Acting Edition

Rez Politics and The Council

by William S. Yellow Robe, Jr.

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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Rather than altering the original work and speculating on Mr. Yellow Robe's authorial intent, we decided to present this play as we found it. We believe this decision best honors Mr. Yellow Robe's creative process and authorial intent while acknowledging that he did not have the opportunity to make final edits.

Should any questions arise as you read or perform this play, please contact us at info@thedgcm.org.

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Rez Politics

REZ POLITICS first premiered at the University of Maine, Orono, ME, on February 5, at the Cyrus Pavilion Theater, and on February 23, at the University Club in the Fogler Library, as part of the Black Student Union celebration of Black History Month – 2009. The cast was as follows:

CURTIS . . . . . Zachary Robbins
GERALD . . . . . Nick Bear (Penobscot Tribe)

CHARACTERS

CURTIS – a large boy about ten
GERALD – smaller in size, about ten

SETTING

A field in Montana.

TIME

Early 1970s, afternoon.

*(**CURTIS** enters the acting area being chased by **GERALD** in a friendly game of tag. They enter the acting area with **GERALD** tagging **CURTIS**. **GERALD** enjoys his small victory. **CURTIS** looks around the area as if checking to see if they are noticed. **CURTIS** walks over to **GERALD** and gives him a hard shove.)*

CURTIS. My dad says you guys are nothing but a bunch of niggers.

GERALD. Yeah? But you guys aren't even Indian. You guys aren't even from here.

CURTIS. Yeah? So?

GERALD. Doesn't make you better than us.

CURTIS. You and your whole family are nothing but breeds.

GERALD. You too.

CURTIS. But we're more Indian than you guys are.

GERALD. No, you're not.

CURTIS. That's what my family said.

GERALD. They're wrong too.

CURTIS. So – you want to fight?

GERALD. I don't know.

CURTIS. Bet you can't fight.

*(He begins to circle **GERALD**.)*

GERALD. I'm not afraid of you.

CURTIS. I bet you are. Damn nigger.

GERALD. To hell with you, Curtis. I thought we were supposed to be friends.

CURTIS. I guess you thought wrong.

GERALD. Why are you doing this, anyway? I didn't do anything to you.

CURTIS. Yes you did.

GERALD. What then?

CURTIS. You know.

GERALD. No I don't.

*(***CURTIS** *has* **GERALD** *on the ground and circles him. He kicks at* **GERALD** *in the next few lines.)*

CURTIS. You're just trying to get out of this.

GERALD. Oww, you shit.

CURTIS. You know what you did.

GERALD. Oww!

CURTIS. Lying nigger.

GERALD. You shit head!

CURTIS. Get up, Gerald! Get up!

GERALD. Why did you hit me, you shit head!

CURTIS. Get up!

GERALD. You shit!

CURTIS. Come on. What are you going to do about it? Cry? Come on, Gerald, let's fight!

GERALD. All right, you ass!

*(***GERALD** *out-maneuvers* **CURTIS** *and gets to his feet and knocks* **CURTIS** *to the ground, getting the upper hand on* **CURTIS**.*)*

CURTIS. You piss head! Oww! Oww!

GERALD. You want to fight? Huh? Huh? Still want to fight? You damn breed!

CURTIS. Stop! I didn't hit you when you were down.

GERALD. Well, I'm not down.

CURTIS. Quit it!

GERALD. Are you going to cry? Huh?

CURTIS. Knock it off, you damn nigger!

GERALD. Stop calling me that!

CURTIS. Indins aren't supposed to be fighting each other.

GERALD. Oh – I'm an Indin now, huh?

CURTIS. I didn't say you weren't an Indian.

GERALD. Then why did you try to fight me than, huh?

CURTIS. Because – because I was told to.

GERALD. Who – who told you to fight me?

CURTIS. My brother, Gary. He told me I should kick your black ass.

GERALD. Piss on you, Curtis.

*(***GERALD** *threatens to strike* **CURTIS***, making him flinch.)*

CURTIS. Oww! Stop it! Let me get up. You couldn't do this, if I could get up.

GERALD. No. You stay there. I won't let you up until you tell me why your brother Gary wants you to beat me up.

CURTIS. I already told you. He doesn't like you, your brother, or your sisters because you guys are part nigger.

GERALD. Well, I play around with you, and you're part white.

CURTIS. That isn't the same.

The Council

CHARACTERS

BEING ONE – Plays **MAN** and **JOEY**

BEING TWO – Plays **WHALE ONE**, **CONDOR**, **ICE TRAVELER**, and **WOMAN**

BEING THREE – Plays **SCIENTIST**, **SPARROW**, **WALRUS**, **MAN THREE**, and **WOLF ONE**

BEING FOUR – Plays **WHALE TWO**, **TIGER**, **SEA TURTLE**, **WOMAN TWO**, and **WOLF TWO**

BEING FIVE – Plays **FATHER**, **PANDA BEAR**, and **MAN ONE**

BEING SIX – Plays **WHALE THREE**, **SEA GULL**, **LIZARD**, and **MAN TWO**

BEING SEVEN – Plays **MICHELLE**, **EAGLE**, **WOLF**, **MAKO**, **WATER BUFFALO CALF**, and **WOMAN ONE**

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Casting

There are multiple roles. All require a great amount of physical abilities and heart.

Native characters should always be played by Native actors. The production must know whether the Native actor is an enrolled member of their tribe or of descent, and if they live their life in community as a Native person, before casting. In no instance should someone who claims to be a Native actor but who has no tribal affiliation be cast in one of these roles.

Production Elements

This play may require use of traditional items, of significant spiritual or ceremonial purposes. It may also take place in settings very specific to and known by Native peoples, and require traditional clothing or elements of regalia. All such items, settings, clothing and elements must be made appropriately. No traditional or ceremonial items should be manufactured by non-Natives. All such items, settings, clothing and elements should be thoroughly researched and accurate, and incorporate Native consultation from the specific tribes represented in the play when appropriate.

Artistic Personnel

This play should not be produced without Native voices attached to the production with a strong leadership presence in the room. In instances where a non-Native is directing, a Native dramaturg or consultant appropriate to the cultures represented in the play should be engaged. In

all instances, Native cast members should be listened to and respected concerning Native representation. For the play to be truly realized, all cultural elements must be accurate. Any cultural statements, references and design elements must be accurate to the cultures they are intended to represent. There should be no compromise in ensuring that the Native peoples depicted in the play are depicted accurately, with full knowledge of the communities to which they belong.

PROLOGUE

(There are three banners flying in the air. They represent **WHALES**. *One by one the* **WHALES** *beach themselves on the shore. A* **FATHER** *and his two children,* **MICHELLE** *and* **JOEY**, *enter.)*

MICHELLE. Oh daddy, look!

JOEY. What are they, daddy?

FATHER. Whales. They must have beached themselves a few minutes ago.

MICHELLE. Are they still alive? Hey, daddy. Look at those men over there, daddy. Maybe they'll know what to do – you think so?

FATHER. Yes, maybe. Michelle and Joey, you stay here and don't touch anything. I'm going over there to ask one of those men if they know what's going on. I'll be right back.

(The **FATHER** *begins to exit, and* **JOEY** *follows him. The* **FATHER** *stops and takes* **JOEY** *back to* **MICHELLE**.*)*

I said I'll be right back.

(He exits. Then one of the **WHALES** *makes a sound.)*

MICHELLE. Do you hear that, Joey? It sounds like one of them's trying to say something.

JOEY. No they're not. You're just trying to scare me.

MICHELLE. Don't be such a geek. I am not – just listen.

WHALE ONE. A long time ago,

WHALES TOGETHER. Grandchildren,

WHALE ONE. The world was young and new. Always changing. The changes of

WHALES TOGETHER. fire, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes,

WHALE ONE. made the first beings join together for their own survival. It was then they decided they would have

WHALES TOGETHER. Council.

(Music as actors freeze. Blackout.)*

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Scene One

*(**MAN** is onstage. He is trying to fly by flapping his arms. **SEA GULL**, **EAGLE**, **SPARROW**, and then, **CONDOR** enter. **SEA GULL** pokes **MAN** and causes a stir. They settle down to a quiet state.)*

SEA GULL. He won't, he can't, he can't fly. What a goofy being.

EAGLE. Quiet, Sea Gull.

SPARROW. There is a possibility he will go to the Council.

MAN. What's this "Council" thing, anyway? I don't want to go. I want to stay with my own nation.

CONDOR. No. We were told to bring you to the Council, Man. You have to appear before the Council. Now, climb on my back and I'll take you there.

SEA GULL. A long, a long way, a long journey to have.

MAN. From here to the Council?

SEA GULL. No, no – I mean, from Condor's back, when in the sky, to the ground is a long way to splat.

CONDOR. Don't say things like that to him! Eagle, Sparrow, help him get on my back.

EAGLE. Man, be brave. Do it now. Condor is the strongest of all of us, and she'll take you there safely.

MAN. All right. Maybe one of these days I'll make the journey myself.

*(The **BIRD BEINGS** laugh.)*

SEA GULL. Don't, don't, don fa…don't splat.

MAN. Thanks a lot.

(The **BIRDS** *begin to take off.* **CONDOR** *is the last to take off.)*

EAGLE. Farewell, Man.

SPARROW. Bye, oh – bye, bye, bye.

*(***CONDOR** *and* **MAN** *are in the air.)*

MAN. This is, this is,

CONDOR. Work.

MAN. No. This is wonderful. I want – I want to fly by myself!

CONDOR. You're not made for it.

MAN. What do you mean?

CONDOR. I have feathers and the ability to fly.

MAN. If I had feathers, could I fly?

CONDOR. I don't know.

*(***MAN** *examines the feathers on* **CONDOR***'s back. He picks one.)*

Some of our relations have feathers and can't fly. Ow. There are some of them who are very fast runners and can't fly. Ow. What are you doing, Man?

MAN. Just borrowing some feathers.

*(***MAN** *has picked several feathers, and* **CONDOR** *is having problems flying.)*

CONDOR. What? Ow! Why?

MAN. So I can fly by myself.

CONDOR. Man! No! You can't fly. And I can't fly if you take my feathers.

MAN. Yes, I can.

*(**MAN** takes the feathers he has plucked from **CONDOR**, jumps off of **CONDOR**'s back, and tries to flap his arms.)*

I can, I can go... I'm gonna go "splat!"

*(**MAN** comes crashing to the ground. The **COUNCIL** gathers around him. **CONDOR**, **WOLF**, **TIGER**, **PANDA BEAR**, **WALRUS**, and **LIZARD**.)*

TIGER. Members of the Council, I give you our new being, "Man."

*(**WOLF** walks over and sniffs **MAN**.)*

WOLF. So this is how it looks up close. It's still alive.

*(**MAN** stirs, and **WOLF** brushes dirt on him and walks away.)*

WALRUS. Oh, bother. I was hoping this wouldn't take so long.

CONDOR. As a representative of my nation and all my relations, I thank you for the chance to bring this new being to the Council. If you don't need me for anything else, I would like to return to my home while the wind is still my relative.

TIGER. Yes – thank you, Condor. You are excused.

*(**CONDOR** exits.)*

LIZARD. What – shall we do with this – silly being?

TIGER. Lizard, my old friend, that's why we are here. All of you, Talkers from the nations and your relations, what are we to do with this new being, "Man"?

WOLF. I, Wolf, say we should get rid of him and his small herd.

TIGER. Then I take it we're in agreement not to let this being live with us?

PANDA BEAR. Excuse me, Tiger and other distinguished Talkers of the Council, but we can't do that. If a cloud passes into the empty sky, we can't prevent it from doing so. He comes from the earth just as we do.

WALRUS. Perhaps he will go away. Pass on. Remember, Panda Bear, remember Lizard's nations and all their relations had beings that passed on. Some of his relations had wings and flew in the sky, and they had no feathers. The ancient ones. They passed away – frightening beings they were. I remember hearing the story of one having little arms. He passed on as well.

WOLF. You may be right, Walrus. Man and his nations may not survive if they don't learn to feed themselves. Man's pack has been taking the remains of our hunts, but they need to learn to hunt for themselves.

TIGER. If a claw poked its skin, the skin would open. Its skin feels so thin.

WALRUS. Look! Not only is it thin skinned, but it grows plants on itself.

PANDA BEAR. Walrus, my large relation, these plants aren't growing from it. Man takes these plants to cover himself.

WOLF. Should we allow it to pass away or live amongst us?

PANDA BEAR. The Council and all the nations would have to make an exception for Man and his herd, flock, or pack. I want an agreement that we will should not hunt them until they've become larger in numbers and stronger in health.

TIGER. No. Full members of the Council hunt and are hunted, no matter what health they are. It's the circle of life...

LIZARD. They are weak of body. They could be weak of mind. If this is so, they will never learn our ways.

PANDA BEAR. We teach our cubs who are weak and don't know the ways. We can teach it the same things. Man will learn, but we have to protect this new being until it has developed its own skills and built its strength…

WALRUS. Protect it? See here, Panda Bear. No one protects our young for us. We do it.

PANDA BEAR. *(Motions to call for a vote.)* There is no other way for them to survive. Agree?

WALRUS. Oh all right, Panda Bear.

(Vote is taken and won.)

They will not be hunted.

WOLF. Will it be a Talker for itself, or should we choose a Talker for it since it is so weak?

PANDA BEAR. Wolf, it has to be able to talk for itself. It has a mouth, I think.

*(***PANDA BEAR** *examines* **MAN**.*)*

WALRUS. Because he and his nation are so young, he should have a Talker who is already recognized and established in bloodlines to talk for him and his nation.

PANDA BEAR. Who is the closest relation to Man? Doesn't anyone want to claim relationship to this new being?

*(***WHALE** *sound.)*

ICE TRAVELER. Me, me – I will.

*(***COUNCIL MEMBERS** *stir.)*

PANDA BEAR. Now, this is very interesting, two relations from two different homes. Someone wants to serve as a Talker for Man. Here is Ice Traveler of the Orca nations and all their relations.

WALRUS. Ice Traveler? Oh dear. I'd rather be splatted, myself.

WOLF. Really? Who could lift you?

LIZARD. Maybe one of the ancient ones, the one with the tiny arms.

TIGER. Silence! We will meet with Ice Traveler.

*(***COUNCIL MEMBERS** *cross to the edge of the circle.* **ICE TRAVELER** *is represented by a banner.* **ICE TRAVELER** *comes to a stop and the* **COUNCIL MEMBERS** *gather near.* **MAN** *is motionless on the stage.)*

ICE TRAVELER. Members of the Council, I will see to it that Man and his nations grow strong. They will become a proud nations of the Council. We are all different, but we must live together as one, and he will be taught this. I will ask help from other Council members to teach Man and his nations to live.

*(***PANDA BEAR** *steps forward.)*

WOLF. You and Panda Bear will make sure he understands and learns the Council's ways, Ice Traveler?

ICE TRAVELER. Yes, I will. We will all teach them.

LIZARD. Silliness!

ICE TRAVELER. If I am wrong, then he will pass away like other nations of the past.

*(***MAN** *stirs, and* **COUNCIL MEMBERS** *cross to him.)*

MAN. I, me, I – I splatted. Ow! My arm is sore, too.

*(***PANDA BEAR** *is face to face with* **MAN**.*)*

What? I, I – I mean, who are you?

PANDA BEAR. Panda Bear, Talker of the Panda Bear nation and all their relations.

MAN. The Council. I made it? I didn't think I would get here.

PANDA BEAR. Yes. Would you like to wrestle? Best two out of three?

MAN. No, no – thank you, but nah. Uh – am I and my people to be included in the Council? We can use more help. Wolf and her nations have been helpful in providing food, but we don't get enough to eat. We are the fourth ones to eat after Wolf and the other nations.

PANDA BEAR. Man, you'll be heard and fed. Things will change for you and your people. Your markings will soon join ours in the Council circle.

*(***MAN** *walks around the circle. He is about to place his handprint.)*

Wait, – you'll have to wait.

MAN. Uh – I thank you, all of you. I'm, uh – I'm going to get something to sit on.

*(***MAN** *exits offstage. The* **COUNCIL MEMBERS** *re-form into* **COUNCIL** *stances in a circle.)*

TIGER. Members of the Council, when Man has grown, we will allow him to place his markings at the edge of the Council circle with ours. Then he will become the Talker of his nation and join the circle of life.

*(***MAN** *enters with a small hide. This causes a large uproar among the* **COUNCIL MEMBERS** *until* **TIGER** *restores order.)*

WOLF. Look!

TIGER. What is that?

PANDA BEAR. Answer, Man.

MAN. I needed something to sit on. The idea came to me, so I'm going to use this mangy old hide.

TIGER. Where did you get – get this "hide"?

MAN. From over there. There were a lot of them.

WALRUS. That hide is from the resting place of the Council members we honor.

COUNCIL MEMBERS. Man! Silliness! Silly Thing! Strange Being! Greedy pup!

(Blackout.)

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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