

Blood Quantum

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SOUND: Native American flute plays as Adrian enters wearing a sweater knitted with the four colors: red, yellow, white and black. On stage are a large dry erase board with a red marker, a small table with a bottle, a cap gun, a sage smudge stick and abalone shell, a television remote, a Native American flute and a chair. Above him is a video projection screen. The LIGHTS come up. As the actor produces his CDIB card, an accompanying image of the certificate is projected on the screen behind him.

Three one hundred and twenty-eighths. That's what it says. I have a voice in the tribe. In our story. I am entitled to attend all tribal and cultural events. I can watch the dances.

SOUND: Hoop Dance

I cannot dance, but I can watch them. They are golden-brown and beautiful, half-blood at least, feathers flailing. They are on display and they are gorgeous. Free to bless the wide open spaces of the local gym. For a moment this is sacred space, and it is breathtaking.

Sound fades

My brother's best friend leans across the both of us and cracks some joke about booze and squaws. Three one twenty-eighths of me starts to chuckle. One hundred and twenty five one twenty-eighths of me wants to kick his pasty white ass. Wants to call my show-piece brothers to war.

SOUND: War Song

But the three one twenty-eighths of me who has the right is still laughing, and laughs harder yet when it sees my own pasty white fist clenched on my pasty white leg. What's the point? With two-plus centuries of oppression and genocide behind us, what's five more minutes, a year, a decade, another century? Humility flows through us now. It is in our blood. In my blood. Three one hundred twenty-eighths of it at least.

IMAGE: Adrian's third grade school picture

When I was nine years old, Oklahoma celebrated its diamond anniversary — seventy-five years of statehood. There would be a program, a small-town tribute to the great state of Oklahoma.

(Embodies nine-year-old self)

Channel Five was going to be there! I wanted to give the speech about Sequoia.

IMAGE: Sequoia

He was a civilized Cherokee, and so was I. I was turned down twice. I was told that, “after all, *that* part should go to an *Indian* student. Well, my Title IV teacher knew that I had at least a small Cherokee blood quantum — I was taken out of regular reading classes because of it, and thanks to her I got my chance. Ms. Brown was a Cherokee storyteller herself, and a damn fine one. A trickster. . . a real believer. I had only recently learned that I was part Cherokee, which was cool because they were one of the Five Civilized Tribes we were leaning about. We memorized the names of those tribe with, well. . .

IMAGE: A string of Native American Mascots

. . . what else?

IMAGE: Washington Redskins

. . . a football cheer.

Adrian picks up pom-poms. Does the following cheer full-on.

“Ready. O-kay!
Chickasaw, Choctaw
Cherokee, Creek
Seminole Chieftains
can’t be beat!”

IMAGES of more mascots accompanies the cheer. Then, the Seminole Chieftain logo, then pictures from the yearbook.

No one aside from Ms. Brown really believed me when I told them I was in’din. So I decided to prove it. We were told to dress up for the statehood program (with land run reenactment to follow!) as either cowboys, pioneers, or “Indians.” I ran home and, with the help of my father, who was very proud of me, I vigorously researched my Native American heritage. Well, as much as an eight-year old vigorously researches anything.

*Adrian looks—as little boy—at the TV IMAGE: Yesteryear Video
Adrian picks up remote, turns off the “T.V.”*

Together we constructed an outfit — appropriate?—for a Cherokee boy in autumn. I was discouraged from using war paint.

Adrian pulls out a tube of lipstick, displays it, then tosses it over his shoulder.

That was a stereotype and completely inappropriate for a post-Trail of Tears Cherokee like myself. I kept the feather. After all, how they gonna know you're an Indian if you got no feather? My buckskin pants. . .now, understand,

IMAGE: True Cherokee dress — a breechcloth

were I authentic here — note the breechcloth. . . (*covers himself*)
I would probably be sent home.

IMAGE: Clan shield

They did bear the mark of my clan-of-choice. . . (*makes "drunken circle with his finger," then points*) the longhair.

IMAGES: Pictures of Adrian in Indian costume

I was an Indian. And when I showed up to school the next day. . .

IMAGE: Schoolyard picture — everyone dressed as cowboys and pioneers, Except Adrian in Indian outfit, dancing

I was the only one. Even the full-blooded Indians were dressed as cowboys. In my regalia, I represented approximately 3/128ths of the third grade population.

IMAGE: Adrian's third grade class on the day of the statehood program. He is circled as if by a sports commentator.

There I am. Completely alone. Surrounded by cowboys and O! pioneers. Now I knew what it was to be Indian. I didn't mind so much. It really didn't bother me until the little land run we did. See, we were all supposed to set out from the monkey bars. The Boomers, the Sooners. . . and me. But the other kids trapped me inside the jungle gym, among them an Indian cowboy. They were all throwing dirt clods and shooting invisible bullets at the lone injun while Billy Bearshield called me a "savage."

IMAGE: Billy circled

Golden-brown cowboys holding a pale-faced indigenous at gunpoint in a confined space, much too limited for the free spirit I was trying oh so *romantically* to embody. It was like colorization gone awry, like watching the History Channel while squinting and going like this. (*Moves hands, fingers spread, rapidly in front of face*) When I finally broke free, I was told that I couldn't stake a claim. (*Grabs cap gun, shoots it off— as another child*) "Indians ain't allowed to own land! You don't believe in it."

I had no place to call my own. No ground. This was becoming familiar territory. . .this. . . lack of territory. There I was, disenfranchised, hemmed in, *removed* and still, no one believed I was really Cherokee. Why would they? (PAUSE, *Sits in front of the TV*) In the

age of the material girl and (*sings*) “I want my MTV,” I guess I was just looking for something, anything authentic . . . shifting, floating through moments of identity confusion, reflections of a colonized birth, of my maternal German side — “Schniedewent” — *there’s* a German name.

VIDEO: A sperm and egg merge, forming a zygote. Throughout the following lines, the audience sees the cells of the zygote dividing and multiplying. Overlaid are old movie clips of cowboy/Indian wars.

You see, when I was but a wee zygote, the German, Irish, English, Dutch-Scotch . . . thingeys . . . all of it rose to the top, to the surface where you see it right now — blondish hair and blue eyes subduing the indigenous genes from my father, imposing “for my own good” (*pace gets faster/louder at this point*) a strong sense of Western culture, good English, structure over savagery, a linear progression in all things arts and science, social and religious! Add a healthy “American” doctrinal influence and remember to squeeze all the Indian into as tight a spot as possible and you’ve got the perfect model of immigrant-engineered cultural/epistemological genocide on a microscopic level.

(PAUSE)

So there I lay in my father’s proud hands, his coarse black hair rubbing gently against my blonde German locks while his own Irish quotient battled the native for dominance. Here’s how it breaks down.

*TEXT on screen: FAMILY HISTORY.
Then, A LESSON IN FRACTIONS.
Adrian writes each of the fractions he describes on the large dry erase board.*

My great-grandmother, “Big Granny” . . .

IMAGE of Big Granny

who was full-blood Cherokee, put herself down on the tribal rolls as quarter-blood. “Why,” you ask? A little thing called the Dawes Act. Too much Indian blood and you were “incompetent.” It was “for your own good,” you know. And for a small fee off the top, the U. S. Government would keep your money for you, let you withdraw at *their* discretion, keep you from owning any significant plot of land, a dependable vehicle, etc.

(PAUSE)

Big Granny was married to an Irishman.

IMAGE: Irish Immigrant

They have Granny, who is officially 1/8th.

IMAGE: Granny

Then my father,

IMAGE: Dad

with a bit of odd governmental math is listed as 1/21st. Another off-kilter computation leaves me. . . somehow. . . with 1/42.333 or 3/128ths. That's my official Indian rating, my blood quantum. Not completely inappropriate when you consider that when the pilgrims landed, Native Americans boasted 500 independent nations and the run of 1, 905,000 000 acres of land. In 2005, those numbers are: 123 extant tribes and 92,000,000 acres of land. Those fractions, respectively, become. . . yep. . . 1/4 and 1/48. Now, my quantum is calculated solely through Granny's line. There's plenty more Cherokee out there that, because of adoption, name changes. . . family stuff. . . is not figured in. On the roll, somewhere, but not officially attached to me. Let's face it, I'm an actor. I'm not even going to attempt that kind of math.

(PAUSE)

After many seasons of introspection, study, through sacred reflection, a few powwows, and oddly enough, some Grateful Dead show,

IMAGE and low SOUND — a powwow bleeding into a Dead show and text from Sherman Alexie's The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven. "In the sixties, my father was the perfect hippy, because all the hippies were trying to be Indians."

As the songs play, Adrian begins dancing slowly, first a powwow dance, then doing a "hippie spin, and comes in hard with dialogue.

I realized what it was I really wanted. I wanted the old ways, the old times. Freedom from the capitalist, expansionist, colonial freak-fest that produces this sort of math! (*Points to boar*) Communitas with the spirits, the eagles, I wanted to call down the Grandfathers and take back the land. With this place, our place. I wanted my 100 percent because that's how I felt!

Adrian stops dancing. Looks forward as if in trance.

Of course, this opinion. . . no. . . this rabbit's vision came to me in increasingly authentic guises. . . academic, historical, artistic, spiritual, personal.

IMAGES : 1. Rainy Mountain, 2. Bury my Heart, 3. Great Spirit, 4. Adrian and father with flutes

Adrian walks slowly to the table and eventually sits.

Last year I spent Thanksgiving with an old friend from high school who just happened to be in the Dallas area. He's half-blood Choctaw. So there we were shootin' the breeze, catching up, talking about the formative years and identity crises. . .and then he finally tells me what I've kind of always wanted to hear.

During the last scene, Adrian plays both characters. Adrian, The Friend and Adrian-as-narrator distinguish themselves vocally and with point of focus.

"Well, I know you're Indian," he says.

"Really?"

"Oh yeah. Definitely In'din."

Adrian takes out his card, puts it on the table.

"Says right here I'm 3/128ths. But that's a lie."

"Oh yeah! I don't care what your certificate says. In your heart, where it matters, you're more In'din than me. And you know well as I do that the government's been lyin' to us since before it was a gov'ment. Things been goin' south ever since the Pinta and them showed up. And you're knowin' that just makes you In'din all the more.

(PAUSE)

Bet I know somethin' else, too. Betcha yer one of them injuns'd rather lived 300 years ago ain't ya?"

"Yes," I said. What I meant was "Are you kidding? Hell yes!"

Then he hits me with the undeniable truth. "Old days is gone. We're all mutts now. Mix and match! What are you, Cherokee?"

"Yeah. Tsalagi."

"Yeah, the nose, the temper. "Old days is LONG GONE for you. Your folks tried to make-um nice. Got civilized. . .got screwed anyhow. My people, too, dawg. Them crazy-ass Sioux, they tried to keep it real! Pine Ridge. . .Now they're worse off'n us. Old ways are deader than Crazy Horse, my-man. The Rez, Seminole, Dallas, man. . .it don't matter. Were all urbanized now. What do you do?"

There is a pause 100 years long.

Adrian picks up his flute.

IMAGE: Adrian and father with flutes.

Adrian plays a short tune, then lets the last note fade out with the image.

The romance fades.

“Well,” I finally say, “it’s Thanksgiving. What do we do?”

VOICE OVER (Friend): “Well I’m Indian. I drink.”

(LONG PAUSE)

“I’m German/Irish. So do I.”

Adrian opens a beer. Drinks.

As I throw back a beer, two, three, six, I swear I can hear it on the wind.

SOUND: Native American flute

Floating like smoke. Up the rivers, over trees, up to the grandfathers’ home. I hear my father, playin’ that flute.

LIGHTS fade on Adrian, beer in hand.