

The Rise And Fall Of Campus Mascots At Indiana University

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College mascots encourage spirited enthusiasm for athletics and unite the campus community through a common symbol (Thelin, 2004). Currently, Indiana University lacks a mascot; however, that was not always the case. Several mascot designs emerged for the university, but none had lasting success. Therefore, Indiana University has embraced the mythical "Hoosier" for their identity. This historical overview of Indiana University's various mascots provides a glimpse of the importance of symbols and identities for the campus.

Let's go Indiana! Whether leading the crowd at football games, making appearances around campus, representing the school in advertisements, or printed on a t-shirt, a mascot serves as a symbol for the students and the university (Eitzen, 2012). Embodying the values and spirit of the campus, mascots are a physical representation of their school. At Indiana University-Bloomington (IU), numerous mascots have entertained crowds at athletic events, yet none survived due to economic limitations ("Students favor idea," 1923) student and public criticism ("Some definite drawbacks," 1967; "Pigskin pride," 1979), and administrative veto (Fishman, 1981). Today, the "Hoosier" represents IU in spirit but not in physical form.

Culture theory helps explain the importance of a mascot for the university, addresses various instances where students used their collective voice to build a unifying campus symbol, describes the adoption of various mascots at IU, and explains what led to the eventual removal of these mascots. According to Kuh and Hall (1993), culture is:

The collective, mutually shaping patterns of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions,

values, practices, beliefs and assumptions which guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education and which provide frames of references for interpreting the meanings of events and actions on and off campus (p. 2).

The four categories of an organization's culture include artifacts, perspectives, values, and assumptions (Kuh & Hall, 1993; Manning, 1993; Schein, 1992). Artifacts include physical items, environment, symbols, behaviors, ritual, and the "tangible aspects of a culture" (Kuh & Hall, 1993, p. 4; Schein, 1992). Perspectives are defined as "the socially shared rules and norms"; these social conventions are casually referred to as "the way we do things here" (Kuh & Hall, 1993, p. 6). Values "reflect deeply held feelings of a person toward particular things, people, or actions" (Schein, 1992, p. 369). Organization members judge situations and people using their espoused ideals (Kuh & Hall, 1993). Finally, assumptions are the underlying beliefs members use to define their role within the organization, their relationship to others both internally and externally, and the nature of the organization itself (Kuh & Hall, 1993; Schein, 1992).

Emphasis in a culture focuses on the importance of the shared understanding of the cultural elements and their interpretation through action of the members (Bess & Dee, 2012). This historical overview of IU's mascot history highlights the series of campus mascots during the twentieth century with culture theory.

Indiana University History

Founded in 1820, Indiana University-Bloomington grew into a large, public, research university. At its inception, IU served the people of Indiana as a seminary until 1838, and in 1852, evolved to serve as the state's public institution of higher education (Indiana University Bloomington, 2013). Athletics later became a large element of the institution's culture and student life with the installation of the football team in 1886 and basketball team in 1898 (Indiana University Bloomington, 2013). These varsity teams installed and unified campus culture as students, faculty, alumnae/i, and fans congregated at the games, participated in pep-rallies and other traditional spirit events, and cheered on the Hoosiers with the aid of various mascots.

Synonymous with IU, is the nickname "Hoosier," which could have possibly originated as far back as 1825 (Carmony, 1992). Several conflicting origin stories exist: a contractor named Samuel Hoosier hired men to build a canal on the Ohio River, an old English term for the hills of Indiana, the thick accent of settlers asking "Who's here?" when someone knocked at their doors, or violent pioneers who took flesh trophies, including ears, after a brawl (Carmony, 1992). Each story was absorbed into the state and university folklore. By the twentieth century, solid

evidence did not exist as to where the nickname truly began. However, individuals continued to unite under the "Hoosier" moniker.

The desire for a unifying spirit on campus prompted students to look for sources of inspiration for a mascot ("Students favor idea," 1923; "A tradition comes to life," 1952). Known as "Hoosiers," but without clarity as to how this name evolved or what it truly meant, difficulty in actualizing the spirit of the term would present itself. Throughout history, IU attempted to define and depict its identity as Hoosiers and other significant representations. The ambiguity of the name led to challenges not only in defining what it meant to be a "Hoosier" but also in how to represent spirit and identity through a campus mascot.

The Role of Mascots

Mascots are visible representations of an organization's, or in this case a college campus' culture (Kuh & Hall, 1993; Schein, 1996). Kuh and Hall (1993) define culture as:

The collective, mutually shaping patterns of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions which guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education and which provide frames of references for interpreting the meanings of events and actions on and off campus (p. 2).

Shared cultural values and assumptions are emphasized through the behavior of groups' members (Bess & Dee, 2012) and, in this example, through the IU campus community. In the twentieth century, "the brand of loyalty to one's own campus prompted students to

create distinguishing symbols” (Thelin, 2004, p. 158). Through use of a representative symbol (such as a campus mascot) both members and non-members can recognize the organization and associate values, behaviors, and beliefs associated with that group (Kuh & Hall, 1993; Schein, 1996).

Within an organization, cultural attributes, such as rituals, symbols, and artifacts, help socialize and inform the individual of norms, values, and expected behaviors of members (Kuh & Hall, 1993). While over time, “relationships contribute to shared understandings as well as a sense of specialness and identity for members” (Kuh & Hall, 1993, p. 9). On a college or university campus, a mascot serves as the symbol of the institutions’ values demonstrated through its iconography and behaviors.

The colorful and sometimes peculiar nicknames of college athletic teams have long been a source of identity and affection for students, staff, faculty, and alumni... athletic nicknames and logos are powerful cultural symbols because they not only evoke allegiance to an institution’s athletic teams but also may be instrumental in shaping the image of the entire college or university (Gilbert, 1998; Slowikowski, 1993; as cited in Connolly, 2000, p. 515).

Indy Star reporter Hutchens expressed contemporary concern for the lack of IU mascot. Citing that a mascot “is an ambassador for the university. It’s one of our brands. It’s very visible and very much the face of not only the athletics department, but also the university,” Hutchens (2011) shows desire for an icon to represent IU in the twenty-first century. Similar to Hutchens’ contemporary remarks, students mobilized many times during the twentieth century in attempts to develop

and install a campus mascot at Indiana University.

Failed First Attempts

American college students in the early twentieth century were accustomed to autonomy and self-organization in higher education (Lucas, 2006; Thelin, 2004). Outside of the classroom, student organizations, clubs, and societies promoted the extracurricular interests of the undergraduate student body. However, with lack of oversight and unification, these subgroups struggled to organize collectively for campus-wide developments. This struggle to align support and interests is evident in the multiple attempts to install a campus mascot for IU.

In 1923, the *Indiana Daily Student (IDS)* posted an article calling for support to purchase a goat as the official IU mascot (“Students favor idea,” 1923). The goat would be similar to that of the Naval Academy’s mascot, also a goat, easy to maintain, and would be of low cost to the students (“Students favor idea,” 1923). This attempt never reached realization, but it planted the seed for future discussion on an IU mascot.

The next generation of IU students revitalized the idea of a campus mascot when the Blue Keys, an honorary society, coordinated a campus poll (“Mascot to be presented,” 1935). An announcement in the *IDS* posted a poll for suggestions, and an election at the Powwow banquet before Homecoming solidified the mascot candidates (“Mascot to be presented,” 1935). At the Powwow, the student body decided to install a collie as IU’s campus mascot (“Mascot to be presented,” 1935). Needing \$75, the Blue Keys collected money from the student body including many fraternities and sororities but only

raised \$37.27 making them unable to purchase the collie in time for the rivalry game ("Mascot to be presented," 1935).

In these first attempts at an IU mascot, students mobilize to express their shared desire for a campus symbol. The assumption that an icon is an important representation of the campus' values and strengths illustrates how culture affects behaviors and actions. IU students acknowledged other institutional examples (Navy) and the shared desire for a symbol by organizing collections and campus votes for a mascot.

Employing State Folklore

Acknowledging that financial and practical barriers prevented a live animal mascot for IU, a human mascot would later enjoy a brief tenure on campus. Paying homage to Indiana folklore, the Hoosier Schoolmaster debuted in December 1951 (Lingeman, 1952). The Hoosier Schoolmaster is one of the folk tales explaining the origin of the moniker "Hoosier" for Indiana residents, and Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier School-Master* was the source of inspiration for the mascot concept and design (Carmony, 1992). Dressed in nineteenth century attire, a wig, and a cane, the Schoolmaster's routine during basketball season was to hobble into the gymnasium and slowly gain momentum and athleticism as the band increased the music's tempo (Lingeman, 1952). For the finale, the Schoolmaster erupted into tumbling passes and stunts to rouse the crowd (Lingeman, 1952).

Instead of gaining support through popular vote, Ned Helmuth, senior class president, used his leadership position to gain administrative support from the Dean of Students and other class leaders for the Hoosier Schoolmaster mascot

(Lingeman, 1952). Helmuth argued that IU needed a mascot similar to Illinois' Chief Illiniwek to rouse the students to cheer for their team (Lingeman, 1952). As a representative of the student body, Helmuth vocalized IU students' feelings for a visible, performing mascot as an important symbol for campus (Slowikowski, 1993).

When asked about his experience as the mascot, Dick Albershardt replied, "It's not the student who plays the Hoosier Schoolmaster that's important. It's what he stands for that is. He symbolizes Your University" (Lingeman, 1952). Albershardt's gymnastic skills suited him for the Schoolmaster concept and performance requirements, but few were qualified to follow in his legacy. Limitations on where the mascot could perform included facility needs and safety considerations for the acrobatics and tumbling associated with the performance. Also, because the Hoosier Schoolmaster was a student in costume, the individual student became the synonymous with the mascot, rather than the image occupying the forefront of attention (Lingeman, 1952).

The Hoosier Schoolmaster iconography linked the state's past with the institution. At the end of the 1952 school year, Albershardt no longer served as the Hoosier Schoolmaster and the mascot faded into memory. In this example, the students identified the way mascots embody campus values and promote traditions, yet the Hoosier Schoolmaster was unsuccessful in implementing a lasting icon. Because the Schoolmaster developed through the interest of a few student leaders and administrators, it was limited in who could fulfill the role and lacked broad application to other campus events and

appearances. After one season, it was retired.

The early effort to initiate a campus mascot illustrates the struggle to unify the student body. Though many students shared the belief that a mascot was wanted or even needed for IU, the various interests of subgroups did not align to make the goat, collie, or Hoosier Schoolmaster a lasting reality. University administration has little presence in these examples, and this absence shows the control students held over campus decisions and the loose organization of institutional culture. Institutional norms allowed students to develop their own artifacts, behaviors, and rituals to represent the university (Schein, 1996). Individual students within the large campus environment proved unsuccessful at securing a stable mascot. However, certain subgroups began to unify their collective interests to affect the campus. Greek organizations already had a structure for communication and collaboration, which allowed them to exert influence over campus in the later 1950s.

Reign of the Greeks

At IU, fraternity and sorority chapters became a peer network for promoting common interests and ideas on campus, in Bloomington, and across the state. One interest the Greek chapters shared with each other was developing a campus mascot to bring luck and enthusiasm to campus athletics (Dolley, 2003; Slowikowski, 1993). These students felt that representing the campus not only with a name, but also with an image could “create a sense of unity and cohesion” (Dolley, 2003) that the entire campus could identify and support. First, Sigma Delta Chi allowed IU to adopt marketing

materials of the “Crimson Bull,” which was created by the fraternity (“I.U. Adopts Fire-Breathing Bull,” 1956). Printed materials, shirts, signs, and paraphernalia circulated in Bloomington, but the idea was short-lived.

A few years later, a little bulldog puppy named “Ox” captured the hearts and spirit of campus (Arbutus, 1959). Belonging to members of Theta Chi, Ox went to football practices to cheer on the team (Arbutus, 1959). Wearing an IU sweater and posing for pictures, Ox made not only the sidelines, but also the yearbook. While cute, Ox lacked a routine or gimmick, like the Hoosier Schoolmaster, to excite the crowds.

The fire-breathing bull and Ox lacked permanency on campus. The Greek organizations comprised a significant portion of the population and were supportive of athletics, yet they could not institutionalize a mascot. The importance of symbolism was not yet lost as the Greeks teamed up with Student Senate and the Student Athletic Board in the 1960s.

Student Collaboration

On October 14, 1965, a unanimous resolution by the Student Senate adopted the first official mascot for Indiana University – the Bison (“Bison sweeps vote,” 1965). The details of whether there would be a live bison or a costumed student were yet to finalize, but progress on determining a campus symbol was certain. Rooted in state history, the Bison pictured on the state seal were once a common sight south of Bloomington (“Anyway, it’s a new Bison,” 1967). Using state heritage, IU hoped to create a strong symbol and gain support from students, faculty, and alumni for their new mascot.

However, the problems with this mascot design were just beginning.

The first concern was if a real bison was actually obtainable for the home games. Students could not overlook the significance of a physical mascot to rally the crowd in support of their team. Unfortunately, obstacles, such as purchasing, maintaining, and training a live bison, stood in the way (“A discouraging word,” 1965; “Buffaloonery,” 1965; “Experienced keeper needed,” 1965; “Mascots – or bison anyway,” 1965; “Or maybe a bison,” 1965). Hoping to convince university administrators, students, and alumni on the feasibility of a bison, student leaders discussed how other institutions had live mascots, plans for the animal’s caretaking, and options for funding (“Experienced keeper needed,” 1965). Because of limited funding and the foreseeable challenges to training a live bison to perform tricks on the sidelines, students started exploring other options.

The creation of a costumed mascot became a viable solution for the mascot problem, because it reinforced campus values and allowed students to participate in the design, selection, and performances of the Bison. Students expressed that “who gets to wear the suit [would be] the greatest honor to which any red-blooded Hoosier could aspire” (“Experienced keeper needed,” 1965).

Looking at other university campuses, IU students felt that “live or a costume or anything, you just need a mascot” (“Mascots – or bison anyway,” 1965). Recognizing that a mascot for the school could serve “two fundamental purposes – [binding] together the individual members of a group, and separat[ing] one group from another...a school’s nickname is much more than a tag or a label”; the students wanted a mascot to reflect “the

characteristics and attributes that define the institution” (Eitzen, 2012, p. 42). The student body modeled their search for the individual who would “play” the Bison after other campus models by holding elections for this leadership role.

Incorporating the Bison into existing campus traditions, the first appearance was at the Indiana University versus Purdue University bonfire pep-rally (Penz, 1965). The campus, alumni, and Bloomington community cheered on the football team before the rivalry game (Penz, 1965). Leading the burning of a Purdue mascot mock-up, the Bison symbolically demonstrated Indiana’s dominance over the opposing team and school (Penz, 1965). Involving the Bison in standing campus activities was the main route to gaining support and acceptance for the mascot.

Public commentary and criticism grew with campus awareness of the Bison. In addition, a desire to update the original costume developed. The first Bison was merely a mask and a furry jumpsuit. IU students and fans wanted a more legitimate costume to inspire loyalty among fans and fear among opponents (“Some definite drawbacks,” 1967). In 1967, students introduced a more realistic design to campus (“Some definite drawbacks,” 1967). This large Bison costume had detail and realism but also came with a poor design. Cheerleaders wearing the costume were unable to see and required guidance around the field by another team member (“Some definite drawbacks,” 1967). Along the football sidelines, the students and alumni watched their mascot amble about. The embarrassment brought on by the costumed mascot, and the desire for a strong symbol, led to the involvement of administrators, alumni, and community

members ("Some definite drawbacks," 1967).

Administrative Involvement and Blunders

Students no longer monopolized campus culture; community members, administrators, and other stakeholders had more influence with their opinions on the artifacts and symbols used to represent IU (Kuh & Hall, 1993; Manning, 1993; Schein, 1996). Emphasis on the importance of the shared opinions related to the mascot resulted in administrative involvement to protect the image of the institution.

Frustrated by the bumbling Bison, community members and administrators began to intervene. Varsity Club Chairman, Phillip J. Badell, wrote to the university President, Athletics, the Alumni Association, and *IDS* to voice his opinion and offer recommendations (Letter from Mr. Phillip J. Badell, 1967). Pledging financial support to install a live Bison or, at the least, an updated costume, Badell emphasized the importance of a mascot and that faculty also shared the desire for a strong and respectable representative for IU (Letter from Mr. Phillip J. Badell, 1967). In a letter to the editor, a collection of faculty stated:

Indiana University is certainly capable of originating and developing its own mascot, and has an excellent one in the Crimson Bull. We feel that by adopting the Crimson Bull - whose strength, fierceness, singleness of purpose and respect is known by all - this kind of spirit could be captured in many ways that would give more heart and prestige to the Student Body, the teams and certainly to the individual who wears the mascot costume...by putting into effect a campaign pushing the circulation of the

Crimson Bull image - on windows, T-shirts, sweatshirts, etc.; by using the image in Homecoming decorations, floats, etc.; by portraying the head of the Crimson Bull on the side of the football helmets and on the cheerleaders' sweaters and by originating a new battle cry or cheer pertaining to the Crimson Bull, along with the many other ideas of which we are sure you and the students could decide on (perhaps through some type of campus contest), this revitalized spirit could swell again within the heart of I.U. ("Adopt the Bull," 1967).

With a sophisticated vision on the importance and steps for implementation, faculty and administrators became involved in the mascot design, selection, and institutionalization. This demonstration of faculty interests shows the power of subgroups within an organization (Kuh & Hall, 1993). The campus environment, shaped by various stakeholders and interests groups, became conflicted over the mascot issue when a national audience for athletics developed ("Anyway, it's a new bison," 1967).

National publicity spurred the campus to devote resources and attention to updating the mascot design. When IU's football team went to the Rose Bowl, a new head for the Bison allowed the cheerleaders to perform without criticism ("Anyway, it's a new bison," 1967). Image and identity were not only important for rallying support from the students, but also for projecting IU to a national audience. Now visible to millions, this was the tipping point for IU. Criticism on their campus mascot would take new shape.

Two years after the Rose Bowl performance, the Bison found itself in storage (White, 1969). IU decided to retire the Bison completely, because so

many fans complained that the mascot was an embarrassment, ill designed, or not inspiring (White, 1969). Though the design was rooted in Indiana state history, Hoosiers did not feel inspired by their mascot (White, 1969). In the following decade, the university decided to pursue a different approach after taking in the feedback and experience of dealing with the Bison turmoil to motivate the campus and athletics.

Mr. Hoosier Pride graced the football sidelines in 1979 (Courtney, 1979; Herrmann, 1979; "New mascot in store for IU," 1979). Wearing a cowboy hat and a big grin, this caricature, developed by Athletic Director Ralph Floyd, was meant to help students and alumni "identify with the university" (Herrmann, 1979). Because IU was the only Big Ten institution in the 1970s without a mascot, Athletics felt pressured to implement a new design without consulting the campus community (Herrmann, 1979). Children enjoyed Mr. Hoosier Pride, but students, alumni, and fans were not happy with the forced mascot.

Again, public opinion would determine the fate of IU's mascot. A strongly worded letter from a community member, Ben Blair (1980), summarized the sentiments of Hoosiers:

Mr. Hoosier Pride is the most asinine and ridiculous-looking character anyone could have dreamed up to be IU's mascot. He looks like a sore loser rather than a proud winner. But even more basic than that, the character is downright ugly.

A school's mascot is supposed to be a symbol of some admirable and desirable trait or characteristic of the athletes or fans. It should be something with which we can identify and which can inspire us in a positive way. I don't find that objective met by Mr. Hoosier Pride.

Noting that Mr. Hoosier Pride's design and activity failed to inspire, motivate, or unify students and alumni, this mascot was retired that same year ("So much for Mr. Hoosier Pride," 1980). This administrative blunder illustrated the importance of finding an icon that represents the campus and has support from the community members. Mr. Hoosier Pride failed to unify the community because it was lacking in symbolic connection, ownership from the community, and historical significance to the campus as evident from Ben Blair's letter (1980).

A Matter of Popular Opinion

Campus administrators failed to implement a campus mascot that maintained support and positive response from students, alumni, and fans. Attempting yet again to generate a campus mascot that would embody the values of IU, restore enthusiasm among fans, and generate campus pride, IU students mobilized again (Student Athletic Board, 1980, 1983). This time, a campus-wide contest for the mascot would move through a series of approvals and campus votes in effort to establish support for the design before implementation (Student Athletic Board, 1980-1983).

The Student Athletic Board (SAB) is a student-led organization that served to promote IU athletics and spirit events. SAB oversaw the cheerleading squad, so the campus mascot naturally fell into their purview. In SAB planning meetings and executive board communications, reinventing school spirit through a mascot was on the agenda (Student Athletic Board, 1980-1983). However, this was not the first time that the SAB

attempted to gather student input for a campus mascot.

After the Bison was retired, the SAB began communicating with Athletics and the University President regarding a mascot contest (Beeson, 1971a, 1971b). In these letters, Beeson, a SAB member, explains how the officers outlined plans for advertising a design contest, selecting worthy submissions, and conducting a campus-wide vote (Beeson, 1971a). However, attempts to get a contest underway would be unsuccessful for the next ten years.

Calling out to all students, the SAB collected submissions during the fall semester of 1980 (Graham, 1980; Letter from IU Student Athletic Board to President John Ryan, 1980). A committee screened the designs and determined the top five to put to campus vote: Red Rooster, Red Dragon, Gargoyle, Henry Hoosier, and a Tasmanian Devil-like character ("So much for Mr. Hoosier Pride," 1980). Holding the vote during the Purdue University basketball game marked the significance of this decision. Coming down to the wire, the administration, specifically President Ryan, postponed the student vote in order to continue the search for stronger mascot designs (Fishman, 1981).

Opinions among campus administration and student organizations conflicted regarding the designs. Administrators wanted more control over potential mascots, because this affected the university's reputation and marketing, while students felt the administrative veto squashed their autonomy and voice (Fishman, 1981). The SAB received instruction from the President to conduct further research on mascots at other universities before moving forward with a design ("Mascot committee to research," 1981).

Discussion arose again in 1983 to "create a better campus image" (Student Athletic Board, 1983), but these ideas never reached fruition.

Paying attention to the campus community and maintaining a historical perspective was important for administrators at this time. Recalling the numerous tried and failed mascots university administrators would need to keep "a careful ear to public opinion in order to maintain [IU's] individuality and integrity among the consumers to which [the campus'] loyalty matters most: their fans, students, and alumni" (Gonzalez, 2007, p. 196).

Reaching Compromise

Since the failure of Mr. Hoosier Pride and the inability of administrators and students to agree upon a replacement, the sidelines at IU games remained without a mascot. The importance of linking the visual symbol to the campus' values was difficult since "the problem with choosing a good mascot lies in the fact that no one knows exactly what a 'Hoosier' is" (Dawson, 1981a). Maintaining the myth as part of state and campus folklore shapes the Hoosier identity (Carmony, 1992). The competing stories on the origins of the "Hoosier" moniker and definitions have evolved into a deep sense of Hoosier pride.

Indiana University students, administrators, and supporters frequently conflicted on what iteration of a mascot should represent the school. The turbulent environment and changing influence on designs pushed the campus to continually change and adapt the mascots. Due to the complexity of the campus environment, agreement among the various subgroups and entities for

adopting cultural elements proved difficult to negotiate (Schein, 1996).

Summarizing Indiana University's sentiments on the mascot issue to individuals inquiring on prospective designs, Sports Promotion Director, Charles Crabb (1983) stated:

As you can appreciate from the controversy with the old IU Bison and Mr. Hoosier Pride, we're all a bit "gun shy" when it comes to a Hoosier mascot. We are not afraid to talk about any and all proposals, but we want to take our time when it comes to getting beyond the discussion stage. A great number of University offices are involved in any consideration of a mascot along with alumni and friends of the University. An acceptable IU mascot – if it ever comes to be – must face a huge number of tests. It also must be usable for each and every varsity sport we have for males and females.

Though it is argued that the institution should have a mascot to represent the campus, motivate the crowd, and promote the IU brand, many also agree with Dawson's (1981b) sentiment that "if in all these years we have not come up with one, I doubt very seriously if we are going to get one to stick now."

The development of a visible identity for IU moving forward was important not only for campus symbolism but also for establishing IU's brand, promoting fan loyalty, and securing a visible public identity (Gonzalez, 2007; Thelin, 2004). Without a mascot for Indiana University, graphics and emblems for the campus are used to brand any university associated and sponsored activities. Though no consensus exists as to what exactly a "Hoosier" is, there was enough agreement to remove the various mascots and adopt the uniqueness of no-mascot.

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