All across the country, names and images of Native Americans are being removed from sports teams. At first, most people experience the initial reaction of, "Oh no, not another group crying for political correctness."

While we are all tired of being told how to think, it is also important to note the reasons for these changes. Once understood, it becomes very clear that it is only a wonder it took this long to change them. Many State School Boards have taken a strong stand against the mascot and team names. We are providing for you here the most obvious reasons why these team names should be changed, and we ask that you maintain an open heart when reading through them. We understand that in many cases, people have strong emotional attachments to these names but it is equally important to understand why historically these names were chosen, and why now, they must be changed.

1. If we must show respect to all other groups, why should we be permitted to dismiss political correctness when it applies to Native people? Why are Native people the only race of people that are permitted to be used as mascots? Interchange the name of any race with the Indians and it immediately becomes clear that we cannot have teams called The Negroes, The Asians or The Jews.

2. It is interesting to note that most mascot names were chosen, and ceremonies using the feathers, drums, and clothing were developed, from the 1920s to the 1950s. During this period of time and up until 1978 it was illegal for Native people to practice their religion. Native people could be, and often were, imprisoned for using these same items in ceremonies. Ironically, while nonnative people were using sacred objects in mimicking the Indians at sports events, Native people had to stand by and watch their culture mocked while they themselves could not participate in the same activities in a religious way. This was not an honor then, and it is not an honor today. Do we not respect the religious rights of the original people in this land because we don't understand their religions? Our lack of understanding does not minimize its importance to Native people. By using objects considered sacred by Native people for sports events, in this land based on religious freedom we continue to deny Native people respect for their religion.

3. Because virtually the only image that nonnative children view of Native people are of the mascots, most children assume that Native people are dead or were warlike people. This stereotype diminishes the Native culture and is hurtful to many Native people.

4. Our myths and legends that the Native people were bloodthirsty killers are perpetuated by the mascot. These myths are what psychologists deem "dehumanization", which is necessary in any war to justify the killing of people. Team names such as Red Raiders, Red Men, and Redskins maintain these disrespectful names. In other wars, we can remember the names used for Germans, "krauts," Japanese were "Nips", etc. But when wars are over we drop those names and show respect once again for people who are not our enemies. We have never dropped those names and perpetuate a war like attitude towards Native people by the continuance of those names.

5. Oppression often happens in places that have mascots:
In Massachusetts, a team burns an Indian in effigy the night before a game.

In Minnesota, after a pep rally where the teachers and students dress up as cowboys and Indians, the cowboys yell, "Get back to the reservation." After the rally, students beat up Indians.

In Kansas, a man who sought to remove the mascot was sent emails from students that threatened his home and the rape of his wife.

In Hutchinson, KS, a newspaper headline stated Orioles Gun Down Indians. Any place that runs headlines like this subliminally teaches our children that the massacre of Indians was a permissible event.

Having Native names also encourages opposing teams to yell Kill the Indian, Scalp the Sioux, etc. This hurts Native children terribly....

In Wisconsin and Michigan, the oppression was so bad, parents had to remove their children from schools for being called Redskin and Red Boy, the names of the mascots. This is not unusual.

Because of the disrespectful ways in which Native people are portrayed at school ceremonies, many Native children are embarrassed to attend games. The woo-woo sounds, the face paint, the misuse of sacred feathers all cause embarrassment to Native people and are a direct violation of civil rights laws which state that all children must be able to comfortably participate in all activities in their schools.

The word Redskin derived from the practice of skinning Indians for easy transport when collecting bounty. The skin was removed from the top of the back and ran all the way down the legs. These skins were used for products such as reins, boots, belts, pouches, etc. Andrew Jackson, who was one of the worst enemies of the Native people, and by far the most brutal president towards Native people, collected the noses of every Indian he killed and encouraged the practice of skinning. Native people are not red. Mostly they range from tan to brown. Redskin comes from bloody skin.

The most common mascot names are: Eagles, Tigers, Cougars, Bulldogs, Warriors, Lions, Panthers, Indians, Wildcats, and Bears. While Bulldogs are not seen as prey, they are seen as determined and feisty animals. All the rest of the names on that list, 9 out of 10, have been hunted. Native people were hunted and bounty was paid for them. No other race appears as a mascot name, because no other race was hunted. People hang animal heads in their dens and Indian heads in their gymnasiums.

The majority assumes that it should be able to retain a symbol they have "owned" for decades, but as with all civil rights issues, the majority must defend the rights of minorities. If we lived by majority rule in civil rights issues, might we still have slavery today? And shouldn’t we all take a stand against oppressive actions, even if they are not occurring in our areas?

Over 81% of respondents to a poll in Indian Country Today, 500 Native organizations, hundreds of tribes and petitions with signatures in the tens of thousands have called for the retirement of these mascots. If you really want to honor Native people, listen to the voices around the country that are asking to be heard. No matter what the name, if someone says they don’t like it, then only a bully would continue to use it.