, and serve as lessons from the past of the sort of behavior in which we ought not to engage.

Figure 34. The Museum of Man would like you to know that playing Indian and using Native American mascots for sports team is racist and wrong.101

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101 Steff Saavedra, Mascot Portion of the San Diego Museum of Man's "Race: Are We So Different?" Exhibit, given to Author July 7, 2015.
One more parting thought, or rather image, specifically for those still cannot understand the racism behind the mascot. It’s something I’ve shared with my students in class, from the time the mascot was remade to be more “historically accurate” and “honorable” (read as: “less racist):

![Image of racist mascots]

Figure 35. Marketing 101: How to obscure your racism. Efforts to make images with racist histories “respectable” or “more accurate” are nothing more than acts of denial that create more harm by avoiding the topic altogether, thereby perpetuating the racism. It’s one thing for a private corporation to do it, it’s quite another when a public institution of higher learning does it.\(^\text{102}\)

The images you see above may not seem to have anything in common, but they are both are the products from the same sort of thinking that refuses to come to terms with the racism inherent in their representations. On the left side, you see the old, racist depictions.

On the right side, you see the attempts to whitewash over the racism by making the symbols “more respectable.” In time, the racist origins of the images on the right might fade away from memory, with their continued use creating more “accidental racists.” But if someone were to scratch away at the surfaces of those images on the right through research, the history of racism and violence are revealed.

It’s time to come to terms with that history. For SDSU, the first step would be to honor its own diversity pledge by putting an end to its use of a racialized stereotype by retiring the Aztec moniker and mascot, thereby removing those blemishes from SDSU’s otherwise distinguished record of achievement in its diversity efforts. Then it should take a cue from the pope, with a sincere apology, and take steps to educate the students, faculty, administrators and alumni about the true nature of the school’s moniker and mascot (and, for that matter, its architecture). Will it happen? Maybe in time. Or maybe…Leadership can start here. Now.
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