



BEKA WATERMAN

is a seventh grader at Hathaway Brown School in Shaker Heights. She is a country girl who loves horses and riding as well as reading and participating in sports. Beka dreams of attending the British Racing School and becoming a professional jockey.

I am proud to say that I am Native American. Not completely, not even a quarter. But it still counts. Since I began to research it in fourth grade, I have read many stories about discrimination against Native Americans. Ever since the Europeans anchored on our shores, my people have been killed, enslaved, and oppressed just because we were in the way of a "New World." Then, once safely caged in reservations and their land stolen from them, laws were created. Until recently, Blackfoot Americans were forbidden to convict a non-Indian in court for committing a crime on Native American land. People couldn't leave the reservations for work, so they were forced to stay in extreme poverty or find a way to open a business that would stay successful. Many men were forced to open up casinos and alcohol stores to support their families, beginning the rumors that all Native Americans were gambling drunks. Beginning in the '70s, Congress has finally started to veto the restricting laws, but many still live in trailers and tents and the children are unable to go to school. Discrimination still stands, even in the most obscure ways. Cleveland's own baseball team is one large bucket of discrimination in and of itself. The name: Indians. They are not from the country India, nor do they look like it. They are American, through and through. The logo: a rose-red, grinning, feathered, happy face. A caricature of a stereotype. People took the stereotypical image of a Native American and intensified it to a ridiculous cartoon. Halloween costumes: a leather, beaded, and fringed skirt, furry boots, large feathered headdress that, in reality, is only given as the highest honor to a chieftain, and usually seen in Plains tribes. This disregard for heritage, tradition, and pride is the utmost form of disrespect.

When I read about the awful things that my ancestors went through, and what they still go through, I was disgusted. Most people think this only happened to Jews or Africans or Mexicans. They think that now, after the Civil Rights movement, all is good and well in America. But what happened to the Civil Rights movement for Native Americans? Why do people still seem to believe that if you don't believe in G-d, or if your forms of government are different, you are barbaric and deserve to be put away like animals? This I do not understand.

I propose to do something. As one person, I cannot to anything drastic, but something small. However, even the smallest action can make a difference. I propose that we take one day, use it to learn. Have one large history class, teach the people in our school what has and is happening to these people. And don't gloss it over. Give the true, hard, cold details. And tell us how we can change things. Give the students and the teachers a way to somehow experience what is happening; and make sure they listen.