

Title: Debating the use of Native American Mascots

Time: 50 minutes

Setting: Tenth grade classroom with 25 students

Theory Into Practice Background

1. The decision to have a lesson on the use of Native Americans as mascots stems from a scene in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* where Junior calls his school racist for having a Native American mascot. This scene reflects the real-world, ethical issue of the use of Native Americans as mascots. In his book, Jim Burke makes it clear that the English classroom is an appropriate and sometimes necessary place to have discussions about ethical issues; since the question of using Native Americans as mascot would qualify as an ethical issue and since it is an important part of the text, it seemed essential to have a lesson discussing the issue (410). However, the idea of the lesson is not to tell students that Native American mascots are right or wrong; The goal of the lesson is to present students with information on the issue and then to have students come up with their own informed stance which they will express through persuasive writing. Burke says, “I am not advocating that students be given moral instruction that presumes a predetermined outcome; rather I am saying the English curriculum challenges both teacher and student to enter into a conversation about those moral issues that arise within the context of the stories we read together” (412). After the lesson, students will explore these moral issues through persuasive writing where they will choose their own stance on the topic. In this way, students are not forced into any one way of thinking.

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Jacklyn Ippolito on Native American mascots. I have adapted the lesson by adjusting some of the materials used/how they are presented and I have changed the final assessment. Instead of writing a persuasive essay, which is what Ippolito’s lesson calls for, my lesson will have students engage in an online debate through posts on a discussion board. I wanted to utilize technology and also allow students to directly respond to one another. I opted for an online debate over an in-class debate because this way everyone will have the opportunity to give their opinion and they will also have more time to think out their ideas. Jim Burke says, “Writing is an activity that forces thought: You cannot write without thinking, for to arrange language into meaningful units—sentences, phrases, poems, narratives—is to use the mind” (245). An in-class debate may have been effective but again, I really want students to be able to *think* through their ideas, especially since they will receive a lot of information on the issue during the lesson.

2. Students will have some knowledge of the history of Native Americans from other classes prior to this lesson. Also, they will have read an essay called “I hated Tonto (Still Do) by Sherman Alexie, which discusses Native American stereotypes and their portrayal

in popular media. They will have also watched a YouTube clip which shows the way Native Americans have been depicted in Hollywood films. Students will access that prior knowledge in this lesson and build upon it as they form their own opinions regarding the use of Native Americans as mascots.

3. The YouTube Clip shown during this lesson is called *Savage Country: American Indian Sports Mascots Part One*. The clip is used to introduce the issue and present some different points-of-view to students (some people in the clip oppose the use of Native American mascots and others do not oppose their use). The article “NCAA Takes Aim At Indian Mascots” discusses the NCAA’s decision to prohibit those teams with “hostile” or “abusive” mascots from partaking in post-season activities. Most of the “abusive” mascots are those using Native American imagery. This article provides more background information to students regarding the issue of Native American mascots.
4. This lesson is linked to the rest of the lessons in the unit because it discusses societal attitudes towards Native Americans. Since the text deals with this issue, the lessons learned in this lesson will be relevant throughout the unit. The idea of the individual vs. the community come up during this lesson and this is something that will be focused on in a future lesson. During that lesson, students will explore the concept of the individual vs. the community by looking at Junior’s struggle in the text.

Objectives:

1. Students will analyze a variety of texts to create an opinion about the use of Native American Mascots in schools/sports teams
2. Students will debate a real-world social issue through persuasive writing.

Materials:

Whiteboard

YouTube Clip (see resources and references)

Projector and Screen to play YouTube Clip

NCAA Takes Aim At Indian Mascots (see Attachment 1)

Persuasive Writing Homework Assignment, Rubric, and related documents (See Attachment 2)

Preparation:

On the whiteboard at the front of the room, write the following questions. 1) “What is a mascot? What does it look like? What does it represent?” and 2) “Do you support or oppose the use of Native Americans as school/sport mascots? Why or why not?”

Procedure:

1. (7 min) Ask students to take out a sheet of paper and tell them we will be beginning class with a quick write on two questions. Direct them to the questions written on the board about mascot and tell them they have about seven minutes to answer.
2. (5 min) Ask for a volunteer to take notes on the white board. Have the rest of the class share their definitions of mascots and have the volunteer jot down the ideas. Try to get a list of at least ten characteristics of a mascot and what it represents. Ask questions to expand student's ideas (e.g. if a student says a mascot is funny, ask them what they mean by funny. What makes it funny? Etc.)
3. (3 min) After you have compiled a list, ask students to take out their copies of *Part-Time Indian* and turn to page 56. Have a volunteer read beginning at "Then the white kids began arriving" up to the end of the page.
4. (5 min) Ask students why Junior thinks his school is racist, focusing on the line "So what was I doing in racist Reardan?" What does the school mascot have to do with anything? Is Junior justified in his reaction to the school and their mascot? Why or why not?
5. (5 min) Explain that the use of Native Americans as school/sport mascots is a hotly debated issue and that students will be writing a persuasive argument defending either side for homework. Play YouTube clip "Savage Country: American Indian Sports Mascots Part One" beginning at 1:17 and ending at 6:00.
6. (5 min) Ask students for their reaction to the clip. Was anything particularly striking to them? What? What role do they think Native American mascots play in how people view Native Americans?
7. (10 min) Pass out "NCAA Takes Aim At Indian Mascots". Ask for three to four volunteers to read the article out loud. When finished reading, ask "do you agree that mascots should be changed? Are they offensive to Native Americans or do they honor them?"
8. (5 min) Ask students to look at their quick writes from the beginning of class and decide whether or not any of their ideas have changed or remained the same. Students should write their findings on the bottom/back of their quickwrite. Tell them to think about the following questions: Do I feel the same way about the issue as I did at the beginning of class? If not, what has changed? Have any of my ideas been strengthened? How? Before students leave for class, pass out/explain their homework assignment on persuasive writing (See Attachment 1).

Discussion Ideas

1. Ask students why Junior thinks his school is racist, focusing on the line "So what was I doing in racist Reardan?" (56). What does the school mascot have to do with anything? Is Junior justified in his reaction to the school and their mascot? Why or why not?
2. Ask students for their reaction to the YouTube clip. Was anything particularly striking to them? What? What role do they think Native American mascots play in how people view Native Americans?

3. When finished reading NCAA article, ask “do you agree that mascots should be changed? Are they offensive to Native Americans or do they honor them?”

BILINGUAL/ESL AND ENGLISHES ACCOMMODATIONS: Spanish and AAVE

Spanish: Our student who speaks Spanish and is an English Language Learner can use Spanish-English dictionaries to translate the questions up on the board, class discussion and to help him when he is writing his quick write. We can also provide him a translator if necessary.

AAVE: We will discuss that answers to quick-writes are to be written in Standard English but other forms of English can be used during class discussion and in the online discussion.

Special Education Accommodations:

Autism: “Autism is a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences”
(<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/spec-ed/html/categories.htm>).

Our student with asperger’s syndrome will be given accommodations throughout the lesson. Since making instructions clear is especially important for students with asperger’s syndrome, the quick-write question will be written on the board and I will also read it out loud to the class. During the discussion portions of the lesson, I will give students enough time to process the question before calling on someone to answer. Also, the homework assignment will include clear directions and a rubric to make sure everyone knows what my expectations are.

Assessment

Assessment of student performance for this lesson will be based on their responses to the quick write questions and end-of-the-class follow up question. Points earned on the quick-write will go towards participation. They will earn two points for thoughtful, complete answers to all three questions; one point for short answers and some incomplete information; and zero points if a quick write is not turned in or if most of the answers are incomplete.

Their homework assignment based on the lesson will also be graded using a rubric (see attachment 2).

Extension Ideas

-The homework assignment will have students engage in a debate on the topic of whether or not Native Americans should be used as school/sport mascots. The following day we will discuss the results of the debate in class and wrap up our conversation.

Source of Activity

This lesson is adapted from a lesson created by Jaclyn Ippolito. Jim Burke deserves credit for providing a wealth of ideas and strategies for creating and implementing the lesson. Thanks to Professor Arlette Willis for suggestions on how to effectively use quick-writes in a lesson. I would also like to thank Professor Lisa Monda-Amaya for her suggestions on how to accommodate students with Asperger's Syndrome.

Resources and References

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Alexie, Sherman. "I Hated Tonto (Still Do) - Sherman Alexie." I Hated Tonto (Still Do). 1998. Web. 07 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.mondowendell.com/tonto.htm>>.

Burke, Jim. *The English Teacher's Companion: a Complete Guide to Classroom, Curriculum, and the Profession*. 3 ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2008. Print.

Illinois State Board of Education: Illinois Learning Standards .2010. Illinois State Board of Education. < <http://www.isbe.net/ils/ela/standards.htm>>

Illinois State Board of Education: Special Education Categories.2010. Illinois State Board of Education. <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/spec-ed/html/categories.htm>

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NBC Sports. "Seminoles OK with use of mascots - Colleges- NBC Sports." *Sports News Headlines - NFL, NBA, NHL, MLB, PGA, NASCAR - Scores, Game Highlights, Schedules & Team Rosters - NBC Sports*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Dec. 2010. <<http://nbcports.msnbc.com/id/8940521/>>

Preschel, Jill. "NCAA Takes Aim At Indian Mascots - CBS News." *Breaking News Headlines: Business, Entertainment & World News - CBS News*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Dec. 2010. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/08/05/sportsline/main762542.shtml>

Pyrilllis, Rita. "Sorry For Not Being a Stereotype." *Chicago Sun Times* 24 Apr. 2004: 12. Print

Schill, Brian James. "Cheerleading for 'Abusive' Mascots." *Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR)*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Dec. 2010. <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=4170>

YouTube Videos:

Hollywood

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hJFi7SRH7Q

Mascots

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVDyldTV9OA&feature=related>

Illinois State English Language Arts Goals

STATE GOAL 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess and communicate information.

5.C.4c Prepare for and participate in formal debates

Students achieve this goal by using information gained in class on Native American mascots to prepare for an online debate of the issue.

STATE GOAL 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

3.C.4a Write for real or potentially real situations in academic, professional and civic contexts (e.g., college applications, job applications, business letters, petitions).

Students will achieve this goal by composing posts debating the use of Native American imagery as mascots. This is a real-life situation and their writing will need to be well thought out and supported.

ATTACHMENT 1

NCAA Takes Aim At Indian Mascots INDIANAPOLIS, August 5, 2005

(CBS/AP) Fed up with what it considers "hostile" and "abusive" American Indian nicknames, the NCAA announced Friday it would shut those words and images out of postseason tournaments, a move that left some school officials angry and threatening legal action.

Starting in February, any school with a nickname or logo considered racially or ethnically "hostile" or "abusive" by the NCAA would be prohibited from using them in postseason events. Mascots will not be allowed to perform at tournament games, and band members and cheerleaders will also be barred from using American Indians on their uniforms beginning in 2008.

Major college football teams are not subject to the ban because there is no official NCAA tournament.

Affected schools were quick to complain, and Florida State — home of the Seminoles — threatened legal action.

"That the NCAA would now label our close bond with the Seminole people as culturally 'hostile and abusive' is both outrageous and insulting," Florida State president T.K. Wetherell said in a statement.

"I intend to pursue all legal avenues to ensure that this unacceptable decision is overturned, and that this university will forever be associated with the 'unconquered' spirit of the Seminole Tribe of Florida," he added.

The committee also recommended that schools follow the examples of Wisconsin and Iowa by refusing to schedule contests against schools that use American Indian nicknames.

While NCAA officials admit they still can't force schools to change nicknames or logos, they are making a statement they believe is long overdue. Eighteen mascots, including Florida State's Seminole and Illinois' Illini, were on the list of offenders.

Those schools will not be permitted to host future NCAA tournament games, and if events have already been awarded to those sites, the school must cover any logos or nicknames that appear.

"Certainly some things remain to be answered from today, and one of those things is the definition of what is 'hostile or abusive,'" said Tom Hardy, a spokesman at Illinois.

The NCAA did not give a clear answer on that.

President Myles Brand noted that some schools using the Warrior nickname will not face sanctions because they do not use Indian symbols. One school, North Carolina-Pembroke — which uses the

nickname Braves — will also be exempted because Brand said the school has historically had a high percentage of students, more than 20 percent, who are American Indians.

"We believe hostile or abusive nicknames are troubling to us and it can't continue," committee chairman Walter Harrison said. "We're trying to send a message, very strongly, saying that these mascots are not appropriate for NCAA championships."

The decision, however, quickly evoked passions and complaints from both sides.

At Florida State, Wetherell said the NCAA was trying to embarrass the school for using its nickname, even though the Seminole Tribe of Florida has given the university permission to continue using it.

"Other Seminole tribes are not supportive," said Charlotte Westerhaus, the NCAA vice president for diversity and inclusion.

Supporters also were unhappy.

Vernon Bellecourt, president of the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and Media and a member of the Anishinabe-Ojibwe Nation in Minnesota, approved of the ban but had hoped the NCAA would take even stronger action.

"We're not so happy about the fact that they didn't make the decision to ban the use of Indian team names and mascots," he said.

Harrison, president at the University of Hartford, said the executive committee does not have the authority to do that, and schools can still appeal their inclusion on the list.

Brand and Harrison said they hoped school officials would pursue policy changes through the NCAA first, before going to court.

"I suspect that some of those would like to having a ruling on that," Brand said. "But unless there is a change before Feb. 1, they will have to abide by it."

Two years ago, the NCAA recommended schools determine for themselves whether Indian depictions were offensive.

CBS News Correspondent Tom Foty reports that the NCAA had investigated 33 schools nicknames and that about half have changed their names since then, leaving the 18 schools now subject to the new mascot and nickname restriction.

Among the schools to change nicknames in recent years were St. John's (from Redmen to Red Storm) and Marquette (from Warriors to Golden Eagles).

But that hasn't changed opinions on either side.

"They're not willing to give up this money," Bellecourt said, referring to merchandising revenue.

"We would hope that it (the decision) was the handwriting on the wall that would urge them to drop these team names and mascots."

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ATTACHMENT 2

Persuasive Writing Assignment

For this assignment you will be taking a stance on this question: “Do you think Native American mascots should be allowed in schools/sports teams/anywhere else? Why or why not?” You will be defending your position on an online forum I have created on our class Moodle website (www.imaginary-moodle-website.com).

Everyone must write **one post** with their initial response to the question and at least **one response** to another student’s post. You will receive an extra credit point for writing at least **two responses** to other students’ posts, but feel free to write as many responses as you would like.

Initial posts must include:

- Your stance on the topic: State whether or not you feel Native Americans should be used as mascots. The bulk of your response should focus on why you feel this way. Use the attached documents and our lesson on mascots to support your answers. You must include some references to these materials in your posts.
- Good posts will have 2-3 pieces of evidence supporting their point of view. They will explore the topic in depth. Posts should be longer than a few sentences but do not have to be pages long. This is a one night assignment so responses should be 2-3 substantial paragraphs.

Responses to posts must include:

- Whether you agree or disagree with the other students’ post (You may respond to ANY post, even responses to other posts).
- Why you agree/disagree. Responses should be longer than “Yeah!” or “I disagree”. Explain your answers.

Rubric:

Category	2	1	0
Initial Post	Includes stance on topic and an explanation including 2-3 pieces of evidence.	Includes stance on topic and one piece of evidence.	Only includes stance on topic with no evidence/ no initial post was made.
Responses	Student made at least one response to another student’s post. Explained whether or not they agreed with the post and why.	Student makes one or more responses but none of them include explanations for their response.	No responses were made.
Mechanics/length	Posts are written using Standard English or AAVE. Initial posts are 2-3 paragraphs and subsequent responses are a few sentences in length.	Posts are written using Standard English or AAVE. Initial posts are only one paragraph and subsequent responses are a few sentences in length.	Posts are very difficult to read/understand. Initial posts are just a few sentences. Short/no responses were made.

Total: ___/6

A: 5-6 B-4 C: 3 D: 2 F: 1

Documents to be used as evidence for homework assignment (Attachment 2 continued):

Extra! **July 2010**

Cheerleading for 'Abusive' Mascots

Critics of Native American sports symbols are sidelined

By **Brian James Schill**

On April 8, 2010, the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education let stand its May 2009 vote to retire the University of North Dakota's "Fighting Sioux" nickname and logo over the 2010–11 academic year. The decision marked the end of a bitter debate on the athletic use of Native American culture at the 13,000-student university. As expected, students, alumni and citizens of the university's eastern Dakota host city, Grand Forks, expressed shock and rage over what one resident called the board's "duplicitous" and "cynical" decision (**Grand Forks Herald**, 4/12/10).

North Dakotans were not alone in their despair over the loss of such a tradition; in 2007, the University of Illinois Board of Trustees retired the "Chief Illiniwek" mascot, a Caucasian student dressed in buckskin who would perform stylized dance numbers at sporting events for the university's Cham-paign-Urbana campus. (The campus was allowed to keep its "Fighting Illini" nickname.) As former "Chief" Scott Christensen told the **Chicago Tribune** (2/22/07) at the time: "This is painful. This is very, very difficult for us."

In 2005, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) included North Dakota and Illinois, along with 16 other colleges, on a list of schools whose team names the NCAA judged to be "hostile and abusive" to indigenous peoples. Unless schools could acquire explicit support from namesake tribes for nickname or mascot use, they would have to abandon such symbols by February 2006 or become ineligible to host NCAA tournaments and championships. With this resolution, the NCAA rendered Native American opinion decisive on such issues; the views of non-Natives, like those of unregistered voters during an election, were of sociological interest but had limited relevance to the outcome.

As expected, symbol advocates at schools on the NCAA list, both Native and non-Native, began organizing to formalize tribal approval of the nickname or logo of their schools; Florida State University and University of Utah, home of the Seminoles and Utes, respectively, were successful in this regard, as were Central Michigan University's "Chippewas," Catawba College's "Catawba Indians" and Mississippi College's "Choctaws."

At the Spirit Lake Reservation near Devils Lake, N.D., one of the state's two "Sioux" tribes, residents voted in support of the name and logo by a 2-to-1 margin in April 2009. (The name "Sioux" is itself rejected by some members of the Lakota/Dakota confederation to which it refers.) However, the tribal council of the state's other "Sioux" reservation, Standing Rock, has formally opposed UND's use of the nickname and logo eight times since 1992.

The Illinois Trustees, acting in the absence of Illinois-based representatives of the Illini—who were driven from the state in the early 19th century and whose descendants survive as the Peoria tribe in Okla-homa—made the only move it felt justified in doing: retire the Chief.

Immediately following their retirements, advocates of both Chief Illiniwek and the Fighting Sioux nickname cried foul, accusing the university boards of subverting democracy and failing to hear the voices of the silent majority, including American Indians, who support such nicknames and mascots. As pro-nickname Standing Rock member Steve Fool Bear wrote in a **Grand Forks Herald** op-ed (4/10/10), the board and anti-nickname activists “fought tooth and nail to make sure [proponents’] voices were silenced”; in so doing, the board “trampled on” American Indians’ civil rights, ironically continuing the whites’ historical disregard for indigenous opinion. Or, as a UND student senator put it to the school’s newspaper the **Dakota Student** (11/20/09), support for the nickname, particularly by American Indians, has been “silenced for too long” and “needs to be said.”

But which voices are actually being heard, and at what volume, in the media on such matters? As one **Grand Forks Herald** reader put it (5/21/10), concerning a perceived anti-nickname bias by news editors, “Why should we not conclude that the **Herald** actively is involved in a propaganda campaign to manipulate the reader with one-sided quotes?”

To determine trends in reporting on indigenous symbol controversies in college sports, **Extra!** explored the media’s coverage of the two comparative cases. With regard to UND, **Extra!** collected print news stories from the national, local and college press that mention “Fighting Sioux” and “nickname” from May 2009 to April 2010; for Illinois, **Extra!** examined stories that reference “Illiniwek” and “mascot” for the 2007 calendar year. These periods represent the height of reporting on these issues in the last decade, allowing for an assessment of which voices are aired in the news (Native or non-Native, pro- or anti-symbol).

A search of several news databases, including Nexis and the ProQuest academic database, turned up 521 print news stories addressing the Fighting Sioux (242) and Illiniwek (279) disputes, citing 1,649 total sources. In each case, sources sought by reporters for comment were designated as “pro,” “anti,” or “neutral” with regard to their opinion of the universities’ nickname or mascot. (Neutral voices were overwhelmingly university administrators who hesitated to express an opinion publicly, or “official” voices merely commenting on retirement processes rather than the retirements themselves.)

Excluding editorials and wire service “briefs” (under 100 words), this report found that not only did symbol advocates receive double the space in the local and national press in both cases, contrary to advocates’ charges, but that American Indian voices, the demographic to which the NCAA had given ultimate say, accounted for less than one-fifth of all sources cited.

In major stories addressing the “Sioux” issue, 72 percent of sources taking a position were pro-nickname. Only 30 percent of all “Sioux” story sources were identified as American Indians; opinion among these sources was split, with 47 percent opposed to the nickname and 43 percent in favor. Of non-Native-identified sources, less than 4 percent opposed the nickname.

In “Illiniwek” coverage, 64 percent of sources taking a position were pro-mascot. Only 9 percent were identified as American Indian, less than 5 percent of whom expressed support for the Chief.

In other words, not only are symbol advocates not silenced, but print media overwhelmingly sought non-Natives for comment, despite the marginal role they played in the NCAA process.

The unfortunate consequence of this is that there's little space made for nuanced arguments and evidence that such nicknames and mascots marginalize modern American Indians as an autonomous cultural entity. In neither sample set did any stories explore the fact that such use of Indian symbols is opposed by, among other organizations, the NAACP, the American Psychological Association and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights for the emotional and civic damage it causes American Indians, particularly children.

As the USCCR put it in their 2001 statement on American Indian nicknames and mascots: "These false portrayals prevent non-Native Americans from understanding the true historical and cultural experiences of American Indians"; while they may "encourage interest in mythical 'Indians' created by the dominant culture...they block genuine understanding of contemporary Native people as fellow Americans."

Sidebar:

Opinion	Pieces	Feature	Mainly	One	Opinion
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Out of 124 editorials and columns identified as addressing the symbols' retirement, 72 percent expressed either indignation or a resigned ambivalence (epitomized by the late conservative pundit and Illinois alum Robert Novak, who in one **Washington Post** column —2/27/07—admitted, "While I can understand dumping the Chief, I don't like it"). The remaining 28 percent endorsed retiring the Native American symbols. Only 11 percent of columns and signed editorials were written by American Indians.

As for letters, the Champaign **News-Gazette** (2/25/07) wrote immediately following Illiniwek's retirement, "We received about 35 letters and only one was anti-Chief." One **Grand Forks Herald** editor (4/22/10) likewise claimed that following the nickname's retirement "letters are running about 6-to-1...against the board's actions and in support of the nickname."

Brian James Schill teaches literary studies and media theory and criticism for the University of North Dakota's Honors Program.

Sorry for not being a stereotype

Chicago Sun-Times

April 24, 2004

By Rita Pyrellis

How many of you would know an American Indian if you saw one? My guess is not many. Certainly not the bank teller who called security when an Indian woman — a visiting scholar — tried to cash a check with a tribal identification card. When asked what the problem was, the teller replied: "It must be a scam. Everyone knows real Indians are extinct."

And not the woman who cut in front of me at the grocery checkout a few months ago. When I confronted her, she gave me the once over and said: "Why don't you people just go back to your own country."

OK, lady, after you, I said, when I thought of it the next morning.

Even though I was born and raised in Chicago, strangers sometimes assume I'm a foreigner. For the record, I'm Native American, or Indian — take your pick. I prefer Lakota.

Sometimes strangers think I'm from another time. They wonder if I live in a teepee or make my own buckskin clothes or have ever hunted buffalo. They are surprised when I tell them that most Indians live in cities, in houses, and some of us shop at the Gap. I've never hunted a buffalo, although I almost hit a cow once while driving through South Dakota.

Sometimes, people simply don't believe I'm Indian. "You don't look Indian," a woman told me once. She seemed disappointed. I asked her what an Indian is supposed to look like. "You know. Long black hair, braids, feathers, beads."

Apparently, as Indians go, I'm a flop, an embarrassment to my racial stereotype. My hair is shoulder-length, and I don't feather it, unless you count my unfortunate Farrah Fawcett period in junior high.

When you say you're Indian, you better look the part or be prepared to defend yourself. Those are fighting words. When my husband tells people he's German, do they expect him to wear lederhosen and a Tyrolean hat? Of course not. But such are the risks when you dare to be Indian. You don't tug on Superman's cape, and you don't mess around with a man's stereotype.

Native American scholar Vine Deloria wrote that of all the problems facing Indian people, the most pressing one is our transparency. Never mind the staggering [suicide rate](#) among Native youth, or the fact that Indians are the victims of violent crimes at more than twice the rate of all U.S. residents — our very existence seems to be in question.

"Because people can see right through us, it becomes impossible to tell truth from fiction or fact from mythology," he wrote. "The American public feels most comfortable with the mythical Indians of stereotype-land who were always THERE."

Sure. [Stereotypes](#) don't have feelings, or children who deserve to grow up with images that reflect who they are — not perfect images, but realistic ones. While Little Black Sambo and the Frito Bandito have gone the way of minstrel shows, Indians are still battling a red-faced, big-nosed [Chief Wahoo](#) and other stereotypes. No wonder people are confused about who Indians really are. When we're not hawking sticks of butter, or beer or chewing tobacco, we're scalping settlers. When we're not passed out [drunk](#), we're living large off [casinos](#). When we're not [gyrating](#) in Pocahoochie outfits at the Grammy Awards, we're [leaping](#) through the air at football games, represented by a white man in red face. One era's minstrel show is another's halftime entertainment. It's enough to make [Tonto](#) speak in multiple syllables.

And it's enough to make hard-working, decent Indian folks faced with more urgent problems take to the streets in protest. Personally, I'd rather take in my son's Little League game, but as long as other people insist on telling me when to be honored or offended, or how I should look or talk or dance, I will keep telling them otherwise. To do nothing would be less than honorable.

Rita Pyrellis is a free-lance journalist and a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

Seminole Nation OK With Use of Mascot

Tribe supports Florida State's fight with NCAA over use of name

[Florida State University](#) filed an appeal to the NCAA on Friday, saying the Seminole name and logo should not be on the organization's list of offensive American Indian images banned from postseason NCAA tournaments.

The appeal, which FSU trustees agreed to pursue in an emergency session Wednesday, comes as state lawmakers with FSU ties said they will do what it takes to keep the Seminole tradition from being relegated to the sidelines during the NCAA postseason.

In a conference call Friday, members of the Seminole Caucus said they'll take up legislation on the issue in a special session this fall. Lawmakers were joined on the call by FSU President T.K. Wetherell, FSU [Athletic](#) Director Dave Hart and state Attorney General Charlie Crist, among others.

Caucus members want Crist to look into a possible antitrust investigation of the NCAA.

Legislation protecting the Seminole logo and other Florida university symbols would help the effort, Wetherell said after the meeting.

"I expect it to be introduced and passed almost unanimously," he said.

Wetherell told caucus members the school won't bow to NCAA demands to drop the Seminole name and logo in NCAA-sponsored postseason tournaments.

"We hope the NCAA will reconsider its actions," Wetherell said. "But we are prepared to go as far as we have to go."

Asked whether FSU would consider bolting from the NCAA, Wetherell said, "There's a lot of ramifications for that, and there's a lot of water to go under the bridge before we get to that point."

FSU's appeal, a three-page letter from Wetherell to NCAA President Myles Brand, asks the NCAA to reverse itself by Aug. 29, the first day of fall classes.

"[Florida State Seminoles](#)' is not a nickname," Wetherell wrote. "It is, rather, a name that we use to identify not only our athletics teams but also many other internal and external groups because it represents traits of a heroic people whom we admire and would like to emulate."

Brand did not return a call for comment.

FSU is basing its appeal on support from the Seminole Tribe of Florida for the school's longstanding use of the Seminole name and logo.

FSU also said the NCAA Executive Committee's decision is flawed because it was based, in part, on the belief that the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma objects to the school's use of the Seminole name.

In an 18-2 vote on July 16, the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma's governing body, the General Council, voted against a resolution condemning use of American Indian names and mascots by college [sports](#) teams, Jennifer McBee, the Oklahoma Seminole Nation attorney general, said Friday.

"The Nation took the position it was not going to condemn use of Native American mascots nor condemn the Florida State Seminoles," McBee said. She said tribe members attend FSU.

McBee said David Narcomey, a member of the Oklahoma Seminoles' General Council, who sponsored the resolution, did not speak for the 14,000-member Seminole Nation of Oklahoma when he protested to NCAA officials about FSU's use of the Seminole name and image.

McBee said the NCAA never asked the General Council its opinion.

Narcomey could not be reached for comment.

The Oklahoma Seminoles' purported opposition factored into the NCAA Executive Committee's decision, said Saint Leo University President Arthur Kirk Jr., a committee member.

Kirk said Friday he would consider sending the matter back to the executive committee for review.

"My understanding was the Seminoles of Oklahoma took fairly serious objection to use of the Seminole name," Kirk said.

Kirk said that based upon the new information, "I certainly think they [FSU] deserve further consideration."

NCAA Executive Committee Chairman Walter Harrison said what committee members thought was the Oklahoma Seminoles' opposition was "a factor" in the decision.

"There was a whole set of factors," Harrison said. "There was certainly discussion of that."

As for FSU's appeal, "I have an open mind on the subject, and I'd like to hear more about it," said Harrison, who had not seen FSU's appeal.

Harrison, president of the University of Hartford, said he has received 100 to 125 messages a day on the Seminole issue since the Executive Committee's Aug. 4 decision. The messages include-mails and voice mail messages he called "extremely impolite."

"We'd all be better served by more light and less heat on this subject," Harrison said.

The NCAA Executive Committee next meets on Oct. 27 in Indianapolis, Harrison said.

FSU is moving ahead faster than at least one of the other 17 schools affected by the NCAA decision.

A University of Illinois spokesman said the school's attorneys were reviewing the decision and looking at options.

Illinois' nickname is the Fighting Illini and the mascot is Chief Illiniwek. Illini was the name of the tribal confederation that once ruled the land now called Illinois.

"At some point we'll make a determination of how to respond," said Tom Hardy, executive director for university relations.