

Reading

I Am the Only American Indian

By Cecelia Rose LaPointe (Ojibway/Métis)

I am the only American Indian sitting at the table during lunch. It's awkward but I am used to it. There's a group of White kids over there. A group of Black kids over there. Congregation segregation. A few stragglers, weirdos, hippies, and nerds.

I congregate alone.

We are so DIVIDED by race. But I feel comfortable as an American Indian on my own. Long beaded earrings, a beaded barrette, my NAIS Native student organization bag. The beat of the drum in my soul. Ancestors all around me.

I talked to my Ojibway grandma yesterday. She's way up in the UP—the Upper Peninsula of Michigan—on the rez.

Shifting in my seat I pay close attention to the birds outside. No one else is paying attention to them. That is how city folk are. They are moving and going and walking and talking nonstop. So I tune out the loud conversations, laughter, and gossip and listen to the birds.

I adjust my long hair. I let it down, showing my pride. Sometimes us Natives see each other on campus. We might not talk but we nod as we walk by. Some Natives wear their hair long to stand out. Our hair SHOUTS ACTIVISM, REBELLION, and RECLAIMING OUR CULTURE, HERITAGE, and IDENTITY. It has to SHOUT because otherwise no one would LISTEN to us.

I've finished my lunch. I walk alone out of the dorm cafeteria. The smell of fries and other processed foods lingers in the air. I walk out the door and down the paved sidewalk to my next class. I have SURVIVED INVISIBILITY.