

## **THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA 'FIGHTING SIOUX' LOGO MUST GO!**

By Denise K. Lajimodiere

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Grand Forks - "Don't you have more important things to worry about?" This statement often is posed by non-Native students at UND to Native students taking part in Fighting Sioux logo discussions.

As a Native educator of 30 years, I can say I have nothing more important to worry about.

I have committed my life to dealing with harmful and negative stereotypes and educating students on my reservation of their culture, traditions, ceremonies and spirituality. As Native people, we experience layer upon layer of stereotypes and images that dehumanize. Eurocentric curriculum and children's literature reinforce stereotypes of the "vanishing Indian," "romantic Indian," "militant Indian," or "drunken Indian." I have seen first hand how these images, along with poverty or low socioeconomic status, generational trauma and other issues of reservation life contribute low self-esteem in Native students.

Despite these issues and because we have Native teachers, social workers, counselors, administrators and tribal leaders taking care of important things, we have many successful students enrolling at UND. The trouble is, Native students continue to be bombarded by negative stereotypical images perpetrated by the Fighting Sioux logo once they arrive on campus.

Currently, I am a doctoral student in educational leadership at UND, a mother and grandmother and have been involved in the anti-logo movement since the 1970s. Still, it was with trepidation that I walked to the anti-logo vigil on the corner of Sixth Avenue North and Columbia Road on March 25.

Standing silently with a small group of students, the first comment I heard yelled from a passing vehicle was, "Go back to where you came from!" This comment was followed by yells of "F\*\*\* you! Go back to your tipi! Drink firewater! If the logo goes so do your programs! You should be proud! I have an Indian friend and he likes the logo!"

We were flipped the middle finger more than 30 times, with one vehicle turning on its overhead dome light so we could see all the occupants gesturing. Imprinted on my brain is the angry, twisted face of a young blonde woman yelling at us.

In light of such behavior, I'm proud of the quiet dignity that the students and adults maintained during the two hours standing on the corner.

"Go back where you came from!" This chant often was aimed at my family's home in Portland, Ore., during the 14 years we were "relocated" off the reservation. Groups of

students from local schools would gather to throw dirt clods and pine cones at our front door. These were kids I went to school with.

In school, being called "squaw" and "stinking Injun" was a daily ordeal. My braids often were used to jerk me around the playground.

It takes a tremendous amount of courage, strength and resiliency for a Native student wanting to leave the reservation to continue his or her education. And many, like me, have our first experiences of racism off the reservation.

I am horrified and distressed by the overt racism we saw that Saturday night. The continuation of negative stereotypes portrayed in comments hurled at us is witness to the ongoing ignorance of Native culture, no matter how many years we have worked to gain awareness and understanding.

My heart aches for all Native students attending this university now and in the future.

The Fighting Sioux logo stands out among colleges nationwide as a mark of institutionalized racism. As an educator and former administrator, it is hard for me to understand how UND can ignore NCAA recommendations to retire the logo. But in light of the ongoing and relentless stereotypes that the logo perpetrates, I stand firm in urging this university to retire the Fighting Sioux name.

As I move into a professorship at North Dakota State University, it is with relief that I will not be confronted by logo issues on a daily basis. I'm tired of having my braids jerked.

*Lajimodiere holds a bachelor's degree from UND and is a doctoral student there.*