

**TYLER C. GAMBLE** is a ninth grader at Cleveland Heights High School. She is an avid musician and artist and plays violin in the school orchestra.

She is a member of the Singing Angels and her art work has been displayed at the Heights Art Center. Tyler would like to attend a music conservatory and pursue a career as a violinist and singer.

Racism was something I experienced everyday, not from white people, but from boys and girls that looked just like me. Other African-American students turned on me just because I was different. I did not speak like them. I did not act like them, and I did not live like them. They tortured me and shunned me for it.

Last year, my teacher asked me what I did last summer. I said I went horseback riding, and all the kids started laughing at me. They said no one does that unless you're white. I sat there in surprise, thinking I never thought that the things I experienced and did were only relating to white people in the mind of some people.

People just like me are experiencing what I'm going through. Black people, against black people. Somehow these past few years, some black people have this fixed-mindset, that there is a certain way to be black. If you weren't sagging your pants, or talking inappropriately, or showing your body to the world, there is something wrong with you. If you don't act like them, you're disrespecting what it means to be black.

Michelle Obama spoke about how when she was a kid she went through the same problems as a lot of kids like me are going through today. She said how kids told her she sounded funny. That she talked like a white girl. She heard that growing up her whole life. Even now, some people think she isn't black, or not black enough. She still keeps going, and achieving her A's and her props. Even when people said she couldn't. Now she is the First Lady of the White House. Ms. Obama is an example of the advantages of being different.

African-American students shouldn't have to go through what I had to go through or what Ms. Obama went through. People should be able to speak or act the way they do without being judged. They should be able to walk down their school halls or anywhere without hearing the words "Oreo", "white girl" or "nerd". Black boys and girls should be able to tell and speak their minds without being insulted. This should not happen to anyone.

I propose to make a change by being me. By not being a typical stereotype for black men and women. Me, saying I'm not afraid to act the right way, and be an individual person. I shall take that stand and show that you don't have to be like everyone else. It only takes one person to make that difference.

African-American people should not be afraid of how they are raised, if they are raised to speak the English language. They should not try to be something they know they cannot be. Be yourself, and like yourself. And your true friends will come. People who act different, and don't do what everyone else does, should not hide. Be proud of what you are taught.