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## Branding A University's Mascot

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BRANDING A UNIVERSITY'S MASCOT

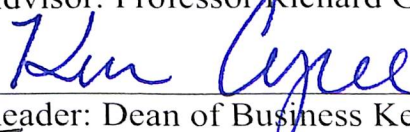
by  
Stanley Ryan Viner


A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford  
May 2011

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Gentry for helping me through this entire process. His sacrifice of his own time, and his friendship, advice, criticism, and encouragement were instrumental to this work and greatly appreciated. Without his work this thesis would not have been possible. I also want to express my appreciation for Dr. David Sansing. Through our conversations together, Dr. Sansing contributed a great deal of invaluable wisdom and insight. This project was also strengthened by the time Michael Thompson spent talking to me about the university and the Ole Miss brand, thanks for sharing your ideas and vision for the future. Additionally, I cannot ignore the contribution that the Honors College and its staff – Dr. Sullivan-González, Dr. Young, Dr. Sammonds, and Mrs. Penny Leeton among others – made to my years at Ole Miss. Finally, I want to acknowledge my family, friends, and the entire Ole Miss community for supporting my efforts and work.

## ABSTRACT

### Branding a University's Mascot

(Under the Direction of Dr. Richard Gentry)

The objective of this paper is to investigate the dilemma many collegiate institutions have with the appropriateness of their symbols, particularly the mascot, and how these symbols can affect the overall brand equity of a university. Plausible connections between the mascot, symbols, and brands will be formulated validating the claim that a mascot is a brand, which will permit the direct application of marketing and branding theories to the mascot situation at The University of Mississippi. The importance of the mascot and the human response to collegiate symbols will be explored by the utilization of two psychological theories - Social Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan) and Basking In Reflected Glory (Cialdini). A historical and emotional understanding of athletic symbols at Ole Miss, as well as a case study on prior mascot controversies will be presented. Following this section will be a study of branding with a special concentration on the six eras of branding. Statistical research, conclusions, recommendations, and a strategic marketing plan, based on a conclusive marketing research survey, will be presented to support marketing efforts in the transition The University of Mississippi is making from Colonel Rebel to the Rebel Black Bear. The findings suggest that the Ole Miss brand is in a state of instability and that members of the university's community are not satisfied with recent decisions to alter school symbols. In conclusion, Ole Miss's brand equity can be bolstered by the correct application of cultural branding strategies developed and discussed in this paper.

## PREFACE

As Dr. Robert Khayat was being ushered in as the university's fifteenth chancellor, he was asked by the Board of Trustees to enumerate his vision for Ole Miss. His response was for The University of Mississippi "to be, and be perceived as, a great public university" (Sansing 344). Dr. Dan Jones, the current chancellor of the university, maintains the vision of his predecessor and strives to achieve the specific goal to "develop a diverse campus that recognizes and promotes the value of individual differences" (Office of the Chancellor). Official cheers, logos, emblems, songs, and especially mascots exist because of a common experience shared by those who have attended or attend any university. These expressions of a unified past express the identity of a university, both internally and externally. Over the past 40 years, the identity (internal and external) and image of Ole Miss has undoubtedly transformed. The university has slowly divested associations with certain aspects of its past traditions and brand: the Confederate flag and soldier-like spirit leader at sporting games, "The South Will Rise Again" phrase which accompanies the song, *From Dixie with Love*, the on field presence of Colonel Rebel, and most recently the presence of his caricature on licensed apparel. The pressing question for the Ole Miss community is how can a university unite its members, and give a clear vision of the future when the past is such confusing influence on its present existence? The brand of Ole Miss is confused right now, this is an effort to explain those confusions and provide a way to clarity.

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## Chapter 1: The Meaning of a Mascot

### The Importance of Symbolism – Why humans make symbols and how they respond to them

In order to form a logical conversation and debate about a particular mascot one must understand the connection of a mascot to symbolism theories, the origin and meaning of mascots, and the expected role of a mascot within a university. For our purposes we will define *symbol* and then discuss the meaning of icons. Images, phrases, singular words, and physical gestures can all be understood as symbolic. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines a *symbol* as “something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance; *especially*: a visible sign of something invisible”. Icons are different from symbols. While symbols and icons can both possess negative connotations, an icon is normally associated with an idea or place of being to which humans aspire. An icon is a higher-level representative piece than a symbol because of its power to be readily identified, understood, and connected to aspiration emotions. While a symbol can become an icon, it is a difficult process because many different elements have to align. Therefore, it makes practical marketing sense to endeavor towards the development of an iconic brand whenever possible. Douglas B. Holt, author of *How Brands Become Icons*, explains, “The crux of iconicity is that the person or the thing is widely regarded as the



most compelling symbol of a set of ideas or values that a society deems important” (Holt 1). *Symbol* is a term I will utilize in this paper. The term will be used interchangeably with the word *mascot* and also refer to other school associated images. The ensuing section will explain the human use of symbols; the effect symbols have on human response, and explain why the mascot is a symbol.

### **Anthropology: Human Creation of Symbols**

Since humanity organized itself into tribal structures, symbols have played an important role in society. Dr. Ed Sisson, an associate professor of anthropology at The University of Mississippi, explained that symbols have been utilized since the establishment of primitive social groups and that one of the initial purposes of symbols was to extend kinship bonds (Sisson). Anthropologists disagree on the exact definition of kinship. Yet, for our purposes it suffices to say that kinship is the manner in which we define *family*. For some cultures, family carries an all-together different connotation than our own western view, but what is important is an understanding of the individual’s sense of belonging to a particular group or set of people. The Ojibwa, a tribe native to the North Pacific, have a word, *totem*, that gives significant insight into how humans can take something outside of themselves, identify the self with that outside element, and in doing so extend their strength of relations to an otherwise unrelated people. In many ancient cultures, like the Korean JangSeung and the Pacific Ojibwa, a totem was a symbol that contained a potent significance. To a member of the Ojibwa, a totem was an animalistic spiritual guide and a bit of heraldry that signified membership to a certain clan, chief, or the commemoration of a special life event (Ojibwa). In JangSeung culture, totem poles were built to protect villages against misfortune, mark territories, and wish for a good

harvest. A totem carried power because in the minds of these people they performed many roles, including group association and indication of possession (What's on Korea). Is it that far-fetched to think that modern, collegiate mascots are a descendent of the totem, and that Americans use these modern day totems to perform roles that they cannot?

The constant use of symbols has not stopped with the Ojibwa or the JangSeung peoples. In fact, symbols continually flood people's minds every moment of every day. In the first chapter of the book *Marketing Without Advertising: Inspire Customers to Rave About Your Business to Create Lasting Success*, Michael Phillips & Salli Rasberry state: "It is estimated that each American is exposed to well over 2,500 advertising messages per day" (23). Brand symbols, such as logos and spokespersons, are present in almost every imaginable location and translate into the consumer's life through a various sundry of advertising mediums. The average American will find it just about impossible to get away from advertising – the brand messages of companies and their products. Show an American a picture of two golden arches and they will immediately attach the image to McDonald's. In a phone conversation say, "Can you hear me now?" and the listener will probably recall Verizon's advertising campaign that focused on superior cell service. These brand messages carry with them a certain implied meaning to which humans react by associating emotions and thoughts to the symbols' images or messages. Per the dictionary definition of *symbol*, we are reminded that symbols suggest a meaning by association; one only has to look at a stop sign and observe the human reaction to that sign in order to believe that humans respond to the suggested meaning of symbols. In a practical experiment, I drew the circular Mercedes-Benz symbol on a napkin and asked

multiple observers what the symbol meant to them. Every single respondent understood it was the symbol for the German carmaker and went a step further by adding attributes, such as excellence, to the meaning of this particular brand symbol. Oftentimes, symbols are much more than just minimal suggestive pieces like a stop sign. The effect of a symbol can be very powerful and the problem of influential symbols, like religious icons or even a mascot, is their tendency to be controversial, misunderstood, or adapted because of social evolution and cultural differences.

The communicated meaning of symbols – images, words, and phrases – alters because society evolves. Symbols do not define themselves. It is society and the individuals who establish their meaning. For example, the image of a plantation might prompt thoughts of southern gentility and nobility to a southern Caucasian. Yet, that very same image can invoke memories of slavery and injustice to an African-American. There are also symbols, which possess multiple meanings due to cultural differences. For example, to Americans, the symbol of the “stars and stripes” conjures up images of freedom, heroism, and democracy. However, to some Iraqis the flag is a reminder of an oppressive nation from which they want liberation. This is why Americans will make a concerted effort to keep the flag from touching the ground and others, like the group of Iraqis in Sadr City, will intentionally burn the flag (“US Flag-burning in Baghdad Marks 6th Anniversary of Iraq War”). In Japan, the physical gesture of eye contact is considered rude. Western cultures condition individuals to a different code of propriety and decency. In the United States, for example, people are taught to hold eye contact as a sign of attentiveness and respect (Neary). Finally, consider the swastika, an example of both cultural difference and social evolution. The modern, western world knows this

reviled image as a representation of heinous crimes against humanity while eastern religions associate the symbol with its Sanskrit origin where the figure means “good luck” or “well-being” (Sayre). Symbols and the meaning they convey can often result in the same way as a bad game of telephone. The original intent of the message begins unadulterated, but as time wears on and the symbol passes from person to person that message can change. Sometimes the end result is shocking. Is it not possible that the Ole Miss mascot, Colonel Rebel, has experienced this common fate of symbols?

### **Beginnings of the Mascot, a Modern Symbol**

The word *mascot* originated in the French region of Provence. Initially, the word possessed an ethereal, spiritual connotation. A mascot was a good luck charm for French children and households. In the late nineteenth century, American sports teams began to adopt mascots, normally animals, as tokens of good luck or sources of entertainment (Spindel 29). The first collegiate mascot is believed to have been Handsome Dan, Yale University’s bulldog (“Handsome Dan”). In 1891, Handsome Dan was paraded at a game against rival Princeton University. In a battle of school spirit, the Princeton students quickly made a mascot to match their school colors of orange and black, the result was a “comely colored” girl dressed entirely in orange (King, *Beyond The Cheers* 2). This set off a quick succession of university adopted mascots in the name of school spirit. The mascot is a symbol because it performs many of the traditional roles of the symbol. It is not unlike the totem, which signified membership in a clan. In terms of modern interpretation mascots are symbols because they incite reaction in humans – whether it is a cheer or a jeer. Logos, mascots, marks, and all other collegiate imagery symbolize an association with a certain school and these modern day totems call people

to rally under their clan's banner.

### **Social Attachment to the Collegiate Brand**

Now that the mascot has been proven to be a symbol one might still be wondering why a mascot is so important and why people respond emotionally to them. This section will employ the use of psychological theories – Social Determination Theory (SDT) and Basking In Reflected Glory (BIRG) – to explain the strength of the collegiate brand, especially the mascot. It will begin by proving that humans desire to be a part of a group. Next, the mascot will be proposed as a socially and culturally constructed device, which allows people to easily integrate with one another. This innate human need, partly satisfied by school symbols, will explain the fervor and attachment individuals have towards symbols such as a mascot.

Self Determination Theory suggests that there are three basic psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – that underlie growth and development. Deci and Ryan explain that our needs or goals in SDT are inherent to the human condition and that they “are essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being” (229). These needs are constantly pursued over the whole life span of a human being. Like water to the body, an individual can never be completely quenched of the needs outlined in SDT theory. A person can never reach complete satisfaction in the areas of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Furthermore, each person possesses each of these needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – even if they are not currently pursuing the satisfaction of those needs. For example, a human has the basic biological need of eating but can refuse to satisfy that innate need for whatever reason. A goal is

simply a desired outcome resulting from a particular behavior. In the tradition of Pavlov, certain actions meet positive or negative outcomes and as a result, humans are conditioned to learn the impact their behavior can have on their life and the lives of others. The three needs outlined by SDT “are considered essential for understanding the *what* (i.e., content) and *why* (i.e., process) of *goal pursuits*” (Deci and Ryan, 228). For our purposes, the mascot is the *what*, social interaction with others is the *why*, and the *goal pursuit* is satisfying the need of social relatedness. For example, if an individual’s goal is to be known by others and find community, this individual will be prone to place the self in favorable social situations in order to achieve the desire or goal to belong in a specific social context.

The need of relatedness with SDT is crucial to our understanding of why mascots are important. SDT postulates that humans are active, growth-oriented organisms who are naturally inclined toward the organization of all their personal psychic elements into an understood and unified self. As humans make sense of themselves they begin to integrate into larger social groups. This need to pursue and engage in community, while contributing your own personal experience to that of the collective, explains the propensity for human beings to create a common or shared identity with one another from individual and interpersonal experiences. The allure of the mascot is its ability to support individuals as they attempt to transcend the self and find a sense of belonging with a larger group. The mascot, like a favorite band, is a mechanism and a means by which we as individuals can find common ground, integrate with one another, and find personal meaning within large groups.

individual wearing the apparel and logo of their team they will immediately go talk to that person. It is these collegiate symbols – logos, marks, and mascots – that give us a sense of common ground and allow us to satisfy the innate human need of relatedness as we integrate and associate with other individuals. The actual mascot is not necessarily important, what is important is the identity complex performed by a mascot. Therefore, whether the mascot is a tiger, hawk, or a tree isn't essential. What is crucial is that the form a mascot takes embodies a group of individuals who compose the university that the mascot is representing. In order to embody the identity of the university a mascot must be approved and endorsed by the members of the university – students, faculty, alumni, and fans. This is why a mascot change is difficult. While it is easy to modify a mascot suit from Colonel Rebel to Rebel Black Bear it is immensely difficult to have a large community forget their identity associations with an established symbol and instantly associate their collective identity with a symbolic piece that has never before represented who they are or performed any identity roles for them.

Think of a time where you discussed sports with a fan of a particular team. Did that fan say *we* when referring to the team's performance or did that fan detach the self from the team and simply say, "Well, the Baltimore Orioles didn't play *their* best game tonight". The use of pronouns as descriptors helps us understand how certain individuals associate with groups with whom they have no direct and immediate relation (in the sense that a fan does not play for or coach the team). Pronouns like *we* and *us* are indicative of a desire for association. The use of other pronouns like *they* and *them* allows the speaker to distance the self from the object being described. The assertion that many individuals have an emotional connection to athletic teams and their associated symbols is not far-

fetched. Most sports fans have a strong, shared identity with the teams they follow; they spend large amounts of time, energy, and money to support them and in the process *them* becomes *we*. Dr. Carrie Smith, an associate social psychology professor at Ole Miss, states that individuals often “place their esteem” or sense of worth and “happiness” in objects beyond themselves, like a mascot, or a sports team and their performance (Smith). If our team loses, we also feel a strong sense of loss. If our team is to win we find ourselves celebrating a great victory, identifying with and sharing the success earned by those on the field.

The work of Cialdini and his colleagues further illustrates this associative phenomenon many people have with athletic teams and symbols. This research team designated the identification a fan has with the success of a team and therefore its related imagery, like songs and mascots, as a complex called, “Basking-In-Reflected-Glory” (BIRG). The experiments displayed that after a team won; there was a noticeable increase in the number of students donning team apparel and a marked increase in the use of personal pronouns such as *we* and *us*. If the team lost, the effects were the exact opposite. For example, subjects used the term *we* nearly twice as often to describe a victory than a non-victory (26% vs. 13.5%) (Cialdini 373). The researchers explained their findings by citing Heider’s balance formulation. Heider theorized that there are two types of supposed relations between things: “sentiment relations”, which suggest feelings that accompany certain stimuli, and “unit relations”, which imply that things are somehow associated to one another. Unit relations are the cause of the t-shirt phenomena after a win. Students connect with the positive connotation of a successful team and the observer (anyone who meets the student) subconsciously identifies the positive



associations of the team with the individual wearing the team's shirt (Cialdini 369). In the wake of Auburn's 2010 BCS national championship "an estimated 78,000 fans... including hundreds of students crowded onto the field before the stage" (Reed). BIRG argues that 78,000 fans would not have been there to celebrate a 4-8 season. When asked about Auburn's fans, the comments of head coach Gene Chizik epitomized the ability of sport to enhance a sense of relatedness among individuals:

When I say ourselves, I'm talking about the Auburn family.... I'm talking about the people that decided to travel and come out here that don't have a ticket. I'm talking about the people that have followed Auburn football, I'm talking about all the people that pour so much -- our place is full of love and passion and excitement for Auburn. And that's the whole family. And so when I say for us, I don't mean just us. I mean the Auburn family and everybody that cares to carry the flag ("Chizik: This One's for the Auburn Family").

As seen in Gene Chizik's comments, a familial and fervently loyal tone can be generated when students talk about their alma maters, literally meaning, "fostering mother". The experience of Auburn University is not unique in the realm of collegiate institutions. Frank E. Everett, Jr., who penned these words about his alma mater, The University of Mississippi, further illustrates this depth of allegiance and profound personal identification to a college:

The University is buildings, trees and people. Ole Miss is mood, emotion and personality. One is physical, and the other is spiritual. One is tangible and the other intangible. The University is respected, but Ole Miss is loved. The

University gives a diploma and regretfully terminates tenure, but one never graduates from Ole Miss.

The years of college that a young man or woman experiences are highly transformative and the gestalt ethos of college possesses powerful psychic links between the individual and the university. The pageantry, history, and tradition of our alma maters evoke memory, a common experience among fellow men. To many alumni, mascots, school colors, and fight songs are as much a part of the university as books, classrooms, and teachers. Mr. Hahn's references to: "symbol", "spirit", and "true meaning" as he illustrated Chief Illiniwek's intimate connection with the experience of The University of Illinois is no surprise. The work of Cialdini's team proves that some humans emotionally link their self-perception to sporting teams. This emotional link extends to the markers, like a mascot, that identify athletic teams. Once this is understood it is easier to comprehend the backlash many schools, including Ole Miss, face when they alter any of the images that have long been attached to the university. Colonel Rebel is arguably connected to the self-perception of many members of the Ole Miss community, and like the t-shirt phenomena, it will be interesting to observe how the unit relations or perceptions of the community members towards the Rebel Black Bear will affect their behavior towards the brand.

## Chapter 2: Symbols of Ole Miss

### Popularity of Collegiate Football Spurs Nicknames into Prominence

This section will give a brief historical account of the *Rebel* nickname, Colonel Rebel, and other university associated imagery. During the mid-nineteenth century organized sport began to gain prominence on American college campuses. In 1852, rowing teams from Yale and Harvard competed in the first intercollegiate competition. This triggered the development of athletic programs across the American university landscape. On May 15, 1874, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, students from Harvard and McGill Universities battled in what was to be the first of many intercollegiate football games in the United States (Lewis 224-228). The game's popularity spread rapidly beyond its origins in the Northeast and found its way to Oxford, Mississippi in the fall of 1893. Professor Alexander Bondurant learned the game while attending graduate school in Harvard and organized the first team in the university's history. This particular team and the sport of football instantly captivated the students, alumni, and the citizenry of Mississippi. As the team prepared for its first game against Southwestern Baptist University of Jackson, Tennessee, the student magazine reported "All of our attention is now directed towards football". This time period was the conception of an unstoppable love affair for intercollegiate sports, especially football, at Ole Miss and other universities nationwide. In 1906, the *Mississippi Magazine* wrote that college football had "found a unique place in the hearts of the American people... Greece had the Olympics, Rome had

its coliseum, and... American colleges will have the struggle of the gridiron" (Sansing 170-174).

After nearly thirty years of intercollegiate competition under the moniker, *Red and Blue*, the university decided to sponsor a contest to find a new name for the football team. Dr. David Sansing, author of *The University of Mississippi, A Sesquicentennial History*, and emeritus professor of history at The University of Mississippi, explains that during the early 1920's the college game of football was becoming quickly commercialized. Likenesses representing universities were transforming into recognizable brands and consumer products. The identification of a team with a certain image, nickname, and mascot provided a common identity upon which loyalty and enthusiasm could be evoked in a fan base. The selection committee processed over 800 entrants and selected the nickname, *The Mississippi Flood* (Newman 321). This calling card for the university's sporting teams never quite stuck and in the mid-1930's was dropped after a committee of sportswriters selected the name *Rebels*, a term that was "to symbolize the spirit, tradition, and ideals of Ole Miss". The *Mississippian* commented that "(rebels is) suggestive of a spirit native to the Old South and particularly to Mississippi" (Sansing 255).

### **Complex History of The University of Mississippi and its Symbols**

The name *Rebels* brought to mind an already strong connection to the history of the university. Ole Miss sent her sons to war in 1861 and by 1865 not one of the *University Greys* ever came back. Union troops occupied Oxford near the end of the conflict and a plot of grass behind the basketball arena is the final resting place for hundreds of Confederate soldiers. This relationship with the Confederate south

unquestionably inspired the imagery that appeared over the twenty years after the selection of the Rebel namesake.

In 1937, the image of Colonel Rebel made his first appearance, stamped on the front of the school's annual yearbook. There will always be much debate on the inspiration behind the imagery of Colonel Rebel. The Colonel Rebel Foundation, a group dedicated to the restoration of the mascot to his past stature and duties, cites the perspective offered by Dr. Sansing. He suggests that the model for the original Colonel Rebel emblem just may have been Blind Jim Ivy, a black man and campus fixture until his death in 1955 (qtd. In Cleveland). Ivy spent over 60 years on campus, attended hundreds of Ole Miss athletic events, and was remembered for saying, "I've never seen Ole Miss lose". There was an honest admiration and affection for Blind Jim, one student wrote that he is, "loved with the same love that the students have for... the Lyceum. Blind Jim is a part of Ole Miss" (Sansing 275-276). This perspective separates Colonel Rebel's inspiration from a direct link to the Civil War. Additionally, Joshua I. Newman of Towson University maintains, "That iterations of Colonel Reb featured a caricature of a plantation owner representative of plantation culture and the Old South, this version of Colonel Reb featured no visible connections to the Civil War" (Newman 322). Research indicates this to be true and it must be made clear that while it may seem that Colonel Rebel is in no way directly attached to the Confederacy, his image does imply a connection to the antebellum south, a link that can possess negative connotations for African Americans. These negative implications come from the mascot's name and image. His name is "Colonel Rebel", *colonel* is a military rank and *rebel* is a term synonymous with the Confederate military forces of the Civil War. Nadine Cohodas,

author of the book, *The Band Played Dixie*, describes Colonel Rebel's appearance as "a southern gentleman in the image of a plantation master: flowing white hair, bushy mustache, wearing a long coat nipped at the waist, light pants, dark shoes, and a big broad-brimmed hat" (161). What his image suggests, by association, is the Old South and plantation culture, one that was characterized by an oppression of African Americans by "plantation masters" that looked like Colonel Rebel.

The University of Mississippi certainly did have direct and implied connections to the Confederate south. Beginning with the university's centennial celebration in 1948, the Confederate flag, more specifically the Rebel battle flag, was waved at Ole Miss football games. Additionally, a student clad in Confederate regalia would romp up and down the sidelines leading the school's faithful in numerous cheers (Towson 323). From the early 1950's, Dr. Sansing explains that the university was fundamentally linked with the trappings and imagery of the Confederacy. In 1950, students inaugurated "Dixie Week" which featured a ceremonial reading of the Ordinance of Secession and the auctioning off of cheerleaders as slaves. While Colonel Rebel was not a fixture on the sidelines, he was part of the fabric of student life. Two years after his appearance on the yearbook's cover in 1937, students elected a "Colonel Rebel" to reign with "Miss Ole Miss" as the two students who most epitomized the ideals of Ole Miss (255, 270). His caricature also appeared on apparel. It seemed that his likeness was just about everywhere in Mississippi except the football field, until in 1979, Jackson lawyer Jeff Hubbard placed the large "mustachioed" headpiece, with the iconic "brimmed" hat, on his head (Cleveland). Colonel Rebel and Hubbard shared their first steps onto Hollingsworth Field that day.

Colonel Rebel enjoyed a stint of brief relative public peace while other school symbols fell under controversial reforms. Methodically, the university began to remove itself from its official relations with Old South symbols. By 1998, the flag, and the Confederate soldier were ousted. In an explanation of the flag's removal, Chancellor Khayat iterated that it was a unified effort, he stated, "The debate over the Confederate flag at The University of Mississippi was resolved years ago when the Faculty Senate, the Student Senate, the Alumni Association and the Athletic Department all disassociated the University from the symbol" ("Ole Miss Has Right to Ban Confederate Flag Waving"). In the wake of this momentous and controversial ruling, Chancellor Khayat faced another daunting question: would Colonel Rebel remain the mascot of Ole Miss? The chancellor avoided any immediate actions by remarking that, "The University does not consider it (Colonel Rebel) 'racist' and will not discontinue its use" (qtd. In Cohodas 220). Soon thereafter, pressure from the NAACP and other organizations ultimately influenced a process to find a new mascot and the administration established a process to do just that. This endeavor ultimately failed. In 2003, Colonel Rebel was banned from athletic events, yet his likeness still remained on fan merchandise. Chancellor Khayat maintained that the "decision to update the mascot was based on the belief that a Disney-like elderly plantation person [was] not representative of a modern athletics program" (Khayat).

Roughly seven years later, in April of 2009, Artair Rogers, the ASB president, and Peyton Beard, the newly appointed ASB director of athletics and president of the Cardinal Club, faced a student petition voicing that the lack of a university mascot was a major issue for the student body. The two spoke with Chancellor Dan Jones and he responded by giving the student body his full support, as well as promising the assistance

of the Ramey Agency, a full service-marketing firm, to ensure a best-practices approach to the selection of a new mascot. Chancellor Jones felt that the mascot was a student spirit issue and encouraged the ASB to direct a student led process as long as it was understood that The University of Mississippi would remain the Ole Miss Rebels. At the end of the fall semester of 2009 the ASB Senate voted on a petition signed by at least 10% of the student body, which expressed a desire for a new mascot to be selected. The ASB Senate passed a bill that asked if the students would “support a student-led effort to develop and propose a new on-field mascot for the Ole Miss Rebels”. In the Feb. 23, 2011 referendum, 3000 students voted, 74% voted YES in support of a student-led effort to develop and propose a new on-field mascot to represent the university. On March 29, 2010, the ASB leadership selected a committee of 17 students to serve on the Mascot Selection Committee. According to The University of Mississippi’s mascot selection website, this group of students worked with the Ramey Agency and Eric Rickabaugh, a mascot expert, to give the entire Ole Miss community an equal opportunity to express their opinions and voice in the mascot selection process (“It’s Time!”).

During the summer of 2010, before the selection process began in earnest, the university distanced itself from the likeness of Colonel Rebel on licensed apparel. The *Associated Press* reported that the university requested that Colonel Rebel be placed in the College Vault Program of the Collegiate Licensing Company. Human Resources and Contractual Services Director Clay Jones, explains that the College Vault Program is “designed for retired and old historic marks. We believe it has a place in history, it’s just no longer going to be our mascot” (Sossaman). The selection of a new mascot happened



in three phases: an initial period of suggestion/idea reception and focus groups, a polling of eleven potential mascot concepts, and a vote on the final three mascot concepts with images. One thousand suggestions were received from the Ole Miss community. From that list, the committee submitted eleven concepts to the Ole Miss community for polling in order to narrow the possible selections down to five. During the polling period over 13,000 students, faculty, staff, alumni and season ticket holders responded. The committee now had five mascot choices and worked with mascot professionals to develop visible concepts for each. The final five were: Rebel Lion, Rebel Stallion, Rebel Land Shark, Rebel Bear, and Hotty Toddy. According to the Mascot Selection Committee, the Rebel Lion was eliminated because it did not have a strong enough Mississippi connection and the Rebel Stallion was eliminated because the logistical issues a live horse would pose. The final election involved the remaining three choices with coinciding image concepts. The result was a 62% positive reaction to the Rebel Black Bear, which beat the Land Shark (56%) and Hotty Toddy (42%). At this point, Ole Miss had a new mascot and the responsibility of its development and implementation transferred to the university's athletic department. Pete Boone, athletic director of The University of Mississippi stated, "Michael Thompson, senior associate athletic director for marketing and communications, will lead this process." Thompson outlined two goals for the mascot, the first is to complement the experience of all athletic events and the second is to establish a permanent connection between Ole Miss and children, the future students and members of the Ole Miss family ("Rebel Black Bear Selected As

New On-Field Mascot for Ole Miss Rebels”).

### **Motivations for Change and the Response of the Ole Miss Community**

As can be inferred by the historical context of the school’s symbols, Ole Miss has a collective past joined by two differing perspectives: nostalgia for the history and tradition of the Old South and a painful sentiment attached to the past injustices of the Old South. Walker Percy, a famous southern writer, captured this confused past by noticing the “terrible complexities” of race; most of these complexities are captured by the experience of Oxford, Mississippi. For example, when Blind Jim, the purported inspiration of Colonel Rebel, passed away the students initiated a fundraiser in his honor and established a scholarship for an African-American to attend college. The reality of the “terrible complexities” of race was that the student could not come to Ole Miss; they had to go to Mississippi Valley State (Sansing 320). In 1997, Kevin Sack’s article, “Old South’s Symbol Stir a Campus”, appeared in the *New York Times* and illuminated the potentially complex nature of Ole Miss’s symbols in a relatively succinct phrase:

Thirty-five years ago, James H. Meredith integrated Ole Miss. Now, the university's black students are deeply offended by the state-supported institution's continued use of the symbols, including the Confederate battle flag, the song “Dixie”, the nickname Rebels, the white-whiskered mascot known as Colonel Reb, streets named Confederate Drive and Rebel Drive, and even the name Ole Miss itself (Sack).

This past and the symbols associated with it affect the perception and image of the school. The gradual brand change (ridding the school of the flag, etc.) was a response to problems stemming from a dilemma with perception and Chancellor Khayat felt that the problems could be lessened if the university approached this issue. In early March 1997, he announced that Burson-Marsteller, the world's largest public relations firm, was to study the image of the university and propose strategies to burnish the way Ole Miss is perceived by the nation. Mr. Burson, a 1940 graduate of Ole Miss and the president of Burson-Martseller, stated, "Robert (Khayat) called me up and said, 'We're going after a Phi Beta Kappa chapter, and I'm just concerned that the one thing that could knock us down is the perception that we're a racist school. I'd really like to change that, but I'm not sure how to go about it'". Chancellor Khayat did not intend for a focused examination of the university's symbols. Yet, that is just what happened. Though the firm was concerned that the race card would move the university to rid themselves of certain symbols, they found that few people mentioned an issue with the symbols and that the majority of respondents were concerned with the perception of Ole Miss as a party school (Sack, "Old South's Symbols Stir a Campus"). The larger problem, Mr. Burson asserted, was not that Ole Miss had a negative image, but that it had little image at all. Chancellor Khayat used the findings to back away from an all-out offensive against the symbols.

The issues that brought a brand change were rooted in athletics and academics. First, the outside perception of Ole Miss affected the school's ability to recruit top talent for athletics. It can be assumed that this, in turn, hurt on the field performance. Rick Cleveland, a prominent sports writer of Jackson, Mississippi's *Clarion Ledger*,

commented in his article, "Colonel Rebel not exactly a longtime tradition", that the "Ole Miss coaches have said for years that Old South symbols, such as the Rebel battle flag, the song *Dixie*, and Colonel Rebel, have hurt in the recruitment of African-American athletes". Coaches such as Tommy Tuberville, Ed Orgeron, and Rod Barnes, suggested that the symbols of Ole Miss have had a negative effect on athletic recruitment and performance. Tuberville stated, "Racism is used against us, I don't think there's any doubt" (qtd. In Sack, "Old South's Symbols Stir a Campus"). Most athletes and recruits, both past and present, will admit that the symbols connected with Ole Miss "definitely affect recruiting". Yet, while it can prove tough to get black athletes to Oxford, Coach Ed Murphy, the head basketball coach from 1986-1992, contended that, "once they get here they don't want to leave" (Sansing 338-339).

Consider the case of Floyd Raven, a coveted football recruit in the class of 2011 from Louisiana. Neal McGready, a writer for the popular sports website and Ole Miss syndicate of Rivals.com, acknowledged that during Raven's recruitment rival schools repeatedly implied racial problems in Oxford, Mississippi. Once Raven came to Oxford he returned home with the familiar sentiment of many African-American athletes before him. Raven shared his view on the matter with recruiting services:

To be honest, with me being a black male, I wanted to see everything for myself. That's why I was slow to commit. When I got here (Friday), it was the total opposite of what I heard. My girlfriend, mom and everyone totally loved it. I had to see it for myself, I talked to a lot of the players and they didn't have any problems like that (with racism) (Brooks).

The university was also struggling to become a respected member of the academic

world and many felt that the past was a hindrance. There were various problems facing The University of Mississippi: not enough volumes in the library, inadequate space for student research, low faculty salaries, few research grants, a small endowment, but quite possibly the biggest concern was an inability to attract top tier faculty and researchers, especially African Americans. In Sack's article entitled "The Final Refrains of 'Dixie'", Dr. Donald Cole, an African American professor who is currently an associate provost at Ole Miss explained this difficulty: "With faculty that are highly sought, other universities will use our past against us. I often think about whether we can get on the fast track out, or do we just throw up our hands and say it's hopeless". Khayat accomplished many, if not all of those goals, and will be remembered as one of the most effective chancellors in the school's history. Many associated knew that for Ole Miss to change its future it would have to contend with the past.

The response to change at Ole Miss has always varied from the negative to the positive. Historically, certain factions of the Ole Miss community did not respond favorably to the administration's directives on image alterations. An example of this strong-willed spirit can be seen in the 1948 *M-Book*. This manual was issued to incoming students, and in one section explained that the "presence of the Confederate flag at athletic venues didn't mean they weren't a part of the United States, it just meant that they didn't want anyone telling them what to do" (Sansing 269-270). This dogged attitude still pervades as can be seen by Desoto County native Bryant Walker's declaration: "It's my freedom to fly that flag (Confederate battle flag). I'll tell you one thing, if it comes to me losing a flag that I believe in, I'll lose football games" (Sack, "The Final Refrains of 'Dixie'").

The decision to appoint a new mascot was initiated by the student body and therefore fittingly supported by the administration. Ole Miss was the only SEC school that did not have an on the field mascot and students, among others, wanted that to change. Senior Andy Halford suggested that something was missing in his quote about the absence of a mascot: “I kinda like the whole college football thing, seeing the mascots on the sidelines. Whether they're shooting the t-shirts into the stands or whatever it may be, it's just a lack in something during the games when you don't see that” (Sossaman). Just as in the past, responses varied from the positive to the negative. The following are samples of the more negative and pessimistic viewpoint. In the “comments” section of an *Associated Press* article about Colonel Rebel one fan stated, “What is the point in changing a mascot? First it was the Flag, then the song, now the mascot. Stupid and unnecessary.” Furthermore, some fans accused the university of wilting to the politically correct movement and were dismayed at the removal of Colonel Rebel at the insistence of a few. Bryan Ferguson, founder of the Colonel Rebel Foundation, remarks, “You hear stories about little girls in Mississippi thinking he’s their grandfather, he’s (Colonel Rebel) a member of our family” (qtd. In Brown).

There are some opinions that are more positive and upbeat. For example, Margaret Anne Morgan, one of the two student directors of the Mascot Selection Committee felt that, “It’s so easy to get caught up in ‘Colonel Reb, Colonel Reb, nobody but Colonel Reb’, in the long run, a new mascot would be very beneficial for our university” (Brown). Jacob Fuller, a journalist for the *Daily Mississippian* wrote, “As hard of a pill as it may be to swallow (removal of Colonel Rebel), and believe that I’m having to force it down too, a new mascot is the right move for Ole Miss from any angle

you look at it" (Fuller). Furthermore, one fan stated, "I'm glad progress is being made. GO REBELS!" (Sossaman). Artair Rogers, former President of the ASB at Ole Miss in 2009-2010, provides an insightful comment that explains the bipolar nature of the responses. He commented, "It's a battle of two histories, it's those conflicting histories that make our university so complex. The administration can only do so much" (qtd. In Dewan).

## **Chapter 3: Mascot Controversy**

### **One Image – Two Perspectives**

In this paper I have already established the importance of the collegiate mascot to the individual and will now present a case about the multiple reactions of individuals and groups to Native American Indian mascots. There are evident disparities between the situations outlined in this case and the circumstances surrounding Colonel Rebel at Ole Miss. For example, the Native American Indian mascot is often deemed offensive because it represents a people group. Colonel Rebel is different because his image can represent an act done to a people group that is not directly represented in the likeness of the mascot. Indian mascots perpetuate stereotypes while Colonel Rebel could be inflammatory given the history of the university and state of Mississippi. The potential offense caused by Colonel Rebel is more indirect, yet still as real, formidable, and difficult in the eyes of marketers. This exercise is useful because it does provide a parallel past precedent that speaks to the current situation at The University of Mississippi. While these are not completely analogous situations, there are certain things Ole Miss can and should apply into their marketing strategy as a result of this case.

The cultural climate of America is changing, for better or for worse, and this certainty of change brings about a more pronounced reaction to certain things that historically speaking went unchallenged. Take for instance the institution of the college



mascot. Until the late 1960's, dozens of American universities were represented by images inspired by Native American culture. These logos were well received by the general American public and the association of an athletic program with Indian heritage, whether accurate or misconstrued, was commonplace. Not only generic names such as the *Indians*, *Braves*, *Warriors*, and *Chiefs* were used. Some schools such as the North Dakota State University and The University of Illinois used specific tribal namesakes such as the *Fighting Sioux* and the *Illini*.

Like many symbols, there are two different interpretations of the Indian mascots, those that are pro and those that are against the use of Native American images in the theatre of sport. The backers of these images and customs claim that they honor American Indian people as well as foster the common identity and collective spirit of an athletic program. Karl Swanson, vice-president of the Washington Redskins professional football team, declared that the organization's namesake "symbolizes courage, dignity, and leadership," and that the "Redskins symbolize the greatness and strength of a grand people" (New Jersey State Bar Foundation). Carol Spindel, author of *Dancing at Halftime: Sports and the Controversy over American Indian*, comments that many fans feel that those objecting to mascots, such as the *Redskin*, are merely "radical left, fringe groups" that are acting merely in the name of political correctness (21).

Those opposed assert that these images misrepresent their culture and "give life to racial stereotypes, revivify historical patterns of oppression". Kathy Morning Star, Director of the American Indian Cultural Support, states: "It is the responsibility of educators to set the example and teach the youth of today to respect other ethnic or minority peoples - NOT to exploit or disrespect them by using them as 'mascots' or

stereotypical 'images' which perpetuates racism" ("MASCOTS – Racism in Schools by State"). A majority of powerful civic, political, and religious organizations including the United States Commission on Civil Rights, the Modern Language Association, the National Education Association, the NAACP, the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., and the United Methodist Church have decried the use of Indian type mascots (Remillard 105). The Commission on Civil Rights felt that academic institutions choosing to use objectionable Indian images "teach all students that stereotyping of minority groups is acceptable," and "block genuine understanding of contemporary Native people as fellow Americans" (The United States Commission on Civil Rights).

The designation of athletic teams with the symbolism of Native Indian culture is often inaccurate and grossly misrepresentative. For example, the popular war chant anthem and tomahawk chop at Turner Field, the home of the Atlanta Braves, and that of the Florida State Seminoles exists to instill a war like spirit and passion among the fan bases of these two particular organizations. Regrettably for the Braves and the Seminoles, the Indian cultures, from which those traditions are inspired, affix an entirely different meaning for the existence of the tomahawk. Many Indians often criticize the tomahawk chop, because the tomahawk is not just a weapon but also a ceremonial object, a decorative item, and a symbol of leadership." Furthermore, Michael Haney, an Oklahoma Seminole explains that the tomahawk chop has no origin in Seminole culture whatsoever (Remillard 108-109).

Research suggests that the majority of Indians are not offended by the mascots and only a small minority feel disparaged by them. In a national poll conducted by the University of Pennsylvania's National Annenberg Election Survey of 2004, 768 people

who said they were Indians or Native Americans were posed this question: “The professional football team in Washington calls itself the Washington Redskins. As a Native American, do you find that name offensive or doesn’t it bother you?” The response was overwhelming, 90% of the respondents said the name “did not bother them”, while 9% said it was “offensive”, 1% of those questioned had no opinion on the matter (National Annenberg Election Survey). According to S.L. Price and research performed by *Sports Illustrated*, “Native American activists are virtually united in opposition to the use of Indian nicknames and mascots; the Native American population sees the issue far differently. Asked if high school and college teams should stop using Indian nicknames, 81% of Native American respondents said “no”. As for pro sports, 83% of Native American respondents said teams should not stop using Indian nicknames, mascots, characters and symbols” (Price).

### **The Outcome of Opposing Forces**

In the early 1970’s Marquette University played host to a collision of these two opposing outlooks. During the 1950’s the student senate selected the name *Warrior* as a symbol and icon of the university. For six years this mascot expressed school spirit as a warrior known as Chief White Buck. This arrangement was to be short lived, soon after Patrick Buckett, the talent and persona behind Chief White Buck, graduated from the university the Chief left with him. A new likeness named Willie Wompum followed soon after Buckett’s departure and epitomized the tradition of the *Warrior*. In a response to Willie Wompum, four Native American students, Schuyler Webster, Patricia Loudbear, David Corn and Bernard Vigue wrote a statement condemning its use:

The mascot is definitely offensive to the American Indian. We as Native

Americans have pride in our Indian heritage, and a mascot that portrays or forefathers' ancestral mode of dress for a laugh can be nothing but another form of racism... About the only thing we have left is our pride, and now Marquette University threatens to take that away by allowing such a display of racism... we are sure that no other minority group would condone such a flagrant use of their heritage and pride. We are sure that the mascot would not take away the effectiveness of the number 1 basketball team in the nation (qtd. In King, *Team Spirits* 290).

This marked the beginning of over 40 years of controversy, legal battles, and PR nightmares. In 1994, the university decided to bid farewell to the *Warriors* (King 281-299). After speaking with American Indian leaders, board chairman John Bergstrom, a business administration graduate in 1967, changed his mind on supporting the return of the *Warrior* namesake. Bergstrom said, "I became convinced that the Warriors nickname could not be separated from past imagery" (Gutsche). With his ultimate decision, Father DiUlio, the university's president at the time of the mascot change, stirred up the distaste of students and alumni. An election was held to find a new mascot and the only choices given to stakeholders were *Golden Eagles* and *Lightning*. Neither of these names had a plausible connection to the history of the university and ultimately, *Golden Eagles* was selected. Unfortunately for the university, the backlash did not end with the appointment of a new mascot.

Ten years later, in the most pronounced manner, a prominent member of the Marquette community expressed his displeasure with the *Golden Eagles* name. At a graduation commencement in 2004, Wayne Sanders, the vice chair of Marquette's board

of trustees, offered \$2 million if Marquette would change its name back to *Warriors*. Consequently, the school's president at the time, Reverend Wild declined the monetary offer but considered the name change proposal, which he eventually decided against. In a news conference explaining the motivations behind his decision, the Rev. Robert Wild said, "We live in a different era than when the Warriors nickname was selected in 1954, the perspective of time has showed us that our actions, intended or not, can offend others" (Gutsche). Soon after, the university conducted a poll where 92% of alumni and 62% of student respondents identified with the name *Warriors*. The very same survey listed the common descriptive words for *Golden Eagles* as "boring" (57%), "weak" (55%), and "common" (52%). Although the stakeholders clearly preferred the name *Warriors* the Board of Trustees would not assent to their desires on the grounds that the logo and name *Warriors* were "disrespectful" to Native Americans. The board recognized the disdain with *Golden Eagles* and in a unilateral decision changed the name to the *Gold*. The Marquette community was incited by this move and forced a vote for a new nickname. This vote had ten choices, the choice *Warrior* was omitted, and *Golden Eagles* was reinstalled as the nickname for the school. As a result of an obviously messy process, the school still battles with its constituents. To this day old *Warrior* logos can be seen in excess at sporting events and the students still chant "Let's Go Warriors" during basketball games (AP, "About 23,000 People Voted on Mascot").

The situation at Marquette has been repeated across the landscape of collegiate athletics. By 2002, the pro-active pursuit of this contentious issue literally changed the face of collegiate brands: sidelines, t-shirts, and stadium seat cushions. The University of Oklahoma fired the first shot in 1969 with its disassociation from Little Red, an

undergrad clad in war bonnet, buckskin, and moccasins. This was the first domino in a row of many to fall. The Stanford Indians became the *Cardinal*, St. John's Redman are now the *Red Storm*, and Syracuse University retired its warrior, known as Big Chief Bill Orange (Spindel 13). As of 2002, more than 600 school teams and minor league professional clubs have distanced themselves from any images, mascots, or actions deemed offensive by Native American groups (Price).

In addition to these self-imposed actions by various institutions, the NCAA banned the use of American Indian mascots during post-season sports tournaments such as the NCAA basketball and baseball tournaments. Walter Harrison, the committee chairman, decided that the NCAA could not bar any mascots from connections to individual schools. Yet, he maintained that they could control the appearances of these "offensive" likenesses at NCAA sanctioned post-season events by disallowing the presence of the mascot at sport venues and prohibiting post-season games at institutions deemed to be in violation of the committee's ruling. This committee ruled that at least 18 schools have "hostile or abusive" mascots that disparage Native American culture, including Florida State's Seminole and Illinois's Illini (Pearlman).

### **There Is Only One Way To Make A Peace**

In the case of the American Indian mascot controversy there was only one direction that pleased both sides. This direction was cooperation and the University of Utah is a good example. After being placed on the initial NCAA list banning offensive mascots, University of Utah officials met with the tribal council of the Ute nation. The university made it abundantly clear that the team's name would change if the tribe thought it offensive. Council members gave the school permission "as long as the

university used the Ute name in a positive manner that preserved the integrity of the Ute tribe". This story is paralleled by that of the Florida State Seminoles, who in 2005, had Chief Osceola, their beloved symbol, fully reinstated by the NCAA. Bernard Franklin, NCAA Senior Vice President "noted the unique relationship between the university and the Seminole Tribe of Florida as a significant factor..." Franklin went on to add that the decision of a "sovereign tribe" to permit the use of its name and imagery cannot be questioned even if others might not agree. Not all schools experienced the same outcome; Miami University of Ohio complied with tribal requests to no longer dub the school's athletic teams the *Redskins*. The following year Miami of Ohio received a record \$25 million in donations from alumni (Price).

### **The Relevance of the Case Study – From Indians to Colonel Rebel**

This case study is relevant because past patterns have a tendency to repeat themselves. The first noteworthy pattern is the power of a small minority's voice. Those opposed to the use of Indian mascots had smaller numbers but their voice was powerful. The case about Marquette University forms a singular example of what happened at many different universities across the nation. Colonel Rebel was in danger as soon as citizen rights groups like the NAACP took notice of a small minority hurt by the possible connotations of the symbol's meaning. From that point, the university's mascot came under a firestorm of intense scrutiny. It was only a matter of time before the administration decided to separate the university from the likeness of Colonel Rebel. The mascot itself was not the issue; it was the perception of the mascot that was the problem. Once this particular symbol's meaning was questioned its ability to be a representative for the school was all but gone. Divesting of the image gives the university an

opportunity to expand its brand equity and image, although the task will be understandably difficult. This brings rise to an important question: how can The University of Mississippi re-brand its mascot to both expand towards new markets and still engender the respect, adoration, and loyalty of its current market?

The second pattern is a lesson on fighting battles that will end up aiding in a victorious end to the war. These battles are focused on managing the image of a university and can be fought in many different ways. For the most part, fighting to retain a mascot that has come under scrutiny as a disparaging symbol is a fruitless effort. Marquette learned that lesson the hard way. The negative publicity generated by efforts to save a mascot can damage the image of a school. Some people believe that if the university gave up the mascot in the early 1990's that the name *Warriors* would have been allowed to stay. On the contrary, it can be valuable for university's to risk conflict in recognition of the cooperative power. Although cooperation and the effort of legal teams can be a financial burden it can also become an image-enhancing endeavor, no matter the outcome. The University of Utah and Florida State University avoided the fallout of a mascot change among their stakeholders by taking the time to reach out to the potentially offended parties. The University of Miami (Ohio) reached out to tribes in the state of Ohio to keep the name *Redskins*, the request was denied respectfully and the university changed its nickname to *Redhawks*. While this could be seen as a defeat, it is important to note that the university changed its nickname out of respect for a people's culture not because the NCAA, NAACP, or any other group forced them to do so through legal action. It must be clear to a university that saving a nickname or mascot is in the best long-term interest of the school and stakeholders. If a university decides to keep its



symbols the commitment level, marketing, and public relations attached to such an endeavor are crucial. Unlike Utah and Florida State, The University of Mississippi does not have the ability to go directly to an authoritative body and ask if the use of Colonel Rebel is permissible. This particular contentious image does not offend a defined group of people like the Ute tribe, therefore it is improbable that Ole Miss could be granted permission by the entire cross section of people and African Americans who are most likely to be offended by the image.

The third pattern is a result of process management or the manner in which the mascot selection process was carried out. Some schools, like Miami (Ohio) handle a mascot change well. A decision is made, the students and alumni are appropriately involved and informed, and the university, along with its constituents, move on. The difficult nature of these decisions is that they are often made unilaterally by school administrations. The stakeholders have to accept it and move on. Before the decision is made most savvy universities seek the input of students and alumni through focus groups, surveys, and elections. The problem many schools face is the lack of support for the unilateral decision to replace a certain symbol. This lack of support becomes all the more volatile if the university does not communicate why they are detaching from specific imagery. From here the participation in the new process is marred by a desire to return back to the original mascot or logo in question. Other schools like Marquette make confused, directionless decisions that do nothing to affirm the school's position in the minds of their constituents. Over 40 years of controversy, bungled electoral processes, and unilateral decisions, without explicitly communicated reasons, have, in my opinion, hurt the image of Marquette University and its relationships with current students and

alumni. The approach to a mascot change and the dialogue (or monologue) between the administrators making the decision and the stakeholders decides the success or failure of a mascot change.

The final pattern is the connection a mascot or logo normally has with a university nickname. Ole Miss for example is the *Rebels* and the former mascot's name was Colonel Rebel. Auburn is the *Tigers* and their mascot Aubie is a tiger. If a mascot is to change then the moniker for the school's athletic teams comes under certain scrutiny by the mere principal of logical extension. It is hard to change one without an alteration of the other. This explains the fears many members of the Ole Miss community have that other traditional symbols of the school like *Ole Miss* and *Rebels* will be taken away. The nickname of a school is a powerful link in the mind of consumers and images, such as Colonel Rebel, are tougher to reposition than words. In my opinion, if marketers are ahead of the impending conflict the words *Rebels* and *Ole Miss* will likely bring, they will be able to protect these integral members of the university's brand. It is the people, who the word or phrase represents, that can ultimately shape what exactly the word or phrase signifies. How should Ole Miss assuage these particular constituent concerns? More importantly should the university take a proactive stance to protect the image and meaning of the *Rebels* and *Ole Miss* namesakes?

## Chapter 4: Study of Branding

### An Introduction to Branding

We have already seen that a mascot is indeed a symbol and a very influential one at that. Because symbols possess the potential to impact human thought and behavior many companies use them to send messages to the marketplace. This is why a mascot is also a member of branding strategies. We will discuss the reasons a mascot is a member of a university's brand and how that affects branding and marketing strategies at The University of Mississippi. This particular branding study was mostly accomplished through the study of four books: *How Brands Become Icons* (Holt); *Emotional Branding* (Gobé); *Citizen Branding* (Gobé); and *Positioning: The Battle For Your Mind* (Ries and Trout).

A brand is not the logo, name, or material designs that are associated with a company. These things are building blocks for a brand, material and physical markers, which will aid in the development of a brand. The key to understanding brand is to concentrate on what cannot be seen or touched. To marketers, a brand stems from the perception of the people who will experience the brand, for our purposes we will call these people prospects, potential consumers, or consumers. If you were to think of what Coca-Cola meant to you and then asked to write your answer down on a piece of paper, your answer would be Coca-Cola's brand. Now this would only be what the Coke brand

meant to you, so if you reproduced the same question and answer all over the world's many individuals you would find the complete brand for Coca-Cola – it is the collective perception of all consumers. Douglas Holt, the author of *How Brands Become Icons*, explains that the materials we assume to be the brand are only props and asserts that the meanings we attribute to these props are actually the brand (3). It is important to realize that because a brand possesses an intrinsic relationship with people, relying wholly on their interpretation, that the meaning or spirit of a brand is susceptible to change.

If one were to examine the evolution of corporate symbols in America over the past one hundred years a logical conclusion would be that very few symbols, brands, trademarks, and logos are constant. In the *Princeton Legal Review*, K.A. Pace comments that, “they (symbols) are fluid creatures that evolve with society” (8). Take for example Wal-Mart, a revolutionary retail giant in the corporate world. Wal-Mart is one of many companies that have updated their logo periodically, most recently in 2008. Company officials have suggested that the current consumer is worried about saving money and is ever more so environmentally conscious, the new logo speaks to those needs (Jana). The desires of consumers and their psychological complexion alter constantly; therefore the message (image) a company portrays must occasionally be augmented to match their target market's evolving personality. Wal-Mart's move to change their logo is an effort to change their brand, how consumers perceive who they are as a company. If a brand symbol remains static, in the sense that it is not altered by its parent company, the public will sooner or later alter the symbol's meaning in some manner. If Wal-Mart had not altered their image, and therefore their meaning for existence, then consumers just might have altered it for them – perhaps, in a negative way. Information is now given through

images – logos, trademarks, and things like a mascot. In his book *Emotional Branding*, Marc Gobé quotes Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, a professor of English at the University of Kentucky and a graphic branding authority who claims, “information has now assumed visible and material form... a visible spectrum of tropes, icons, and graphic conventions that collectively convey the notion of information to the eye of the beholder” (135). As illustrated by Kirschenbaum, brands are communicative devices, carrying a message to the marketplace where potential consumers interpret that message based on their own experience, culture, and perspective among other things. To carry these messages, brands use props like logos, trademarks, names, etc. In the case of The University of Mississippi, the mascot is a message bearer, a communicative device. The selection of the bear will definitely inspire a new mark or logo to add to the already present logo standards of the institution. Gobé defines a logo, “as a symbol of what a company represents (or hopes to represent) and the resulting consumer perceptions” (*Emotional Branding* 122). As marketers, we have the opportunity to develop these messages. What always must be kept in focus are the end listener and our target audience because they define the message marketers send. Jack Trout and Al Ries, authors of *Positioning: The Battle For Your Mind*, say this beautifully, “since so little of your message is going to get through anyway you ignore the sending side and concentrate on the perceptions of the prospect. Not the reality of the product” (8). The marketing strategy for the development of the Rebel Black Bear must accept this opportunity and responsibility to construct a message bearer that appropriately represents the collective perception of The University of Mississippi.

## The Four Mascot Roles – A Mascot as a Brand

It will be helpful to understand a brand as the perceived emotional corporate image, a brand identity as all the visual aspects that form the brand, and a logo as a visual aspect that identifies a business or organization. To illustrate this, think of Polo Ralph Lauren, the famous clothier. The thoughts you have about Polo is the Polo brand. The iconic polo player mounted on a horse image and Polo font set is the brand identity or visual aspect of the brand, and the main logo or brand identifier is that familiar horse image. The Rebel Bear is technically a logo and therefore a member of the university's brand identity. As a visual messenger and image of The University of Mississippi it will affect the perceived emotional image of the university. This section will establish four primary mascot roles based on literary research and connect those roles to those of conventional brands. These primary roles of a mascot are: a focal point for school spirit, a source of group mentality and belongingness, representative of a university's identity, and a branding/revenue generating device. This section will further reinforce the mascot as a substantial part of a university's brand based on S. Yang's assumption that university licensed products (ULP), such as a university identity, name, logo, and mascot are synonymous and a part of a brand (Yang).

The first purpose of a mascot is to be a physical manifestation of an internal, intangible school spirit. In the 1950's, the student senate at Marquette University decided to designate themselves the *Warriors* to provide "a sort of focal point for student cheering". Proponents of the name argued that "the name warrior gives an indication of what all Marquette teams would like to be: a fighting band of athletes in the friendly wars

of athletic competition” (King, *Team Spirits* 285, 288). The University of Arkansas’s spirit squad mission statement identifies maintaining and building school spirit as a central element of their purpose, which is “to lead in positive local support for the team; to project that support and solicit that support from Razorback fans” (Arkansas Razorback Spirit Squads). This purpose communicated by the students of Marquette and the spirit squad of Arkansas parallels the tone of Nike’s Consumer Affairs packet from 1996. In an explanation of its brand symbol and logo, the *swoosh*, Nike states: “(The *swoosh* is) Synonymous with honored conquest, NIKE is the twentieth century footwear that lifts the world’s greatest athletes to new levels of mastery and achievement. The NIKE ‘swoosh’ embodies the spirit of the winged goddess who inspired the most courageous and chivalrous warriors at the dawn of civilization” (Nike History Timeline). This is the first reason that a mascot is a logo, because just like the NIKE logo a mascot embodies the spirit of whichever college it represents.

Secondly, a mascot is suggestive of a university’s identity. The selection committee appointed to facilitate the process of naming a new mascot at The University of Mississippi identified the importance “that the designs are representative of the Ole Miss culture”. Furthermore, the criteria for Ole Miss’s new mascot: “have a Mississippi connection, be unique, fit the Ole Miss culture, project a proud image, be timeless and not trendy” suggest that the mascot must be evocative of the university’s personality (Mascot Selection Committee). Gobé cites Paul Rand’s IBM logo as a brand marker that aptly communicates the identity of the company it represents. He states, “It is, above all, important to realize that the representation of a logo does not necessarily need to represent the business you are in: the Apple logo is not about computers... What is

important is how committed you are to supporting a brand identification system that will represent your corporate values in a way that is distinctive, visible, adaptable, memorable, universal, and timeless” (*Citizen Brand* 144). Like the IBM logo, the Rebel Black Bear should be a visual match and expression of the inner values of the university. The black bear is a pivotal part of Ole Miss’ efforts to communicate its core values in a way that is unique, represents Mississippi and the culture of the school, timeless, appropriate, and proud.

The third purpose of a mascot is its utilization as a financial tool. The majority of universities permit the sale of their official apparel through licensing agreements. Licensing is a kind of brand marketing, a strategy based on leasing a legally protected property such as a name, likeness, logo, graphic, word, signature, character, or a combination of several of these elements (White). These licensed elements, like a mascot, are collectively known as ULP – university licensed products. In the past, revenue from ULP sales was meager but in recent years ULP sales have soared. Collegiate Licensing Company (CLC), the largest collegiate licensing firm in the nation, financial statements indicated that the firm has 80% of the collegiate licensing market and grosses a staggering \$4.0 billion in sales per year. Other reasonable estimates put this entire market at a total \$5.0 billion (“The Collegiate Licensing Company: Fiscal Year-End Rankings July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010”). Bill Battle, the founder of CLC, recalled that universities were “ecstatic when they generated \$100,000 a year from athletic licensing” (Solomon & Perrin). By contrast, in 2007, the Southeastern Conference alone was responsible for \$600 million in retail sales of officially licensed products (Solomon & Perrin). In 2009-2010, CLC declared that the Texas Longhorns



have arguably the strongest brand in the nation, grossing over \$10.150 million in royalties from the fiscal year ending June 30. Royalties included the sales of t-shirts, performance wear, headwear, and youth related items (O'Toole). Five SEC schools are in the top 10. The University of Mississippi is ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the SEC, and 36<sup>th</sup> overall. The presence of a mascot and corresponding logos can buoy the brand equity of a university and result in financial gain.

The fourth and final purpose of the mascot is to enhance group belongingness and is a conduit for addressing the human need of relatedness. Oftentimes the vernacular within collegiate organizations perpetuates a sense of group association and social identity. For example, FSU Dean of Arts and Science Donald Foss quoted James E. Billie, the former chairman of the Florida Seminole tribe, as declaring, "I am proud of all those who are by birth or choosing a Seminole!" (Remillard 112). This quote insinuates that Florida State is like a tribe and individuals are born or adopted into the tribe. This is group association and social identity at its highest level. The identity of consumers with their respective colleges and its imagery is a major factor in a mascot's status as a vital member of a university's brand. Social identity is defined as "the part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel). According to social identity theory, affective organizational commitment (AOC) could be defined as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Mowday). Considering many organizational behavior theories, many researchers suggest the positive relationship between AOC and constituent actions such as performance, attendance, staying with the

organization, and purchasing intentions of products. Yang believes that consumers have a tendency to buy identity related products relevant to their self or group identity. The mascot is a brand because it influences purchase and social behavior among consumers. If the Rebel Black Bear becomes relevant to the identity of Ole Miss fans then the brand will grow in equity.

### **The Six Eras of Branding**

Due to the propensity of brands to evolve as a mirror of societal changes, the manner in which marketers have communicated their brands to potential and current customers has changed radically over the last century. Through a literary review of marketing, six eras of branding have been identified: product, image, positioning (mind-share), emotional, viral, and cultural. It will be best if the reader views each of these strategies as building blocks that can be present and necessary in some shape or fashion in every successful branding attempt. During the explanation of the positioning, image, and viral eras, we will explore their pros and cons from the perspective of the cultural branding theory to develop a fuller understanding of their role within the marketing strategy for the Rebel Black Bear.

#### **Product Era**

The first branding era was the product era, which focused heavily on identifying customer benefits and product features. Rosser Reeves, an ad man for Ted Bates & Company, developed the concept of a USP (unique selling proposition). In *Reality in Advertising*, Reeves explained the USP in a three-part definition. First, each

advertisement must make a proposition to the consumer; this must be more than words or empty flattery. Each advertisement must say to the reader that if you buy this product you will get this specific benefit. Second, the proposition must be unique to that product, a claim that competitors cannot make. Third, the proposition must be so significant that it pulls millions of consumers over to the product (46-48). An example of this approach is the current SMART car ads that make the automobile's mpg a clear, differentiated point that appeal to a customer's potential purchase decision. To define the product type of a mascot would quite possibly limit what it can become. For starters, a mascot is nothing like a car, hairdryer, or shampoo. There are no direct product benefits like horsepower, watts, or nutrients intrinsic to a mascot. However, through marketing and branding endeavors a mascot can become a merchandised logo, and a spokesperson/brand advocate among other things. We must understand that there is not one USP for a mascot, especially the Rebel Black Bear. The key here is that initially marketers should not ask the Ole Miss community to buy anything related to the new mascot. Our strategy promotes forming a positive relationship that will deliver long-term benefits, it is a strategy that understands the benefit of *uniqueness* and that downplays the worth of *selling*. Ole Miss constituents will be attracted to how the new mascot is made unique through branding; the danger is making the product, in this case the mascot, unique for the mere purpose of profiting from it.

### **Image Era**

The second era was steeped in an appeal of company and product image. David Ogilvy, the architect of the image era and a prominent account executive stated, "Every advertisement is a long term investment in the image of a brand" (qtd. in Ries and Trout

24). This approach was a reaction to the product era; a period that ended once competition became level in terms of the benefits offered. The playing field was leveled by technology and companies could no longer find USPs. One brand was really no better than the other because there was no differentiation. Prospects soon realized that product categories like soaps were filled with many brands performing the exact same benefits. Consequently, soap was soap unless it became more than just a cleanser. Thus, marketers began to add an image to a product, and through this message differentiate one bar of soap from another. During this era, image architects like Ogilvy took brands such as Rolls Royce and told the world that elegance was more important than the metrics of horsepower or acceleration. Image is an integral part of any campaign. The marketing effort for the new mascot should be centered on providing an appropriate image for the Rebel Black Bear. So that the emotions attached to the image are in turn attributed to the mascot. Many people believe that if you say it (a message) enough, it becomes true. That is precisely the idea here, marketers for the Rebel Black Bear will have to say things, either vocally or by action, that bring a message, and the figure being represented by that message, from existence to acceptance.

### **Positioning Era**

This theory, developed and endorsed by positioning kings Al Ries and Jack Trout, explains that humans only have so much room in their heads and that to be a successful product you have to own a piece of the consumer's mental real estate. This principle is also known as mind-share strategy where the key function of a product, say fighting cavities, is enhanced by a rational appeal like a dentist's recommendation, and finally buoyed by emotional appeals. In mind-share, marketers are stewards of the brand's

essence and responsible to see that the brand message remains consistent. The tactics outlined by Trout and Ries place a great weight on understanding your target audience and performing, “cherchez le creneau”, a French phrase that means, “look for the hole” (54). Once a marketer finds this available position it should be filled by their brand and product. Positioning admonishes marketers on the trouble of changing people’s minds. Trout and Ries explain, “history shows that the first brand into the brain, on the average, gets twice the long term market share as the number two brand and twice again as much as the number three brand. And the relationships are not easily changed” (43). Colonel Rebel was the first Ole Miss mascot brand and the Rebel Black Bear will be the second. The Mascot Selection Committee released statistical data from the final mascot election and from their data we can see that the Ole Miss community will be a tough segment for the Rebel Black Bear to win over. The total number of voters was 13,365 and a total of 5,044 (38%) respondents indicated that they “dislike this mascot” when questioned about the Rebel Black Bear. The following is a further, segmented break down of the 5,044 respondents who “dislike” the Rebel Black Bear: Students (34%), Alumni (41%), and season ticket holders (42%) (“Summary of Ole Miss Mascot Poll Results”). The Rebel Black Bear is a second mover but that does not mean all hope is lost. For many, Colonel Rebel is “the real thing” and “like a first love will always occupy a special place in the prospect’s mind” (Reis and Trout 47). This brings to mind the marketing fiasco at Coca-Cola during the 1980s, where the company unsuccessfully changed the taste of its product in response to Pepsi’s increasing market presence. In his book, *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell states that, “We transfer to our sensation of the Coca-Cola taste all the unconscious associations we have of the brand, the image, the can, and even the

unmistakable red of the logo” (166). I argue that this is the same transfer of sensations that takes place when a fan is exposed to a mascot or logo that represents his or her team. This is why changing mascots is so difficult because you are changing not only a product but also all the unconscious associations constituents have with your brand. Coca-Cola worried too much about their actual product and not enough about their brand. Ole Miss cannot afford to do the same.

### **Positioning Critique**

According to Holt, the mind-share model is only beneficial for utilitarian, low-involvement items like shampoo or laundry detergent. In marketing, involvement ranges from high to low as risk, price, and other options are considered. The Rebel Black Bear should be considered, as a high-involvement item due to the connection we have already seen between people and symbols in conjunction with the scrutiny it will face from constituents of the Ole Miss community. In the case of Corona, many marketers place success of the brand on mind-share techniques. In Holt’s case study of the brand, however we learn that Corona succeeded only when it broke an important positioning statute – shifting its brand personality and essence. In the early 80’s the drink was wildly popular and marked as the “party drink”. The brand fruitlessly fought to remain the “party drink” until the early 90’s when the brand changed its essence to align with prominent cultural patterns. In this instance, it was the American need to get away from a highly competitive, stressful, work world. Corona’s ads spoke to this need with quiet beaches, no dialogue, no music, just the presence of the beer and the surf coming in and out (15-20). Higher involvement products and services must employ positioning and mind-share but they must also understand that the desires and perceptions of society

change. Thus it is helpful to view a brand “as a cultural artifact moving through history” (215). Like Corona, Ole Miss has altered its brand personality with the Rebel Black Bear, and the university’s marketers must find the correct message to define this brand and speak to the needs of the Ole Miss community.

### **Emotional Era**

In the 1990s, consumers began to desire a more tangible connection with the items they were buying. Marc Gobé, a marketing consultant/visual designer insists that branding is becoming increasingly based on strong relationships between consumers and companies. He places paramount importance on an evolution of purchasing from a necessity towards a desire not necessarily based on need. Emotional branding transcends the old approaches of business, intersects with humans and culture, and believes that the consumer, not companies, should lead commerce. Everything a company does should be with the consumer’s benefit in mind. This approach focuses on communicating a product’s personality and declares the consumer as a partner in the business instead of a recipient of what the business does. Gobé provides an example of this marketing approach via Joe Boxers. This firm’s vending machines speak recorded messages to potential customers in order to interest them in buying a pair of boxers (*Emotional Branding* 190). This approach is light hearted and conveys that the company likes to provide you with more than just boxers; the company wants to give consumers a fun and humorous experience with their brand.

Experience is an important member of Gobé’s Ten Commandments of Emotional Branding. He feels that it is crucial for brands to recognize and serve the whole person,

that “stimulating emotion and affect is a better way to distinguish a product and draw interest” (72). Experience branding allows things such as music, smell, and tactile feel - shape and texture - to construct an identity for a brand. It is helpful to consider a place like a coffee shop when teaching about experiential branding. How do your senses interact with an experience in Starbucks? The smell of coffee hits your nostrils as you walk in, the ambient music and din of conversation provides stimulation to your sense of hearing, and the warmth of the coffee cup against your hand calls forth your tactile senses. The marketers at Ole Miss would be wise to add as many sensory experiences to the branding strategy of the Rebel Black Bear. As mentioned earlier, Michael Thompson, senior associate athletic director for marketing and communications at The University of Mississippi, outlined two goals for the mascot, the second goal is to establish a permanent connection between Ole Miss and children, the future students and members of the Ole Miss family. Considering the target audience, one example could be a stuffed bear that says, “Hotty Toddy” and “Go Rebs”. This engages the child’s emotions and senses – visual, hearing, and tactile. Why not give these teddy bears away as a Christmas gift from the university? This engenders the loyalty of parents and appeals to children during a very formative time period.

### **Emotional Branding Critique**

Holt believes the emotional model developed by Gobé is sufficient for some brands but not for identity brands. He argues that emotional branding’s inherent limitation is with what he calls “cultural disruptions” (23). These “disruptions” are events that cause a cataclysmic shift in the perspective of collective people groups. Coca-Cola will always be a benchmark brand because of its ability to connect



emotionally with its clientele. The brand was a household name during WWII, after Vietnam, and is now one of the most powerful brands in the world. How has Coke been able to sustain success for so long? Some might argue emotional branding has maintained their enviable brand image but Holt explains that it is their ability to let the brand change as culture changes because of “cultural disruptions” like WWII. Coke transformed from a “pause that refreshes” symbolizing the suburban-nuclear family, patriotic cheer, and the American way of life post WWII to a drink that wanted to “teach the world how to sing in perfect harmony” during the volatile Vietnam years. According to Holt, emotional attachment is a result of cultural branding. Cultural branding is the means to a desired end while emotional branding is simply a means to an end without an identity brand (21-28). Ole Miss must be willing to permit the changes in culture to alter its brand.

### **Viral Era**

Social networking sites and the overall proliferation of the Internet lends marketers a resource that has endless potential. The ability to post a video on a small budget and push a message to consumers in an efficient way is changing the way advertisers think. According to Holt, viral branding is more than just the Internet; it is grassroots, buzz, word of mouth, and a human networking approach. This technique is a response to the cynicism many consumers have towards ads and the increasing desire consumers have to discover products on their own. Think of a virus, it starts with one person and once that person comes into contact with others the virus hops from one host to another – this is the idea of viral branding where the virus is a brand message. An example of viral marketing is the street teams sent out by companies like Red Bull.

These teams consist of members from the products target audience. They expose the brand through their presence at parties and by free giveaways. The takeaway from viral branding is a subversive, gentle type of marketing. If marketers properly understand the new brand and the target audience's sentiments towards the older brand, as in the case of Ole Miss, they will allow the audience to accept the new brand on their own terms.

### **Viral Critique**

Viral branding as expressed earlier is all about generating buzz. The belief here is that any communication is good as long as it's retold. Unfortunately for viral marketing, human nature only permits us to remember so much information. If we do not identify with the brand in a meaningful way then it will be a fad and no more. Ty's Beanie Babies are a good example of this, a trending topic that stormed the market but is now only a topic of "remember when" conversations. The danger of viral marketing is the heightened responsibility and power wielded by the consumer (29). The company plants a seed and then allows nature to take its course. Thus, the consumers end up defining the brand instead of the brand being defined by its owners and creators. While this is a beneficial process to stimulate it is not an end in itself. Snapple is a good example of a firm that used viral type marketing to achieve identity/iconic brand status. The company turned corporate ideals on its head, presented wonky, amateurish ideas, and appealed to a consumer base tired of the deceptive money mongering major corporations. Snapple was a role model promoting culture, which built strong identification between the brand and consumers. This disseminates much slower than a fad, which cannot become an extension of the consumer's perspective of the brand (29-35). Ole Miss must be careful

to use viral branding in a controlled manner, preventing the Rebel Black Bear from being defined in a negative way by members of the Ole Miss community.

## **Chapter 5: Research and Conclusions**

### **Executive Summary**

This section will include a summary and methodology of the survey, an overview of the research objectives, data analysis, and limitations. This data and its analysis will provide support for my conclusions and recommendations. All six branding eras, specifically – positioning, emotional, and viral – will be drawn upon to formulate final recommendations for the mascot’s branding strategy but only within an overall plan to establish an identity/iconic brand through Holt’s discipline of cultural branding.

The results are as follows:

- According to respondents, personal growth is the most important aspect of college life, followed by school spirit, and social life.
- The most important role for a mascot to perform is to raise school spirit and enhance game day experience, the second is to unify all members of the university and provide a common identification to the university at all times.
- The majority of university constituents do not expect the mascot to interact with children or participate in community service endeavors.
- 75% of survey participants were aware that The University of Mississippi created

a website ([www.mascot.olemiss.edu](http://www.mascot.olemiss.edu)) to inform Ole Miss community members of the mascot selection process.

- 47% of respondents did not vote during the final election for the new mascot of The University of Mississippi. Of those that did vote: 26% voted for the Rebel Black Bear, 17% voted for the Rebel Land Shark, and 10% voted for Hotty Toddy.
- Of those that chose the Rebel Black Bear many expressed that the reason for doing so was because that choice was the best of a mediocre to bad group of alternative options. Others expressed an understanding of the bear's connection to state history (i.e. its natural presence in the state, Teddy Roosevelt, and William Faulkner's *The Bear*). Finally, many participants understood the bear's potential to remain relevant for a long time to come, citing that the bear is more "timeless" than the Land Shark and Hotty Toddy man.
- The change of symbols and imagery, especially the removal of Colonel Rebel, at The University of Mississippi has affected donation activity among its constituents.
- The Rebel Black Bear faces a lack of receptiveness among the Ole Miss community. For the most part, community members do not identify with the new mascot, are not excited about the bear's presence at Ole Miss, and are frustrated by the selection of the Rebel Black Bear.
- A majority of survey participants are dissatisfied with the mascot selection

process, and the university's role in the process.

- An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that the best name for the new mascot is *Rebel*.
- Colonel Rebel's brand position in the minds of Ole Miss constituents is marked by his understood role as a positive catalyst for game day experience and school spirit. The perception of his image is characterized by the following descriptors, in the order of most applicable to least applicable: "Traditional", "Unique", "Noble", "Close-minded", "Negative", and "Racist".

Based on these results, the marketers at The University of Mississippi have a myriad of obstacles facing them as they attempt to develop a positive relationship between the Rebel Black Bear and the Ole Miss community. My recommendations for the conception and implementation of the marketing strategy are as follows:

- Leverage the college experience as a vital member of a marketing campaign for the Rebel Black Bear and the university. Personify the bear as a representation of each individual associated with Ole Miss and in doing so strengthen the message that the Rebel Black Bear is a symbol that there is a "Rebel inside all of us". For financial drives, like the UMAA efforts to raise support, leverage this message with the tag, "The Rebel in You". Finally, consider a division of UMAA that encourages donations from current students.
- Develop the Rebel Black Bear to perform roles that the Ole Miss community

does not associate with Colonel Rebel, such as community service leader and interaction with children, this will establish a separate and unique identity for the new mascot, allow it to be more than a “replacement”, and engender quicker acceptance.

- Join with various on campus philanthropies and service minded organizations, making the bear an activist of “doing good” in the Oxford community and statewide. For example, have the bear visit the North Mississippi Rehabilitation Center in Oxford and through social media outlets show the Ole Miss community the good our new mascot is doing.
- Use plausible connections to the state of Mississippi and the university, such as William Faulkner’s story, *The Bear*, Teddy Roosevelt’s naming of the teddy bear, and the natural presence of bears in this state, to create a historical link between the bear, the state, and members of the Ole Miss community. For example, if the university is to have a live bear, name him *Old Ben* or *Roosevelt*.
- Introduce the Rebel Black Bear with great patience, sensitivity, and tact, do not force acceptance, rather allow constituents to adopt the bear on their own time, in such a way where acceptance comes through their own volition.
- Continue to make efforts to develop a dialogue between the university and the community. Welcome regular input in regards to the mascot. For example, design a site that allows the bear’s outfits and props to be customized by fans and utilize business school students to subsidize advertising, public relations,

and marketing ideas. For instance, have a competition for the best 30-second promotional featuring the Rebel Black Bear as the main protagonist with the message that there is a “Rebel inside all of us”.

- Create a “Rebel Kid’s Club”, led by the Rebel Black Bear, that is integrated with community service, personal growth, and participation in Ole Miss athletic events. To make the club more effective try to get involved with local schools like Oxford Elementary. For example, the bear and a group of football players can go help students read and also play with them to encourage healthy lifestyles.
- Strengthen the image and position of the terms *Ole Miss* and *Rebels*, and in doing so assuage the fears of many Ole Miss community members that these words will soon be removed from The University of Mississippi. This will allow the Ole Miss community to focus on something else other than the mascot issue; a focus that is about bringing the Ole Miss community together to support an adored spirit and message. For example, during football games run a video or display a picture graphic that describes and honors a particular *Rebel* in Ole Miss’ past like James Meredith or Dexter McCluster.

## **Methodology**

The primary data for this segment of the thesis was collected with a survey. Social networking utilizing various mediums: Facebook, email, twitter, and word of mouth were used to gather data from the target audience. This method for gathering data is commonly referred to as “snowball sampling” where data is collected from the



researcher's acquaintances, which in turn look to their own acquaintances to further the data quantity. Thus, the data amount is to grow as the word of the survey is steadily spread among social groups. The target audience is the Ole Miss community and the survey was designed in such a way that only surveys from members of this group are considered valid and analyzed. This valid sample population is divided in segments of "Current Students", "Alumni", "Faculty Staff", and "Other".

A total of 1,942 surveys were started and 1,641 were completed. The majority of participants (90%) indicated that they were associated with The University of Mississippi while 10% indicated that they were not. Members of the Ole Miss community started 1,740 surveys. Participants were asked for their association with The University of Mississippi: 1,081 (63%) of respondents were "Alumni", 340 (20%) were "Current Students", 238 (14%) were "Other", and 55 (3%) were "Faculty/Staff". Our sample consisted of 900 males and 525 females. Of those surveys started, 1,439 were completed and considered valid. The number of fully completed and valid surveys (1,439) is about 11% of the 13,365 Ole Miss constituents who voted in the final election for the mascot.

### **Objectives**

1. Observe the effect of the mascot change on The University of Mississippi's brand equity and notice if any relationship between the mascot and brand image of the university is present.
2. Explore the positive emotional connection that people have with college and ascertain the reasons behind the connection.

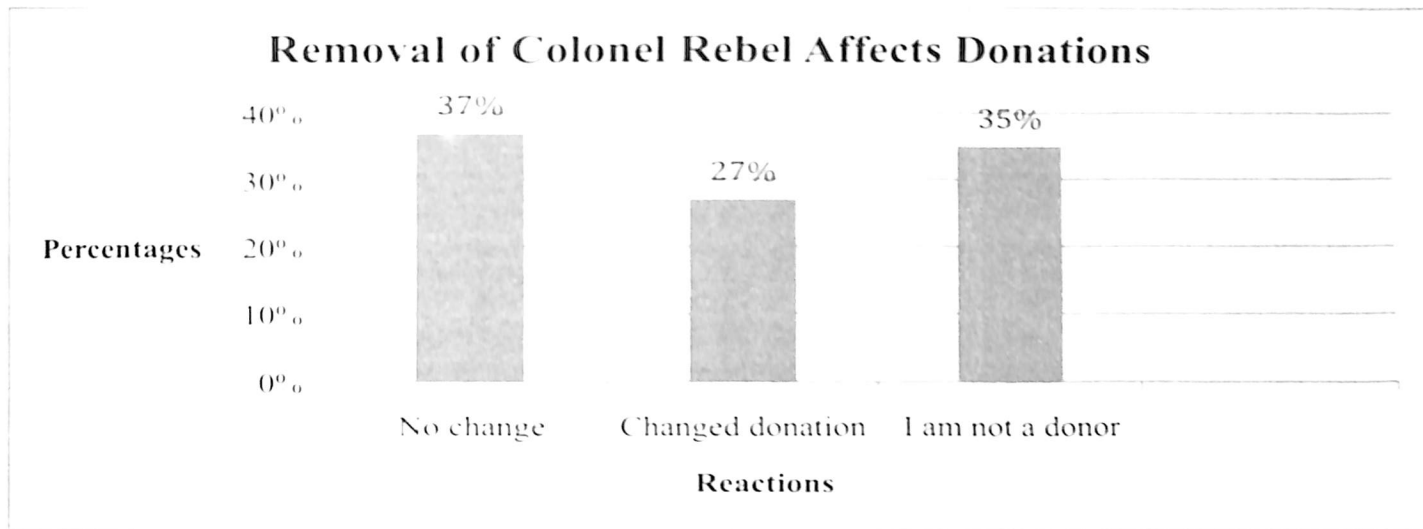
3. Evaluate the personality type(s) that people prefer to see expressed by mascots.
4. Determine the roles people expect mascots to play as a member of their university.
5. Gauge the position of Colonel Rebel's brand within the Ole Miss community: assess his perceived personality, purpose, and association with university.
6. Solicit responses to specific names for the new Ole Miss mascot and appraise the perception(s) that the Ole Miss community members have towards the Rebel Black Bear.
7. Assess the level of satisfaction the Ole Miss community had with the selection process and its execution.
8. Probe for potential behavioral effects, either positive or negative, of the mascot selection process on the Ole Miss brand.

## **Data Analysis and Results**

### Objective 1 – Mascot Change Affects Ole Miss Brand Equity

This objective attempted to establish a relationship between the mascot change and the financial behavior of constituents. Question 13 states, "Have you changed the amount of your personal donation to Ole Miss as a direct result of the mascot change beginning in 2003 with the removal of Colonel Rebel from athletic events?" Subjects were given three choices: "Yes", "No", and "I am not a donor". There were a total of 1,428 responses. 553 (37%) said "No", 506 (35%) "I am not a donor", 389 (27%) "Yes". Thus, out of the 942 survey respondents who donate 41.3% have changed their donation amount in some way, either positively or negatively, as a result of the mascot removal in

2003. This analysis displays that the mascot does have an effect on The University of Mississippi's brand equity and it is clear that the mascot removal was a "direct" cause of alteration in the donation behavior of Ole Miss constituents.



Objective 2 – The Emotional Connection to Collegiate Life

This objective attempted to identify the emotional connections Ole Miss Community members have with collegiate life. They were asked to indicate the personal importance (1 = Not at all important; 5 = Extremely important) of five aspects of college life: "Individual freedom", "School spirit", "Social life", "Personal growth", and "Family tradition". The mean value indicates the average response for each specific category and is useful to rank the five aspects of college life according to our sample. The following ranks the importance of the aspects of college life according to constituents (the mean value is in parenthesis): "Personal growth" is the most important aspect of college life (4.37), followed by "School spirit" (4.06), "Social life" (3.99), "Individual freedom" (3.87), and "Family tradition" (3.49). While "Family tradition" does rank 5<sup>th</sup> it has the highest standard deviation (1.332) which means that this particular response has the most

answers that deviate from its mean, indicating a wide response range of values that do not group too tightly around the mean of 3.49. Thus, many Ole Miss constituents feel this aspect is extremely important and many do not.

### Objective 3 – Preferred Personality of a Mascot

In order to measure the constituent's preference for a mascot's personality, survey participants were asked to rank order the personality attributes of a mascot from the choices: "Athletic", "Enthusiastic", "Competitive", "Proud", and "Comedic". This question is ordinal and had five mutually exclusive choices (1 = Most important; 5 = Least important) allowing the respondent to rank each variable on importance from 1-5. The median value, displayed in parenthesis, is used in order to rank the five variables in each of these questions as a measure of central tendency. The most desired personality attribute is "Proud" (1), followed by "Enthusiastic" (2), "Competitive" (3), "Athletic" (4), and "Comedic" (5).

### Objective 4 – Expected Mascot Roles

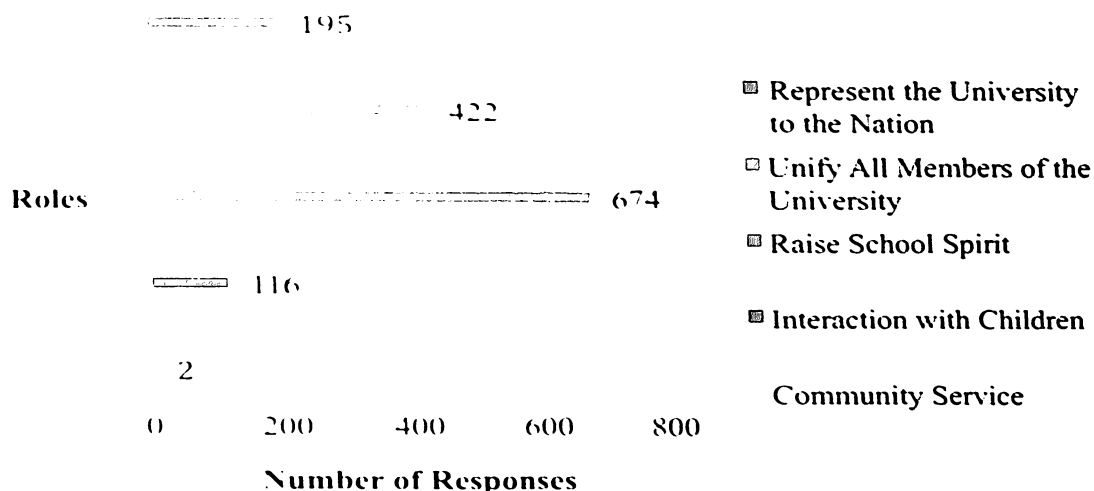
Ole Miss community members were asked which roles they expect the mascot to perform. The question is an ordinal question, which allowed the respondent to rank 1-5 the preference of mascot roles for a mascot to represent Ole Miss (1 = Most important; 5 = Least important). The median value, placed in parenthesis, is again used to order their responses and reflect the samples' perceptions and expectations of mascot roles. The preferred roles are in this order: a tie between "Raise school spirit / enhance game day experience" (2) and "Unify all members of a university and provide a common identification to the university at all times" (2), "Represent the university's personality to

the rest of the nation" (3), "Interaction with children" (4), and "Community service minded leader" (5). The reason for the deadlock of median values among the top two choices is because "Unify all members of a university" has a smaller range (22) and its responses are more equally distributed from the rankings of 1-5 while "Raise school spirit" has a larger range (31) and its distribution is more skewed towards the frequency ranks of 1 and 2. Thus, "Raise school spirit / enhance game day atmosphere" is the role that the majority of Ole Miss constituents expect to be fulfilled by the new mascot.

#### Objective 5 -- Colonel Rebel's Position in the Mind's of the Ole Miss Community

Subjects were asked to indicate which role most correctly describes Colonel Rebel's service to Ole Miss. The roles given were the same roles that subjects were earlier given to rank on expected roles for the new mascot to perform (refer to objective 4). With a frequency of 674 and a valid percentage of 47.8, the role to "Raise school spirit / enhance game day experience" is the most applicable role Colonel Rebel performed for Ole Miss. Second, with a frequency of 422 and valid percent of 30 was "Unify all members of a university", followed by "Represent the university's personality to the rest of the nation" (frequency = 195; valid percent = 13.8), "Interaction with children" (frequency = 116; valid percent = 8.2), and "Community service minded leader" (frequency = 2; valid percent = .1). The mode of the responses was 3, the value that coincides with the label and choice, "Raise school spirit / enhance game day experience". Therefore, the position Colonel Rebel occupies in the mind of the Ole Miss community is primarily that of a conductor for school spirit and a unifying symbol.

### Perceived Role of Colonel Rebel



In question 17, subjects were asked to rank from 1-6 (1 = Most appropriate; 6 = Least appropriate) the words, which most accurately described Colonel Rebel. The question was a rank ordinal question where each choice was mutually exclusive. Because the question's responses are mutually exclusive and rank ordinal, the median value is used to reflect the perceptions that the Ole Miss community has for Colonel Rebel. The rankings from 1-6 were: "Traditional", "Unique", "Noble", "Close-minded", "Negative", and "Racist". The disapproving sentiments were "Close-minded", "Negative", and "Racist". Of these, only 81 respondents (6.2%) ranked "Negative" as the most applicable term to describe Colonel Rebel, 23 (1.8%) "Close-minded", and 45 (3.4%) "Racist". A vast majority indicated that the most evocative word for Colonel Rebel is "Traditional" with 1056 respondents (74.6%) ranking this first, meaning that to Ole Miss community members it is the most applicable term to describe their perceptions of Colonel Rebel. There is not a statistically significant relationship between race and the selection of which words most accurately describe Colonel Rebel. For the most part, African Americans

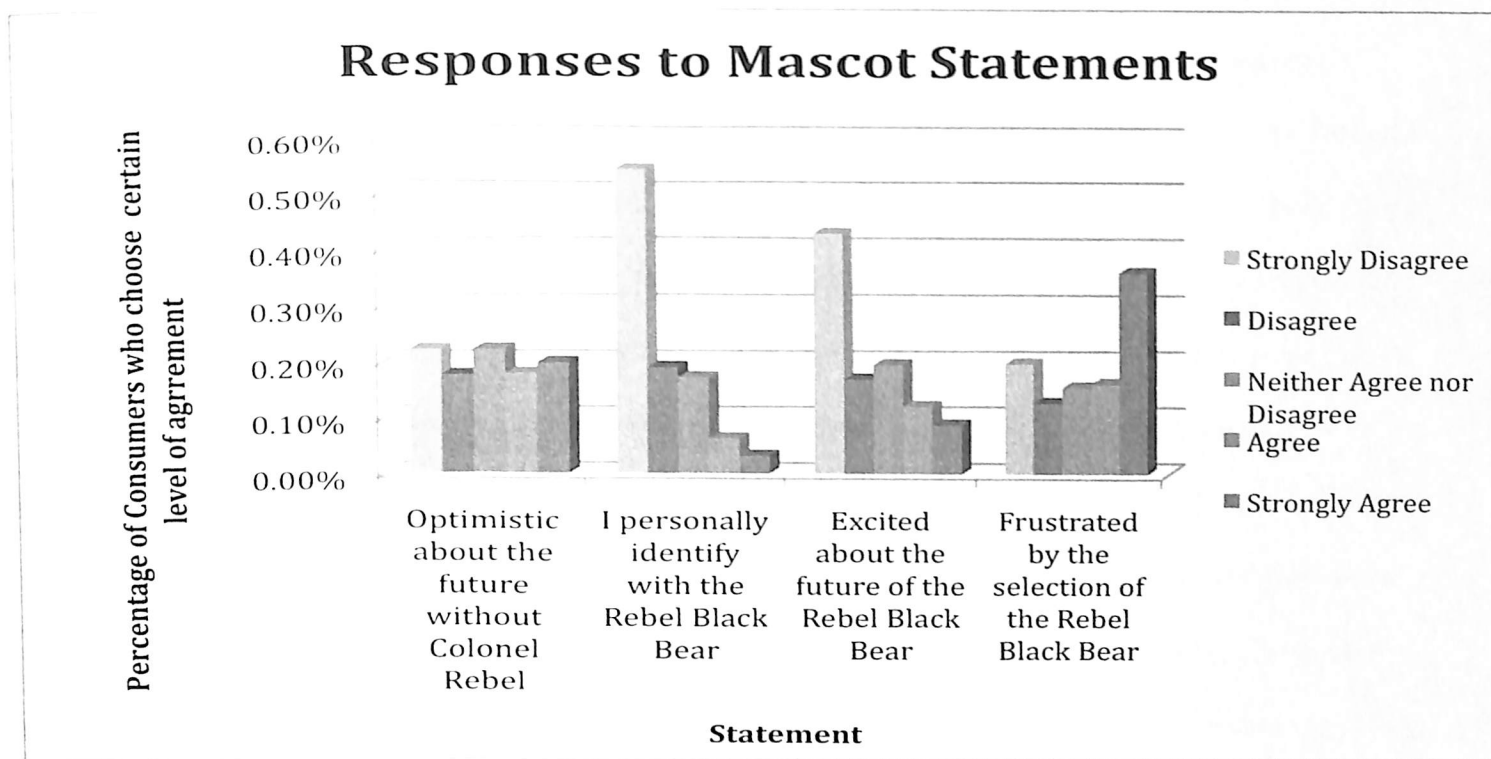
responded in the same manner as Caucasians. For example, 68% of African American respondents indicated that "Racist" was the least applicable word to describe Colonel Rebel, while only 20% ranked this word in the top 3 as being more applicable.

#### Objective 6 – Outlook for the Rebel Black Bear

Ole Miss community members were asked to choose what name they think best for the Rebel Black Bear mascot. There were a total of 1,376 valid responses. According to valid frequency percentages, the names rank as follows: "Rebel" (67.6%), "Old Ben" (11%), "Rebel Bear" (11.1%), "Hotty Toddy" (6.5%), and "Teddy" (4.7%). It is clear that constituents favor the name *Rebel*.

In Question 14, a series of statements were used to measure the perception of Ole Miss community members towards the mascot selection. We will analyze two statements focusing on opinions of the black bear. The first statement we will analyze is: "I personally identify with the Rebel Black Bear". 776 respondents of a total of 1,430 (54.3%) "Strongly Disagree" and 271 respondents (19%) "Disagree" with the statement. 90 respondents (6.3%) "Agree" and 47 respondents (3.3%) "Strongly Agree", while 246 respondents (17.2%) "Neither Agree nor Disagree". The mean response was 1.85 (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) and the standard deviation was 1.14, this suggests that the majority of data responses were grouped around the "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree" choices. In conclusion, the majority of respondents disagree with this statement and approximately 70% of Ole Miss community members do not identify with the Rebel Black Bear. The second statement we will analyze is: (I am) "Excited about the future of the Rebel Black Bear". 126 (8%) of a total of 1429 respondents "Strongly

Agree” and 172 respondents “Agree” with this statement. Therefore, these two positive outlooks only total to 298 (21%) of the respondents in the sample population. The negative outlooks for this statement: “Strongly Disagree” at 611 respondents (43%) and “Disagree” at 242 respondents (17%) account for a sum of 853 respondents (60%) from the Ole Miss community members who are not excited about the future of the Rebel Black Bear. The remaining 272 respondents (19%) selected, “Neither Agree nor Disagree” and are neutral on the statement. The mean response was 2.27 (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) and the standard deviation was 1.351.



To summarize, 70% of Ole Miss constituents not identifying with the Rebel Black Bear is not too terribly concerning because it has only been the school’s mascot for a few months. Although consumers must be led by a brand’s product into a reasonable level of purchase intention the fact that only 21% of the sampled Ole Miss community indicated a



positive level of excitement about the Rebel Black Bear's future is a reasonable source of worry for marketers.

### Objective 7 – Perception of the Selection Process

The questions in this objective were designed to measure the participation and level of satisfaction Ole Miss community members had with the selection process. Results from Question 9 indicate a high level of constituent awareness for the university mascot site. 1,094 (75%) respondents were aware of the university website: [www.olemiss.mascot.edu](http://www.olemiss.mascot.edu). Also, in response to Question 10, which asks participants what mascot option they selected during the final election, 677 (47%) of the survey participants indicated that they did not vote in the final mascot election. Of those that did not vote, an astounding 404 (60%) knew about the mascot selection process. There was a significant relationship ( $p < .05$ ) between those who voted and their satisfaction with their personal role in the election process. The mean level of satisfaction for those participants who voted for the Rebel Black Bear was 3.54 (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) with a standard deviation of 1.087 and the mean of participants who did not vote was 2.40 (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) with a standard deviation of 1.130. Those that did vote were more satisfied with their personal role in the mascot selection process. There was also a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between the satisfaction levels of voters for the Rebel Black Bear, voters for other choices, non-voters, and the university's role in the process. Rebel Black Bear voters' mean response (3.09) indicated that they were neutral on the university's role. Non-voters' mean response (1.79) to the university's role indicates a low satisfaction level. Those who selected Land Shark (2.14), and Hotty Toddy (1.78) had almost equal levels of

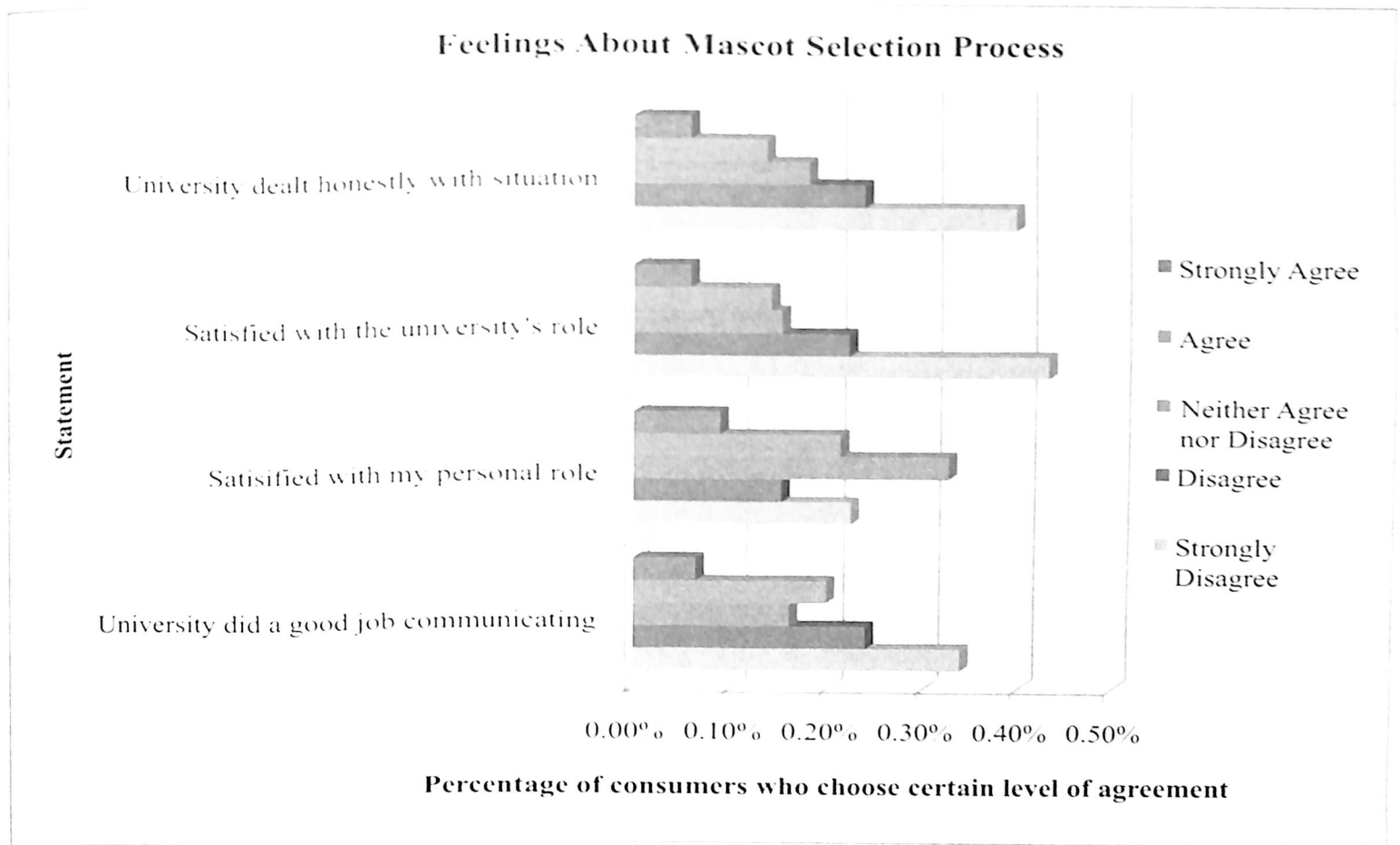
dissatisfaction with those who did not even vote.

In Question 14, subjects were asked to indicate their level of agreement (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) with a series of statements, four of those statements gauged the individual participant's opinions and perceptions towards the selection process – their personal role and the university's role.

<b>Statistics for Levels of Satisfaction</b>		Satisfied with the mascot selection process	Satisfied with the university's role in the mascot selection process	Felt the university did a good job communicating throughout the mascot selection process	Satisfied with my personal role in the mascot selection process
N	Valid	1430	1431	1435	1432
	Missing	548	547	543	546
Mean		2.12	2.18	2.41	2.79
Median		2.00	2.00	2.00	3.00
Mode		1	1	1	3
Std. Deviation		1.264	1.279	1.305	1.251
Range		4	4	4	4

The values of 2 and 3 imply “Disagree” and “Neither Agree nor Disagree”. The mean values of each statement (2.12, 2.18, 2.41) and the mode values, all mode values are 1 (1 = Strongly Disagree) indicate that the Ole Miss community has a negative perception of the university's role in the mascot selection process. When asked about their personal

role in the process, respondents were a bit more upbeat. (Where 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree) The mean value for this statement (2.79) and mode value (3) are closer to the neutral, "Neither Agree nor Disagree" variable choice.

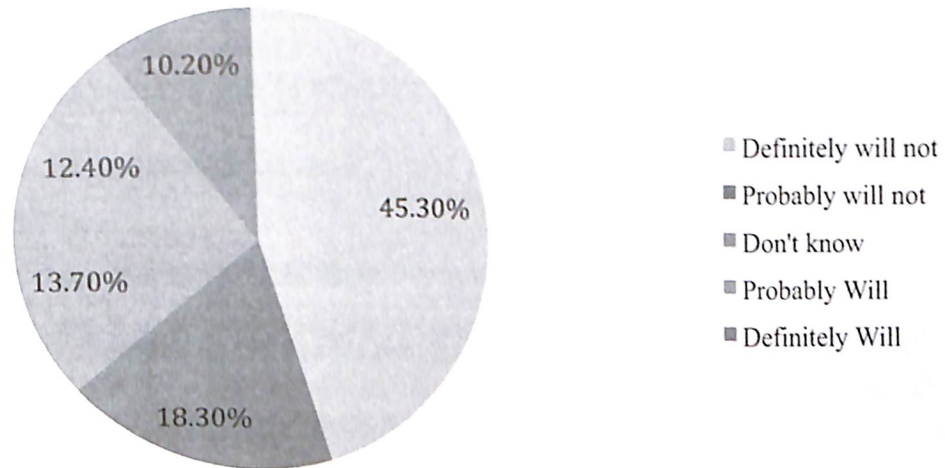


Furthermore, when asked to respond to the statement, (I) "Felt that the university dealt with this situation with complete honesty and transparency" the mean value is 2.22 and mode value is 2 (2 = Disagree). Constituents are a bit more satisfied with their own role than they are with the university's role. The figure above illustrates the lack of satisfaction constituents had with the selection process in general.

## Objective 8 – New Mascot’s Implications on Constituent Behavior

Currently, the brand equity of the Rebel Black Bear brand is relatively low. This conclusion is ascertained by the responses to Question 15, which asked participants to indicate their level of agreement (1 – Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) to their acceptance of the Rebel Black Bear as the mascot of Ole Miss and their purchase intentions with Rebel Black Bear logo apparel. The mean value for the acceptance of the Rebel Black Bear is close to neutral (2.8) but trending to the negative. While acceptance numbers seem a bit promising the purchase intentions of respondents are not. Ole Miss community members were asked if they intended to purchase apparel with the Rebel Black Bear logo. 650 respondents (45.3%) indicated that they “Definitely will not”, 263 respondents (18.3%) “Probably will not”, 197 (13.7%) “Don’t know, 178 (12.4%) “Probably will”, and 147 (10.2%) “Definitely will”. The mean of the response was 2.24 with a standard deviation of 1.397. This indicates that initially, the majority of constituents will not be willing to purchase Rebel Black Bear logo apparel.

### Will you purchase Ole Miss apparel with the Rebel Black Bear logo?



The assumption that certain groups of people, sub-sets of the Ole Miss community, had different views towards accepting the bear was made. There is no significant relationship between the number of games attended and the attitudes towards the Rebel Black Bear. However, there is a significant relationship ( $p < .01$ ) between the level of acceptance of the Rebel Black Bear and intent to purchase Rebel Black Bear among males and females. Males are more willing to accept the Rebel Black Bear and have a higher intent to purchase *Rebel Black Bear* apparel.

#### Limitations

As with any research endeavor this effort has limitations and flaws. The first limitation is found in my sample population. While the sample population is of adequate size, the number of valid surveys (1,439) is about 11% of the 13,365 Ole Miss constituents who voted in the final mascot election, the miniscule participation rate of the African American segment is of concern. The Ole Miss student body is 14% African

American (Jefferson) and the percentage of African American responses in my survey was 2% (26 respondents). Due to this, it is my concern that the sample does not adequately represent the entire population. Furthermore, I realize that my claim of having 11% of the total vote number is a bit skewed because not all of my survey participants voted in the mascot election.

In addition, response bias could have been present in my research. There are four types of response bias I will address as relevant to my survey. The most important bias is selection bias. The survey went out to friends and gatekeepers of certain networks – alumni associations in Jackson, Dallas, and Birmingham, Ole Miss related Internet message boards, and personal acquaintances. Because the snowball method was used to collect data convenience sampling was a factor and it is quite possible that my sample of respondents is a restricted network of the Ole Miss community that does not represent the entire Ole Miss population. To circumvent this I did reach out to networks with which I had no connection such as the African American community at Ole Miss. Second, some responses may have had acquiescence bias, which results when some individuals tend to agree with all questions. For example, in question 9, which asked Ole Miss community members if they were aware of the university operated website for the mascot selection process, respondents could have answered “Yes” because some respondents tend to agree with all questions. Extremity bias occurs when some individuals tend to use extremes when responding to questions, this normally happens with interval, scale type questions like question 14. The last type of bias is social desirability bias, which occurs when consumers wish to appear in a role other than their true self. In my survey, some constituents might have lied about voting in the mascot election because they are

ashamed for having not voted. Finally, there is also the possibility of administrative error expressed through mistakes in data processing and tabulating results using SPSS software.

If I were to alter anything about my survey it would be the wording of question 9 which asked if donation amounts had changed as a direct result of Colonel Rebel's removal in 2003. In this form, the question serves as proof that a mascot can be a direct cause for financial action. However, there is no way to tell if the change was positive or negative, there is the possibility that some constituents increased donations and some decreased donations. We cannot know because of the limitations of that particular question. If I could add a question I would like to gauge how many respondents use twitter and how many of those are aware of Ole Miss' presence there. It would be beneficial to see what segment – Alumni, Current Students, and Faculty/Staff – composes Ole Miss' twitter audience.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations – Cultural Branding and the Ole Miss Myth**

In the first chapter, the idea of symbols and the attachment to brands resulting from said symbols was explored in detail. It is very important that the marketing strategy of the bear comprehends why humans can be so passionate about symbols, like a collegiate mascot. Symbols are brands and mascots are symbols. Thus, for our purposes a mascot is synonymous with a brand. Objective 1 proves that the mascot is a brand because of the direct relationship a mascot can have with the financial activity of a university's donor population. Although these recommendations are based on the precepts of Holt's theory of cultural branding it is important to realize that this strategy

would not exist without the other branding eras. Holt believes that the eras of branding, specifically - positioning, emotional, and viral - are a part of cultural branding. But also maintains that by themselves they are inadequate and will not be able to construct an iconic brand. Holt defines cultural branding as "the set of axioms and strategic principles that guide the building of brands into cultural icons" (8).

Holt explains that icons can be people, places, objects, companies, and universities. For a symbol to transcend the gap between the symbolic and iconic it must become shorthand for something important to a particular culture. For example, display a swath of houndstooth material to an Alabama fan and that person will associate the black and white fabric with Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant, national championships, and football glory. In this case, houndstooth is an icon that symbolizes a set of ideas and values that Alabama fans (a particular societal group) value. Holt states that, "Customers use iconic brands as symbolic salves. They grab hold of the myth as they use the product as a means to lessen their identity burdens" (8). Brands become iconic when they perform identity myths: simple functions that address cultural anxieties from afar, from imaginary worlds rather than from the worlds that consumers regularly encounter in their everyday lives. The cultural branding approach is rooted in an effort to find the "acute" cultural tensions present in the selected target audience, and address these tensions through a potent myth or story that eases the tension. A myth is a story and like every story there must be a plot, characters, and a setting.

The myth that marketers should consider for the Rebel Black Bear is steeped in the experience of college, in particular the experience of Ole Miss. The one thing that all sub-segments of the Ole Miss community share in common is the connection to



collegiate life. While not every member of the constituency in concern went to The University of Mississippi or has experienced Oxford, it is safe to say that the majority have at the least a notion of the collegiate life. College is a powerful and alluring, almost magical, four years of a person's life. Those who are not yet in college cannot wait to be there; those in college don't want to leave, and the ones that have graduated want to go back. While this is an assumption and not all individuals feel this way about college, or Ole Miss in particular, the influence of the collegiate myth is potent and should be employed to fortify the bear's image among the members of the Ole Miss community. Objective 2 illustrates the sentiments Ole Miss constituents have about college life. The responses to the open ended questions in that section suggest that though there are many different ways to experience Ole Miss there is one thing that ties all the separate identities together – the Grove.

Holt stresses that the myth location is key, and that the most successful locations are "populist worlds", which he defines as "places separated not only from everyday life but also from the realms of commerce and elite control" (9). Holt provides three characteristics of a populist world: 1) their ethos is the collective and voluntary product of their participants 2) the inhabitants perform personally valued activities and are not motivated by commercial or political interests 3) set in place removed from centers of commerce and politics (58). Does not the collegiate world satisfy these characteristics? In a populist setting, people's actions are driven by belief and not self-interest. A brand's myth connects its constituents to a populist world and gives them the feeling that they too can live like those who inhabit the populist world. Ole Miss is a populist world even more so than most other colleges. If the Rebel Black Bear is placed in an advertising

campaign that leverages the populist world of college and the Ole Miss experience it will build a positive image. Each member of the Ole Miss community has a place or experience that to them defines Ole Miss, their personal perception of the university's brand. From the survey's open-ended questions we know that there are many different experiences that characterize Ole Miss and that the Grove unifies them all. Marketers must identify these and place the bear within those experiences. This will link the bear to the people he is meant to represent, give the bear a history he does not intrinsically possess, and unite a diverse community. The bear must be a singular expression of all the different things that make The University of Mississippi "A Great American Public University", communicate that "We are all Rebels", and that there is "A Rebel is inside all of us". For example, picture a promotional advertisement with the bear as student packing for college and moving into Stockard/Martin, as Archie Manning throwing a touchdown pass, as a student cramming in the library for a final, as James Meredith walking into the lyceum, as William Faulkner or John Grisham penning a book, as a student at a local party, as an Oxonian enjoying Rowan Oak, a baseball game in the spring, or as any Ole Miss community member enjoying the Grove on a Saturday during the fall. Students could execute this commercial concept and therefore it would have the "insiders" stamp of approval and possess a viral, YouTube feel. The point of such a wide expression is that the bear is a representation of how each individual of the Ole Miss community links their own identity with the university. If this can be done successfully, people will have internal markers, positive associations that place their experience of college at Ole Miss with the Rebel Black Bear. In a myth there must be actors, and in this specific myth the actors are those who consider themselves members of this populist

world – the Ole Miss community. For any myth to truly become powerful it must possess a ritual where those who associate with the brand can truly experience the populist world created by marketing strategies. The alluring quality of this strategic marketing approach leveraging the university as a locale for the myth is that the brand participants have countless rituals where they express their association with the world of the Ole Miss myth, such as the ritual of the Grove on game days.

Marketers must remember that creating a brand connection to a populist world can be dangerous if the actual inhabitants of that world do not consent to your actions. The populist world that a brand uses must be an accurate representation of the real people and settings that make up the particular world. Holt explains that if insiders approve of a brand's use of their world – language and lifestyle – that the “icon becomes all the more valued in the eyes of its other constituencies”. On the other hand, if insiders disapprove and “trash the brand's claims – berating the brand for selling out or because its actions reveal ignorance – the brand loses credibility. Depending on the size and authority of the insiders, they can destroy the icon when they withdraw their approval” (147). Ole Miss has the smallest enrollment size and is located in the least populated city of any SEC institution. Due to the small size of Ole Miss and its familial nature the number of “insiders”, those who consider themselves intimately involved with the university, is relatively high. As marketers execute the college myth they must consider the wide range of segments that represent Ole Miss' “insider” population. Current students, young fans, and alumni all constitute the “insider” group. Thus, any marketing efforts must have a voice, personality, and approach that are consistent with the Ole Miss culture these groups have established and expect.

How does Ole Miss choose whom to target with such a voice? Marketers know that targeting everyone is a path to failure. Ries and Trout state, "Today the 'everybody trap' may keep you afloat if you're already in office or already own a substantial share of market. But it's deadly if you want to build a position from nowhere" (60). The difficulty for Rebel Black Bear will be striking a balance with what is familiar and integral to the *Rebel* ethos while differentiating the brand enough from Colonel Rebel to establish a unique position. The mind does not have too much room for the new product (mascot) unless it is somehow related to the former product (mascot). However, if the new brand, in this case Rebel Black Bear, doesn't have an independent position in the mind of the Ole Miss community it will blur the meaning of the Ole Miss brand and never become more than a second rate replacement. This is precisely why the Rebel Black Bear must be evocative of the Ole Miss tradition while becoming something Colonel Rebel never was. According to Objective 4, when asked to rank the most important roles of that the university's mascot should perform, participants indicated that the most important role is to "Raise school spirit", followed by: "Unify all members of the university", "Represent the university to the nation", "Interaction with children", and "Community service minded leader". These are the roles constituents expect performed by a mascot because of the precedent set by Colonel Rebel, as we saw in Objective 5. For the Rebel Black Bear to be accepted it must redefine what a mascot is, becoming something all together different than the familiar, performing a unique role that the Ole Miss community members cannot help but to appreciate. This is why the Rebel Black Bear should focus on becoming a community service leader who interacts well with children. Although those roles are not "expected" or desired they will be valued and in

no way limit the mascot from performing the other "more important" roles.

According to Objective 6, the Rebel Black Bear is building a position from nowhere; the brand construction is starting at a negative position due to the pessimistic attitude the Ole Miss community has toward the bear. This new mascot should be viewed as an opportunity to honor the past and move on towards the future, a chance to broaden the functionality of a mascot into roles Colonel Rebel could not justifiably play. The acute tension of a past with two different perspectives must be addressed by marketers and can be done through simple actions. As addressed in Objective 6, the naming of the bear is a substantial part of this. The name *Rebel* comforts the fan base and assuages their fear of losing other traditions, like the *Rebel* moniker, while also providing a subtle link to our past as *Ole Miss Rebels*. The appearance of the bear is also crucial. In the conceptual renderings the bear wears a jersey with the number 10, a remembrance of a certain famous quarterback in Ole Miss history, Eli Manning. I think it would be particularly prudent to pay homage to tradition, something we have seen is very important to the Ole Miss community, and place a number 38 on the bear's jersey. This would honor the life of Chucky Mullins, a former football player at the university during the late 1980's, who eventually lost his life as a result of a horrific football injury. The example of Chucky Mullins illustrates how marketers can take steps to attach distinctive and traditional values to a completely new and otherwise untraditional mascot.

We have already seen that the basic desire for humans is to experience group relatedness (Deci and Ryan), which is a reason for the success of the collegiate mascot and also a contributor to the potency of tribal marketing. Gobé explains that the definition of family is dramatically changing the way consumers relate to products.

*Family* is becoming a much more expansive and inclusive term. In the past, the term *family* used to entail a group of people who share the same blood or are related through marriage. Now, *family* suggests the membership of formerly tertiary people such as an individual's friends (*Citizen Brand* 26). Gobé believes that this formation of friend groups into tribes, the term for an expanded and more inclusive family, is the result of a fast paced life and globalization. He believes that the tribe is a safe place where individuals can be themselves and commune with others that share similar passions and outlooks on life (7). Tribal marketing is about bringing people together for positive experiences. Think back to Auburn's Gene Chizik calling that community the "Auburn Family". This resonates with Gobé's opinion on the trend towards tribalization and its continued and increasingly formidable importance in group centric markets. It is my contention that the target audience for the university's marketing department does not have to be limited to one sub group of the Ole Miss community. This entire group of people is a tribe. Within this marketing strategy there exist two necessities: a language and a place. The language of Ole Miss is southern hospitality; it is "Hotty Toddy", and "Go Rebs". The place of the Ole Miss tribe is Oxford, the Grove, the Lyceum, and anything else that expresses the essence of a group that has something in common – the college experience. Thus the target audience is the Ole Miss tribe, a family with many members united by place, language, and the college experience.

We have seen that the university has systematically removed certain symbols from its athletic branding strategy. The objective appropriateness of these decisions are not of direct concern to this research but the effects these decisions have had on the target audience and therefore the Ole Miss brand is of is great relevance. Objective 7 explores

the perceptions Ole Miss community members have of the mascot selection process. It may seem that The University of Mississippi's mascot selection process did enough to initiate a trusting, democratic, and cooperative environment, but it doesn't matter what the university does. What matters is the Ole Miss community's perception of the university's actions. The data analysis from this section suggests that currently, trust between the university and its constituents is in a meager state. For example, when respondents were asked if they felt the university dealt with the mascot situation with complete honesty and transparency the response was a strong "No". The mean value was 2.22 (2 = Disagree) with a standard deviation of 1.25; clearly this is a relationship that needs some reparation. In Gobé's book, *Emotional Branding*, trust is one of his Ten Commandments of Emotional Branding. Per Gobé, "Honesty is expected. Trust is engaging and intimate" (xxix). This commandment can be realized through personal dialogue, which he contends is necessary because "consumers today expect their brands to know them – intimately and individually – with a solid understanding of their needs and cultural orientation" (xxiii). In his sequel entitled *Citizen Brand* an expression of trust is identified as open dialogue. This purports that companies communicate with their constituents in a democratic fashion. Gobé states, "People want to embrace and vibrate emotionally with a brand. People want to learn, want to have fun, share information, and be a part of the process. The best ideas are the ones that intrigue people and excite their sense of adventure and discovery. People love interactive relationships. People love to be a part of the creative process" (198). The way Ole Miss marketers can establish trust is through opening a dialogue where community members influence the appearance and actions of the Rebel Black Bear. Imagine a website where kids and adults could go to

dress the bear in something particular for an upcoming game, or recommend a certain prop, then the mascot actually shows up to the game wearing that costume and using that prop. Consider an iPhone app that is GPS enabled and can request the bear to come by a grove tent and visit children. Finally, how about a competitive vote where high schools try to win the opportunity to work with the Rebel Black Bear on a service project? These types of marketing activities will engender trust and help to propel the brand into the positive purchase intentions of Ole Miss community members (Objective 8).

Within this specific community there is a palpable tension between past tradition and future direction. A large contingent of the Ole Miss tribe believes the university is on a mission to rid the school of traditional symbols such as *Rebels* and perhaps even the name *Ole Miss*. These two phrases are essential members of the Ole Miss language and the fear Ole Miss community members have of losing them is indicative of their attachment to these symbols. In question 14 of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: "(I am) Worried symbols like 'Ole Miss' and 'Rebels' will soon be gone". 70% of respondents (1,012) indicated that they "Strongly Agree" (49%) or "Agree" (21%) with this statement. It is clear that there is a major concern for the future identity of the Ole Miss brand. This is the perception of the constituents and therefore must be addressed by the black bear's marketers. In my opinion, the university and its marketers must soon move forward to protect these two vital members of the Ole Miss language. It is easier to reposition the meaning of name than the meaning of an image. The following is an example of how the term *rebel* can be redefined. As a noun, *Rebel* could mean a member of the Confederate Army or it could be defined as one who refuses allegiance to and opposes by force an



established government or ruling authority, like the patriots who died so that America could have its freedom from Britain. *Rebel* in the form of a verb means to resist or defy an authority or a generally accepted convention (“Rebel”). Should not The University of Mississippi *rebel* against the problems of illiteracy, poverty, and obesity particular to the state of Mississippi (Nettleton)? Jon Turner, former president of the Ole Miss Alumni Association, comments:

Going forward we must proactively own the words “Ole Miss” and “Rebels” and make them represent what they truly are and what we want them to be... not what our competition and the media would want them to be. The “Miss” in “Ole Miss” refers to the state of Mississippi to the rest of the world outside the state and not some ‘lady in the house!’ and “Ole Miss” is simply an endearing term for our alma mater. There are all kinds of Rebels, including the Revolutionary rebels and James Meredith, the ultimate Rebel. Mississippians of all colors have tended to be “Rebels” through the years. The movement away from the Colonel mascot allows us to develop the great word Rebel much better (Turner).

Turner, like many others, sees *Ole Miss* as a foundational pillar of the university and a mystical phrase that means *family* to all members of the Ole Miss community. Aside from these reasons to protect the name, there are practical marketing reasons as well. First *Ole Miss* is only two syllables, it is easy to say and catchy, much more so than saying “Mississippi” or “University of Mississippi”, which have four and nine syllables respectively. Second, the name is unique. There are hundreds of universities but there is only one *Ole Miss*, there are multiple UM abbreviations in the college market – Maryland, Miami, Montana, and Michigan just to name a few – and only one *Ole Miss*.

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This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482. \*\*\* This survey is purely academic and in no way reflects the opinions of the University of Mississippi Administration or Athletic Department\*\*\*

**Start Survey**

Q1. Would you consider yourself associated in any way with the University of Mississippi?

- Yes
- No

Q2. Which of the following most appropriately describes your affiliation with the University of Mississippi?

- Alumni
- Current Student
- Faculty / Staff
- Other

Q3. From your own personal experience, please rate the importance of the following aspects of your college experience at Ole Miss:

	Not Important	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Individual freedom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School Spirit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal Growth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family Tradition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4. What are one or two places on the campus of the University of Mississippi that you remember the most?

Q5. What is one experience you had that you believe captures the college experience of Ole Miss?

Q6. Please rank from the following characteristics what personality attributes you find most important in the mascot for Ole Miss. Place a 1 next to the attribute that is most important and place a 5 next to the attribute that is the least important.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Athletic
- \_\_\_\_\_ Enthusiastic
- \_\_\_\_\_ Competitive



- Proud
- Comedic

**Q7.** Please rank the following roles you expect the Ole Miss mascot to perform. Place a 1 next to the role that is most important and place a 5 next to the role that is least important.

- Community service minded leader
- Interaction with children
- Raise school spirit and enhance **game day** experience
- Unify all members of a university and provide a common identification to the university **at all times**
- Represent the university's personality to the rest of the nation

*Note:* In 2010, the University of Mississippi sponsored a student led process to elect a new mascot. On October 14th, the Rebel Black Bear choice was elected by alumni, the student body, and faculty/staff. The following questions are about this process and the final mascot selection.

**Q9.** Were you aware of the university sponsored website: [www.mascot.olemiss.edu](http://www.mascot.olemiss.edu)? This site was run by the Mascot Selection Committee and provided an in-depth explanation of the mascot selection process.

- Yes
- No

**Q10.** In the final vote to select a mascot for Ole Miss, which mascot choice did you select?

- Rebel Black Bear
- Hotty Toddy
- Rebel Land Shark
- I did not vote

**Q11.** In one or two sentences, please share why you selected the Bear to be the mascot of the University of Mississippi?

**Q12.** In your personal opinion, what is the best name for the Rebel Black Bear mascot?

- Rebel
- Hotty Toddy
- Rebel Bear
- Old Ben
- Teddy

**Q13.** In 2003, Colonel Rebel was removed from athletic events. Has your personal donation amount to the university changed as a direct result of Colonel Rebel's removal?

- Yes
- No
- I am not a donor

**Q14.**

Please indicate how you feel in regards to these statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I personally identify with the Rebel Black Bear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worried symbols like "Ole Miss" and "Rebels" will soon be gone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Excited about the future of the Rebel Black Bear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frustrated by the selection of the Rebel Black Bear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Satisfied with the university's role in the mascot selection process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Satisfied with the mascot selection process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Optimistic about the future of Ole Miss without Colonel Rebel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Felt the university did a good job communicating throughout the mascot selection process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Felt that the university dealt with this situation with complete honesty and transparency	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Satisfied with my personal role in the mascot selection process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q15.** Please indicate the likelihood that you will do the following things:

	Definitely will not	Probably will not	Don't know	Probably will	Definitely will
Will you purchase Ole Miss apparel with the Rebel Black Bear logo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will you accept the Rebel Black Bear as the mascot of Ole Miss?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q16.** Which role do you think most correctly describes Colonel Rebel's service to Ole Miss?

- Community service minded leader
- Represent the university's personality to the rest of the nation
- Raise school spirit and enhance **game day** experience
- Unify all members of a university and provide a common identification to the university **at all times**
- Interaction with children

**Q17. Please rank from 1-6 the following words which most appropriately describe what you think of Colonel Rebel.**

- Traditional
- Negative
- Unique
- Racist
- Noble
- Close-Minded

**Q18. In what year were you born? (example: 1988)**

**Q19. What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female

**Q20. What is your race?**

- African-American
- Caucasian
- Native American
- Asian
- Hispanic
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

**Q21. On average, how many Ole Miss football games do you attend per year?**

- None
- 1-3
- 3-6
- 7-10
- 10 or more

**Q22. I want to thank you for your time. If you would like to be a part of a raffle for \$25 at University Sporting Goods in Oxford please share your email address.**