

# *Closet Chickenology*

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## *Closet Chickenology*

### CHAPTER ONE

#### The Closet Chickenologists

The Closet Chickens hatched on the internet during the late spring and early summer of 2001. Students of the ancient past and contemporary racial politics, the Chickens did archeology and thought about the way archeologists did archeology. And Chickenry self-identified, for the most part, as “Native American,” so it’s fair to say that we created ourselves in the image of race.

In our first thoughts as a group, in fact, it became clear that everyone expected to share a common path. We would be Indian archeologists in a white world.

But I didn’t share this vision of things. I had given up race. And suspecting that the Chickens might not share my view of things and decide to go on doing race, I wanted to at least hear some good reasons for doing it.

In late May 2001 I flew to Boston and took a shuttle up to Dartmouth College, where Joe Watkins and Deborah Nichols had organized a conference entitled “On the Threshold: Native American - Archaeologist Relations in the Twenty-First Century.” Joe had played a major role in fostering the presence of Indians in archeology during the 1990s. Now it was the beginning of a new millennium and Joe and Deborah thought it seemed useful to bring together these new Indian archeologists.

They invited me to give the opening plenary address – it was an honor even though I’d been dabbling with giving up racial Indianhood and I was an historian, not an archeologist. In hindsight, Joe himself would have been the most appropriate opening speaker, given his years in the profession and his leadership among Indians.

In the weeks that followed the end of the conference, Dorothy Lippert got in touch with everyone via group email. We enjoyed the contact and through June and the rest of the summer we continued our discussions, naming ourselves the Closet Chickens.

Davina Two Bears became the Keeper of the Coop, maintaining our formal origin story. Other founding Chickens included Janine Bowe chop, John Norder, Desireé Martínez, and Deborah Nichols. Richard Begay dropped out of the group as it got going, and Dean Suagee joined us. By the end of summer, Desireé had set us up as a Yahoo Group for easier communication.

In my early emails to the group during the summer of 2001 I brought up race as an issue, feeling that this topic lay at the heart of our deliberations and deserved

explicit attention. I'd been talking in a random way about race for maybe five years and I had arrived at certain inward destinations and knew where I stood by then, but I still didn't feel very sure of what it meant and what I ought to say about it. My efforts to explore race with others had proven somewhat disappointing. It surprised and dismayed people and made them feel awkward to discuss what it meant that race is not actually a biological reality.

"What are you saying, Roger?"

And I didn't know what I was saying but I nevertheless took it seriously. It seemed to mean something worth pondering. "We're doing race," I'd note in a thoughtful tone that came off sounding tricky to people, "Should we be doing it if it isn't real?" I'd say this to colleagues and relatives.

It seemed reasonable to me to question the doing of race, but my Indian relatives and my Indian colleagues didn't like it. Complicated reasons came into play, but essentially we had all grown up learning how to do race and learning how to sort out the most socially desirable ways it should be done from the less popular ways of doing it, and many of the people I talked to had become quite good at this and enjoyed doing it and planned to keep improving the ways racial Indianhood should be done until the very end.

Hearing me, people were polite but firm. And understandably, my comments occasionally drew forth strong feelings of defensive resentment. What I said about race sounded so outrageous to their sense of self that it couldn't possibly be real. Was I serious?

I thought I would get a better reception among Indians who were doing anthropology. As the coop got going in the summer of 2001 I had high hopes that the Closet Chickens would start talking about race and we'd compare notes. Together we would help Indians and archeologists figure out what it meant that race had been discredited as an explanation of human biological diversity. We would address the past, present, and future character of racial Indianhood. We wouldn't just be Indians; we would be Closet Chickens.

My first email on race was written circa June or July 2001. It set forth my position and called for dialogue:

Now that our secret society has been exposed, I am interested to hear your opinions on a topic I raised at the symposium. Anthropologists and historians have periodically raised various challenges to the idea of race as a construct, and this issue has become very prominent in recent years. To what degree is the concept of "Indian" / "Native American" a fabrication of racial ideology, rooted in false assumptions about biology? Isn't false biology inherently dehumanizing?

It's my view that this form of social identity is wholly dependent upon embracing racialism – the idea that people can be sorted out into races. If this

is accurate, shouldn't this false, dehumanizing construct be challenged and rejected. What would this mean in terms of our shared hope of getting archeology as a profession to be more inclusive of "Indians"? Having spent most of my life accepting the precepts of racialism, I don't have any clear idea as to what a post-race world would look like.

The idea of race helps us create a sense of identity rooted in heavily edited history, and this rudely shoves aside the historical processes that account for who we really are over time. So framing the issue as one of aiming at inclusion of "Indians" in scholarship is therefore as problematic as passively accepting that American scholarship should continue to be exclusively performed by non-Indians. For this reason, I wonder what Greasy Chicken is aiming at in advocating the need for an "indigenous" archeology. Does this rely wholly on embracing race? Or is it a way of making archeology more inclusive, more reflective of who we are as Americans? Or both? Is it possible to accommodate race without embracing it? What do you think, Chickens?

I truly expected some kind of dialogue, but the Chickens didn't respond with much enthusiasm. This is not entirely surprising since my challenge to race questioned the very foundation of their unifying identity as a group. The Chickens wanted the warmth of sharing ideas, finding friendship and mutual support. They wanted to bond through race; they didn't want to confront it. In the months that followed, Closet Chicken support for indulging and enacting racial Indianhood proved unwavering.

Mysteriously, no further discourse on the topic ensued among the Chickens. The silence was polite, and in terms of my high hopes, ominous. The Chickens needed time to sort out things. After all, I had taken several years to think about race and several more to get going on what it meant to reject it. I would be patient in the face of their polite silence. And I looked forward to hearing their ideas about what we should say to each other in the coop. Many interesting topics indeed arose, but my patience gradually turned into disappointment over the months that followed as it became clear that the coop would just get on with doing race.

I pondered what to do next. I felt an obligation as a scholar to keep raising the issue among my professional peers. Not to change minds, but to keep alive an issue that adherents to racial Indianhood elsewhere in the academy were ignoring.

So not long after our initial exchange, I resumed the thread in a second long email on race to the Closet Chickens, but even less discussion followed. The other Chickens declined to accept the challenge I raised in these early emails. It quickly became clear that everyone intended to proceed with race as the unifying agenda of the group. My comments jolted the coop but didn't derail anyone from race.

With our new internet connection, it became convenient to begin expanding the membership. While the other Chickens scratched about looking for Indians to

nominate in the fall of 2001, my first nominee was Chicken Nuggets. I wanted to know whether non-Indians would be welcome to join our deliberations. Nuggets was well-known in Indian country as a voice of reason among his colleagues in archeology, trying to encourage more sensitivity and communication between Indians and archeologists. If they didn't accept Chicken Nuggets as a Chicken, then no white archeologist would ever be truly welcome in the coop.

The Chickens readily agreed to admit Nuggets. Accepting him gave us a way to compromise. The enactment of racial Indianhood would proceed, but the Chickens wouldn't become a racist Indians-Only project.

As the beginning of the new century approached and appeared, I began trying to get my colleagues in the Native Arts Department at the Denver Art Museum to think about race. In early 2001, I took up the practice of circulating emails on the topic around to the curator of the department, Nancy Blomberg, and our other three colleagues, and I included some of the Chicken chatter on race.

It had been my hope that the Chickens would help me with race, and we'd look for new ideas and ways to proceed. And this would aid me in dealing with my colleagues at the Denver Art Museum. If the Closet Chickens got going on race, and if the Denver Art Museum would join us... we would... well, this prospect gave me something exciting to imagine and each day the possibilities seemed even vaster than the day before. We would... we would – of course we would! Even if I didn't yet know what this meant.

But the Chickens shied away from the issue.

I wondered what this meant.

Okay. Surely my anthropologist DAM colleagues would prove willing to sort out this issue with me. We could gradually build our own little network of supportive colleagues. Together we would struggle with race. Maybe we'd have to go ahead and keep doing race, but it would be a self-conscious enactment that would look for new angles and ask useful questions. I thought we could start with the name of our department, the Native Arts Department.

So later on that year in September 2001, on the day after 9/11, my colleagues at DAM met to consider race and our departmental identity. In a somber mood, I said that the issue of race deserved thorough acknowledgement and we needed a useful exchange of ideas. I didn't have answers; I hoped instead for dialogue.

It was a short meeting. Favoring the proposition that what we did as a department was "ethnicity" rather than "race," my co-workers refused to acknowledge that race had anything to do with our departmental identity. Nancy Blomberg seemed non-committal. But deferring to the will of the majority, she chose to do nothing. I had been out-voted. As the meeting drew to a close, it seemed to me that they stood up together and I marveled to see how I stood outside their circle.

By the beginning of fall 2001 as the leaves fell upon our various ideological positions in the Closet Chicken coop and in the Native Arts Department, it became clear that my efforts to talk about race had failed. No support materialized in favor of holding a serious dialogue about it. My views on race had been courteously rebuffed and every so often I wondered whether I should persevere. But I knew that the future of race was a matter that wouldn't go away, and over the year that followed I kept looking for occasions to bring it up among the Chickens and at DAM.

Speaking at a Chicken session on "indigenous archeology" at the spring 2002 annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, I discussed race. Later on in the session, Navajo Chick opened her presentation by observing that she had no idea how to respond to what she had heard. She seemed to understand that my challenge to race posed a profound problem for Chickens who intended to bond through racial Indianhood. Would the Chickens decline to bond as Indians, as Natives, as indigenous people?

Prior to the SAA meeting, I had talked to Nancy Blomberg at DAM about hosting some kind of Chicken event. Maybe a tour of the museum and its collections. Nancy said no, explaining that the museum was in the midst of a collections storage area reshuffling. Denying me a chance to host the Chickens, I couldn't very well fight for it. The Chickens didn't want to join me in rethinking race, and DAM had little reason to go out of its way for the coop.

By this time I had the distinct impression that Nancy had come to view me as a dubious contributor to the department. My work on NAGPRA was thorough and conscientious, but as an assistant curator my interests weren't very traditional. Looking for ways to confront our departmental mission of enacting bioracial Indianhood, I often wondered, for example, whether we should collect German-made "Indian" artworks. This seemed logical enough if we were truly bent on viewing Indian identity as pure ethnicity free of biological authenticity tests. But this suggestion of going so far as to actually treat Indianness as a non-biological cultural construction only served to further alienate my colleagues.

It seemed obvious to me that we were doing race as a department, and I suspected that we were now moving toward doing it as a covert operation under the cover of ethnicity. There didn't seem to be any desire to seek other options. Aiming at challenging race, my departmental input necessarily came to be seen as very problematic.

At DAM I joined a special committee formed to envision the development of new exhibit spaces for the Native Arts Department, and I made a determined pitch for re-conceptualizing our departmental acceptance of race. This led to some lively discussions. But it gradually became clear that no one knew what to do and no one felt particularly motivated to figure things out. Nancy Blomberg and Melora McDermott-Lewis, the head of the Education Department, soon drew together in

unified resistance to my pressure, patiently turning aside all my ideas on race. By the fall of 2002, an impasse evolved as I persisted in suggesting that we do something and they quietly listened.

Finally one morning in December 2002 Nancy stopped into my office to inform me that Dan Kohl, the museum administrator in charge of the committee, didn't wish to go to bat for my ideas with DAM administrators and the Board. Dan, Nancy, and Melora were a good team and worked well together. With my radical notion of challenging race, I didn't fit. Thinking back now, our differences of opinion were sharp but respectful.

To be sure, my observations about race had daunting implications. Would anyone at the Denver Art Museum support making big changes in the way we did race? Could the museum initiate meaningful change and still keep the good will of its racialized constituents? I was alone in wanting to find answers to these interesting questions. Nancy's news about Dan Kohl made it difficult for me to see how I could contribute to the departmental program.

With the end of that millennium and the beginning of the next thousand years, it seemed like a good time for everyone to rethink old assumptions, but in the early years of that propitious time, nothing changed with regard to race. Everyone I knew would go on doing it. In fact, the Closet Chickens and my department at the Denver Art Museum all came to share a single mind on the issue of race.

It wasn't an issue that people wanted to dwell on. No one particularly wanted to have the racial basis of their lives confronted. It was more convenient to simply keep perpetuating racialism than to consider ways to defuse it. Anyway, many other important matters needed attention.

I sensed a certain amount of milling about as if people might be taking sides, but everyone just needed time to sort out how they felt about my comments. In the end, during those days at the beginning of the new era to come, none of my colleagues decided that they shared my concerns. Little productive dialogue ensued. After that, continuing my efforts to keep the challenge to race alive served merely to harden opposition to my notions.

I had confronted race and had been defeated.

When the holidays ended, in January 2003 I submitted my resignation from my job as an assistant curator at the Denver Art Museum. I didn't relish the thought of looking on, ignored, while the museum built new exhibits around the old idea of race. I would give thought on my own time to what I should say about race and what should happen next.

*Closet Chickenology*

CHAPTER TWO

Wouldn't We Wouldn't We Wouldn't

In the fourth year of the third millennium of the Common Era, I made astonishing progress in spreading the news about race, but the year didn't begin very well. On the first day of that year the first thing I did was to send an email to the Closet Chickens with an attachment that talked about race. And somehow, for reasons that aren't clear, this move had the effect of completely shutting down some very exciting chatter in the coop about an idea proposed by Chicken Noodle.

Not long before the winter solstice of the third year of the third millennium, she had suggested launching a new professional organization for Indian archeologists. Hearing the idea, the Chickens had chattered excitedly, and they all had things to say. I collected the excitement and put it into a document for easy reference, thinking it would be a convenient resource as the coop made itself into something else.

I'd been silent during the chatter, thinking about what kind of role my thinking on race should play. I finally decided that I'd make a pitch to have the new organization put race on its official agenda in some form. Maybe they'd do a website and invite me to help shape a component on race.

They'd at least do that, wouldn't they?

Instead, Chicken Noodle's dream died suddenly in the January 2004 snows. I felt like maybe I'd taken an axe and chopped its head off. There might have been a few more flaps and maybe some scurrying in the snow before the dream keeled over and the snow buried it forever. I hadn't intended for that to happen. But in any case, Noodle's suggestion didn't go anywhere after that.

So in the first cold winter months of the year, my oldest brother, a lawyer at the Native American Rights Fund, sent an email to me, Suzan Harjo, Tex Hall, and James Riding In. Did anyone have useful ideas on what to do in response to the Kennewick Man court decision? This court decision gutted the consultation provisions of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, dismissed oral traditions on the basis of a selectively slanted ultra-conservative analysis, and made it impossible for ancient human remains to be classified as "Native American."

I explained to my brother that I was opposed to bestowing race upon Kennewick Man and his peers, but that the National Park Service cultural affiliation findings for Kennewick Man were flawed because they ignored readily available

information that I had published in 2000. They'd used my publication, but they had ignored what it meant. I had made a case for ancient connections of my Caddoan ancestors to Kennewick Man.

In the parlance of NAGPRA, Kennewick Man has a likely cultural affiliation with the Pawnee Nation. As he had done on several previous occasions, my brother expressed mild curiosity about my findings and very politely thanked me for my input.

Months later I learned that NARF had decided to take on Suzan Harjo, James Riding In, and several others as clients. This group soon led the way in pushing Congress to amend NAGPRA with an "or was" to ensure that the racial definition for "Native American" would apply to ancient human remains.

This choice of strategy offered itself as a practical course of action. But from my perspective, it also served as a reminder that even though the ideology of race originated as an import from colonialist Europe, racial Indianhood is nevertheless treated as indispensably indigenous to America.

I had once been an Indian and I understood the attraction and power of the bond of racial Indianhood. What was I now?

Well, I'd given up race, but I hadn't given up being a Pawnee. I was still a Pawnee, wasn't I? Thinking about this question, I knew that the Pawnees today believe in race and see themselves not just as Pawnees, but as Pawnee Indians. And as an historian I also knew that this hadn't always been the case.

Race had come among my Pawnee ancestors and had convinced them to become Indians. Race didn't ever encourage them to ever think of this as optional. Instead, race told the Pawnees that it was an inflexible authoritarian law of nature. I inherited this idea as part of the tradition of being Pawnee, a tradition handed down from my Pawnee ancestors. We are Pawnees – Pawnee Indians.

And in the spring of 2004 the Field Museum of Natural History contacted me for advice about their Pawnee earthlodge lecture program. The head of the anthropology department wanted to kill the lecture – he had an axe in his hand and was ready to chop off its head when they called me. The earthlodge lecture program was very popular with the public and the Education Department preferred to keep it alive.

Would this be a good place to talk about race? I decided to find out.

I wrote up a detailed outline that looked at Pawnee history and the development of racial identity. I emailed it to the anthropologist they'd hired to develop a new program. I said to myself: they're an anthropology museum; surely they're already doing something on race. Talking to a group of staff on the phone, I explained the project. I thought I did a pretty good job.

But they didn't like it. It seemed too complicated. They would instead rely on Martha Blaine's books on Pawnee history for material. If you ever visit this famous

anthropology museum, if they happen to be doing something interesting on the topic of race, they're probably not doing it in their Pawnee earthlodge.

That year wore on. Spring gradually gave way to summer. My oldest brother's oldest son got married. Summer deepened. And in mid-August I attended Wayne and Laurie Moore's 2004 Summer Party.

I've known Wayne since we met as students in the creative writing program at the University of Colorado in 1975. I've kept in touch with Wayne over the years since then, and after the beginning of the new millennium Wayne and Laurie began holding an annual summer party at their home in the country not far from Haystack Mountain in Boulder County.

Sitting on their patio in August 2004, I had a chat on race with one of my most important mentors, Jenny Dorn. Jenny has been publishing my work since the early 1980s, encouraging me to write and be a writer, so I have treasured her friendship for years even when we haven't kept in touch. Her dead husband, Ed Dorn, had been a leading literary light upon the Boulder scene, a respected author of both epic lyrical poems and verse concisions. I had stood nearby during the 1980s as the two of them and their many friends assembled *Rolling Stock* and published my work.

So Jenny listened very patiently to the things I said about race. When I finished she had a thoughtful look in her eyes. Conceding that I might indeed have a good point, Jenny nevertheless suspected that endorsing my views would threaten her husband's legacy. Ed had written very movingly about Indians and white people.

I had put her in a rather awkward position by advocating a viewpoint that might well have the effect of making her husband's lifelong labors appear somewhat anachronistic. It seemed polite to let the matter drop.

A short time later I found myself repeating my standard conversation on race with my old creative writing professor, Peter Michelson – another editor of *Rolling Stock* – and his girlfriend, Judith Aplon. Much to my amazement, they both grasped very quickly my point about race not being a valid concept. Rather than debating the issue in a contentious way, a lively discussion followed. They seemed unconscious of how unusual their response to me might be in the world.

Peter encouraged me to get moving on writing something about this.

“Get moving on a fucking book, Roger!” he advised.

After the party, I began writing short vignettes on my experiences with the issue of race. I wrote three or four of these things over the next few weeks and this material grew into a booklet and then into a whole fucking book on race called *The Magic Children*. I got the title of this book from a little story I published in Jenny Dorn's 2004 issue of *Square One*. And I feel a sense of warmth from the fact that this story tells of something that happened in my life long ago when I lived with my oldest brother and his family, back when I was an Indian. I treasure the warmth we had then as a family.

At the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the next millennium, members of my family and Jenny Dorn and the Closet Chickens and many other people whom I love and respect heard my views on race and chose to continue doing it. Their choice was without rancor; none of them wished me any ill-will; they would simply stick with race.

As they saw it, race might not be real biologically, but perhaps nothing should change culturally. The truths of race seemed irrelevant to the reality of its practice. But more importantly, I saw that the reasons for doing race were diverse and strongly held – racial identity gets wielded in the world like a precious natural resource, even if it isn't natural. Letting go of race wouldn't ever be a simple matter of one day making a decision. Rather than aim at somehow changing people's hearts, it seemed more realistic to aim at giving everyone a choice.

That year as 2004 proceeded through winter, then spring, and on toward the end of summer, I often gave thought to the Closet Chickens. While experimenting with vignettes on race, I thought it might be useful to follow this same model in my emails to the Chickens, creating what would be essentially a sporadic column on race. In the coop I would figure out how to talk about race.

In early September 2004, Chicken Noodle circulated a newspaper report that referred to the Kennewick Man situation and the study of ancient skulls. The Chickens responded in their usual way, talking as if race were something real, something they intended to perpetuate. I couldn't keep silent. On September 7, I sent an email that challenged race – would this prove to be another commentary they could dismiss?

But something was in the air. Checking my emails on September 9, a number of Chickens had responded. Chicken Nuggets, Cackle Hu-Yolk, and Chicken Claws all chimed in with emails that expressed support for developing a critical perspective on race. This was the first time the Chickens as a group had responded with open sympathy for my views on race.

Cackle soon came up with a plan to publish a group of papers as a special issue in the *American Indian Quarterly*, and Nuggets volunteered to write up something based on our email exchange. He asked for my help and I agreed. Long ago at the end of the 1980s I had once-upon-a-time asked for his help and he had immediately agreed. And that had been during a time when few others in American archeology would help me do the things I thought I needed to be done.

If Chicken Nuggets wanted me to help him, of course I'd help.

On the first day of 2005 I received the first draft of the paper and we launched into preparation of "Beyond Racism: Some Opinions about Racialism and American Archaeology." Seeking to update and contextualize familiar discourse on racial Indian people versus racial white people – now repositioned under the terminological rubric of "Indigenous peoples" versus "Western" colonialism – Cackle Hu-Yolk designed the

special issue to focus on the idea of decolonizing archeology. “Beyond Racism” would appear near the end. It suggested that we needed to move beyond challenging racism into challenging race itself.

In the end, I felt very pleased with the fourth year of the third millennium. With the sound of Peter Michelson’s enthusiastic encouragement echoing in my ears, I’d begun writing what ultimately became a whole fucking book on the topic of race.

And I kept hearing in my head how Chicken Nuggets had spoken out in support of my views. And with his help we’d had a major conversation among the Closet Chickens about race, and Nuggets and I had consequently written a solid paper on the topic, and maybe this would be the beginning of something new and good in our little coop. Now we would talk about race in a more complicated way and we would compare notes and share our experiences and together we would develop a useful analysis of race.

And as we Chickens would help each other figure out race, together we would help change the way everyone looks at race. Together we would ponder the future of race here at the dawn of the new millennium, wouldn’t we?

Wouldn’t we?

*Closet Chickenology*

CHAPTER THREE

Hello Chanticlerics of Featheredness

Several of you must already have your copies, but the rest of you may be interested to hear of the release of *Native Americans Voices on Identity, Art, & Culture: Objects of Everlasting Desire* (2005) edited by Lucy Fowler Williams, William Wierzbowski, & Robert Preucel. It's published by the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and features photos of 78 objects from the museum collection together with commentaries by 58 Native Americans and me. This includes several Chickens.

The book features two vignettes by Destiny's Chicken. Her first contribution is a warmly personal contemplation of three necklaces and an abalone shell. It's always interesting to glimpse the private meanings inspired by things we encounter in the course of our lives, and Destiny's Chicken has very kindly invited us to visit her world in this piece.

Her second commentary considers a basket made by Ramona Lubo and touches on the literary Ramona and historical Ramona and subsequent Ramona tourism. Destiny's Chicken shows us how the basket "speaks on many levels." History is nothing if not mythic, hyper-real, surreal – utterly complex.

The editors' guidelines to the authors were very general, so there's an interesting mix of poetry, meditative reverie, storytelling, and art historical analysis. It's fun to just flip through and admire the objects and read the brief commentaries, but one overriding fact is abundantly clear: race pervades this book.

Race powerfully shapes what we choose to say to one another in our racialized world, and the sayings of race give rise to projects like this book. It follows that most of the writings in this book conform to the familiar storytellings of race.

Vanishing Chicken's contribution, for example, resonates with the story of race and is only vaguely rooted in the details of history. In his commentary, he analyzes a Lakota headdress and diagnoses its historical condition as one of "Schizophrenia on the Frontier."

He suggests that this headdress, taken from the body of a slain Teton Lakota in 1876, can usefully symbolize US programmatic aggression toward the Lakota versus programmatic preservation of cultural icons. Vanishing Chicken sees in the

headdress “a story of persistence and perseverance.” This is an interesting perspective, but I’m not completely agreeable with his choice of thesis here.

The headdress was probably looted during the campaigns of late 1876 when Lakota, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Shoshone, and other scouts served in alliance with the US military. My great-grandfather served as a Pawnee Scout during this campaign. According to family tradition, he enlisted under the authority of Pawnee leadership to get revenge for relatives slain by the Sioux at Massacre Canyon in 1873. Wounded Knee and Sand Creek are often cited as evidence for American genocidal mania, but what does the forgotten story of Massacre Canyon signify? My grandmother’s grandfather and a delegation of Pawnee leaders were in Sioux country at the time, seeking to arrange an end to decades of sporadic war with the Sioux when they received sad news of the horrific slaughter of Pawnee hunters and their families at Massacre Canyon.

The decades-long aggression of the Sioux against the Pawnee people can only be very awkwardly reconciled to the whites-versus-Indians story told by race. And the formal alliance of tribes with the US in late 1876 doesn’t much advance the racial model of Indians-versus-whites mythology that too often passes for history in our racialized world. History is nothing if not utterly complex.

Greasy Chicken comments on a set of Clovis and Folsom points and I’m interested in his suggestion of defining “American Indians” as tied to this land by the time of “the second generation, those born here[.]” I’m very sympathetic to this argument because it seems non-racial in its outcome – whether or not he intends this result. I hear the term “indigenous” being used by Chickenry and others frequently, but its usage is typically anchored into the meanings and intentions of race.

To be sure, this is a book that believes in race. It comfortably accommodates the assumptions of race – in fact, it unquestioningly hands race along as though our present racialized world will just continue unchanged into the foreseeable future. The story told is that there really is such a thing as a racial “Native American” and we all know who they are – race is something in the blood, like a mineral. Referring to this natural order of things, we can therefore arrange our storytelling according to the accepted imperatives of race.

Mateo Romero has contributed a marvelous short short story on this topic as he contemplates a Zia painting. The story is beautifully written, and it evokes very effectively the common narrative of race told throughout Indian country. An evil type of human engages in theft, lies, kidnapping, and extortion, while we are invited to contemplate an idyllic harvest scene in the painting. Romero is explicit in his message: “Everything has turned to shit since the coming of the Clanking Metal People.” And there’s a wonderfully poetic ending with the death of the oppressed protagonist’s infant: “Who will bury Moonlight Woman’s daughter, with her eyes of fire?”

Romero is an artist of some note himself, deeply committed to political and cultural causes, and this is a well-written, fascinating little story. I wish I had his skillful and haunting way with words and imagery and narrative. I wish I had eyes of fire, but they're more like a couple of reddish tail-lights hanging off the end of a clanking metal machine.

If you have a chance to look at the book, I'm sure you'll find your own favorites among the many beautiful objects and beautifully written commentaries. Whatever truths and artifacts and stories we fill our lives with, at this moment I like this book and its unexpected beautiful moments. But it's a defeat, a disappointment. This book is filled with the predictable sayings of race and at this moment I don't much like it.

What will we find when we move on to the next page, the next version of the world, anyway? Things are always so complex like this....

CHAPTER FOUR

Is Race Good?

Chicken Noodle, I understand your impulse to joke about my approach to race. And I appreciate your effort to find a candid yet inoffensive way to respond to views that must be offensive to you.

Looking around the coop, I sometimes get the feeling that I don't really fit in, though you and the others have been very accommodating. Perhaps I'm less of a Chicken and more of an Ugly Duckling!

Most people, when pressed, want to see race as a good thing because it's so powerfully present in their lives and holds such compelling personal meaning. Why confront or give up a good thing? But most people don't know that race is, in reality, simply an optional cultural choice rather than an inherent biological condition. What would these unsuspecting victims of race do, if given a conscious, truly informed choice on the matter? Whatever the answer, I think people deserve a chance to make their own decisions.

This may or may not be an interesting question for Chickenry, but it seems useful to raise a related and more pertinent set of questions: Is race a good thing for archeology? Isn't there some kind of ethical dilemma involved in just accepting race as an unchallenged foundation for constructing archeological scholarship? As a matter of morality, knowing race is a cultural choice rather than an unshakable biological imperative, surely we must weigh in our hearts whether we believe it's something that makes our world a better place.

I can think of no good reason to perpetuate something that distorts the nature of our humanity. Indulging in a vast fib, even if you think of it as a little white lie, can't be good for archeology or scholarship of any kind. Other points of view on this issue no doubt exist – what are they? If Chickendom doesn't take this seriously as a relevant matter for anthropological archeology, who will?

When people know the choice to be made and choose to go on doing race, I suspect it's because they wisely grasp the fact that our world isn't ready to really let people choose. Race is too powerful; it can't be denied its place of preeminence in our lives.

Delphine Red Shirt published a comment in the *American Indian Quarterly* in which she complained of her treatment at the hands of *Indian Country Today* and then observed in essence: Who would dare to give up practicing race? Not me, she declared. This outcome implies that we have no choice but to go on doing what we do when we employ scholarship as a way to enliven the visible and invisible assumptions of race.

I think there is an alternative – an ultimate punchline to the dizzy practical joke that race pulls on our humanity. This alternative is to talk about the meaning of race in our lives, to encourage a range of discourse, and to create the explicit possibility of genuinely optional choices for people – at least, there should be an alternative of this sort.

If Delphine Red Shirt doesn't feel it's rational to think of eluding the clutches of race, perhaps she is right to feel cynicism on this point so long as academic intellectuals like the Closet Chickens find efforts like mine to be tiresome and hardly worth the effort of even bothering to come up with a good joke at my expense.

No doubt most of the people we love in the world are unaware of the choice to be made about race and their plan is to just pass race along intact into the future and.... And in time some people might well appreciate knowing that there is an alternative to the terribly fun hilarity of race.

It may be arguably presumptuous of me to assume that Chickenry as a group has a special obligation to give people this power to choose. But I believe that archeology should be anthropological, and it should be attentive to complex cultural and historical circumstances – this is, after all, the inherent ethos of groups like the World Archaeological Congress and laws like the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. This assumption, anyway, is what drives me to sweeten or sour the coop's soup with emails like this one, Chicken Noodle....

Sweet & Sour Ugly Duckling

## *Closet Chickenology*

### CHAPTER FIVE

#### Through Vine's Looking Glass, Darkly

Visiting my nephew's house one day, I noticed he had painted a small portrait of Vine Deloria Jr and had hung it in his dining room. Vine's smile beamed warm colors down into the room, a cheerful air. I paused to study the face in the picture. At my elbow my nephew spoke softly. Vine Deloria deserves honor among Indians, said my nephew. And this painting will appear in a magazine soon, he said, a special issue honoring Deloria.

That's cool, I said to him. And I meant it. I felt pleased with my nephew's success as an artist.

Vine Deloria Jr was a major figure – a giant – in the doings of 20<sup>th</sup> century racial Indianhood. At his death in the fall of 2005 he received many glowing tributes from racial Indians and others – tributes that remarked on his quite remarkable influence and stature in Indian country. My nephew's warm portrait echoed these warm sentiments. Vine would be missed among all the Indians in Indian country.

As I looked from the painting to my nephew, I could see in his eyes his sincere appreciation for Deloria. Painting this portrait with his heart, it was his way of acknowledging and honoring a real giant in the production of late 20<sup>th</sup> century racial Indianhood.

My own feelings were... well, I had never really sat down to sort out in any systematic way how I felt about Vine Deloria. Maybe because it wasn't very pleasant the way things had gone between the two of us all those years ago. It wasn't actually all that long ago in reality, but it seems like another lifetime to me. Back when I was an Indian. Back when I believed in race and it believed in me.

When Vine Deloria died all the Closet Chickens took note, and a flurry of notices scrawled across the list. I sent in several links. A tribute by Rick Williams, a comment by Phil Deloria. The chatter was solemn and respectful. The Chickens respected Vine. He had inspired many members of the coop.

Back in the early 1990s Rick and I had been students at the University of Colorado. Rick's warmth and interest in people was genuine, and he got along very well with Vine. And in 1994 Vine's son Phil had come to the history department at CU and I shifted from working with Vine to working with Phil in my final days as a

graduate student. Phil was a pleasure to study with. Thoughtful, diplomatic, very helpful and encouraging.

I was pleased to pass along to the coop the thoughts of Phil and Rick, Vine's son and a close friend. I kept my own thoughts to myself.

But when one of the Chickens made a negative comment about a critic of Deloria, I thought I might say something. Maybe I'd try to figure out how I felt about what happened all those years ago in another lifetime when I was an Indian and when I knew Vine Deloria. What did all that mean?

When Vine first appeared at the University of Colorado in the early 1990s, the history department put him in charge of my upcoming master's program as my advisor and the chair of my thesis committee. I met with him in the year or so before I started.

By the time I started my new academic program at CU, I'd already encountered a lot of hostility from various Indian intellectuals for my ideas about archeology. I had the hope that Vine would become interested in my work and that his support would open minds – minds that thought well of him and would no doubt listen to what he might say about my work. I felt confident. I looked forward to winning his support. My logic seemed clear and strong and surely Vine would see that. Together we'd find things to talk about and he would help me in my work.

Some archeologists had already utterly dismissed my work on oral traditions and some Indians had denounced me for relying on archeology. But I wasn't worried. Now with Vine's help things would change. My work had first taken shape in the course of doing pre-NAGPRA repatriation research. I couldn't very well be dismissed by Vine as a wannabe archeologist, a sellout to white archeology, could I?

In my first meeting with Vine, I had lunch with him and several professors from the CU department of history. Vine spoke of his interest in "geomythology." It sounded promising. Maybe we'd have some common interests, something with which we could build a good working relationship. I had many research ideas and things I wanted to look at for my thesis on origin stories. Now I spent many hours excitedly thinking that with Vine's help I would show everyone how archeological scholarship and the study of oral traditions could be performed together. From such materials, I would invent "ancient Indian history." Maybe Vine would get excited about it too. Maybe he'd be a big help.

Getting wind of my notions over time, Vine wanted to know where I might be going with all this. In our first discussions, it became immediately clear to me that he didn't share my enthusiasm. When I'd mention an idea, he'd frown and tell me where he thought I should go with it, or he'd lecture at length, dwelling on all the stuff I probably didn't know and needed to know. He had a definite vision of the way things should be done, a vision crafted in the course of his long advocacy for empowering racial Indianhood.

It's good to learn about things you don't know, but the things he thought I should know didn't seem very helpful to me. He warned me, for example, that I would be aiding and abetting the cultural enemies of Indian country, the ones who had bedeviled his thinking for many years since the 1970s and before. The Wounded Knee trials came up several times as he harangued against my approach to archeology. I would be helping his long-fought enemies, he said to me. Indians should do battle with white archeology and deter the anti-Indian doings of white archeologists. To buy into archeology would be seriously detrimental to my career. He said many such things to me, all expressing his disappointment with my thinking.

Okay, I wouldn't get his help. Declining to help me do my scholarship, would he actively oppose me? Could I still do what I thought I needed to do?

One incident made me wary. Working out my ideas about the significance of the theme of darkness in stories of dark underworlds was a crucial component of my analysis, pointing, I thought, to very ancient historical events in origin stories. I thought I saw history where others saw metaphor and myth. It meant that – as I saw it then – Indian origin stories held glimpses of history going back millennia. Standing in his office one day, Vine pressed me to articulate what I thought the theme of darkness meant. I knew it would be touchy because my historical interpretation of the theme pointed to an association with the Arctic Circle and the Bering Strait.

Vine was horrified. He explained that I'd be making a big mistake. Indians wouldn't sit still for it, and even academics would, he predicted, come to reject the whole Bering Strait thing within the next ten years anyway. He couldn't in good conscience help me go down that path, the wrong track.

Then he shared with me some of his own ideas. He suggested that I should study more esoteric ideologies. He pondered the possibility that maybe people came to the Americas through a realm of darkness, but via UFOs, maybe even coming from some other star system. He urged me to consider studying this alternative to the Bering Strait. I needed to cull through the so-called fringe literature for the really important obscure truths, he said. Now this, Roger, would be a courageous thing to do, he said.

His response disappointed me greatly. We both felt very disappointed, wary. It wasn't easy to communicate after that.

Responding to my early thesis drafts, Vine urged me to narrow my focus. He didn't think I was qualified to talk about religion, repatriation, science – many things. I was too ambitious. As he put it: "Roger, to convince the skeptics, you need to concentrate on just one topic out of the many you've outlined. You must become a total expert on it. You'll need to spend maybe ten years thinking about just one thing! That's how you'll succeed at this." This was not an outrageous suggestion, certainly, but I had a lot of ideas I wanted to talk about in my thesis.

Toward the end of our time together, it became clear that Vine didn't like my choice of one of my thesis committee members. An archeologist. The single occasion

when I got everyone together for a meeting, Vine sat there in thunderous silence as I talked. Sensing his mood, I mentioned a certain mysterious spiritual experience I'd had in the mid-1970s and wondered whether it might be related to my present work, but this didn't soften his ever-darkening visage.

Finally he interrupted. He had something he wanted to say. He turned to the archeologist sitting next to him, and, looming over the poor fellow in a threatening way, proceeded to bomb him into the stone age. Vine suspected that the archeologist had something to do with my warped unIndian thinking. Finishing his tirade, Vine declared, "I've had enough of this; you guys go on without me!" He shoved away from the table angrily and stalked from the room.

Thinking back, that might have been the last time I ever saw Vine. The message seemed clear enough. I talked to another committee member about replacing him. Would such a thing be possible? It turned out that when she checked with Vine, he had suddenly become too busy with other commitments to continue with my thesis committee.

I went on to complete my thesis at the end of 1994, working with Phil Deloria. It's on origin stories and the anthropology of Indian origins, and I'm proud of that work. In recognition of my work on oral traditions and archeology, CU awarded me a master's degree in history with an emphasis in ancient Indian history. So far as I know, no one else in this star system or any other has ever gotten such a degree.

Vine made reference once to a book he planned to write someday. This happened in a class he was teaching. He gave a brief speech. He would drive a stake through many ridiculous archeological theories, he vowed. This vague comment was the only time he ever mentioned in my presence that he was at work on what would become *Red Earth, White Lies*.

At the end of 1995 or early 1996 I came across *Red Earth, White Lies* in a bookstore. Reading it, I felt sad. It seemed to me that Vine had treated my thesis research as raw material.

I guess he always did feel that I wasn't doing justice to those Indian oral traditions. Now in this book he took care to show everyone how those oral traditions ought to be properly viewed. My way of thinking about ancient history stood in complete opposition to his view of the Indian past. Why had I ever thought to sway him? It seemed a naive notion.

Reading the book later, it had some interesting stuff in it, very thoughtful and beautifully written. But overall I'm glad he didn't acknowledge me in any way. He took the material I'd been looking at and he had his own things to say about it. It didn't sound like me at all.

In this book, Vine articulated a powerful message for faithful practitioners of racial Indianhood, a message to all Indian country. The idea of being Indian held a central place in Vine's thinking. He thought long and deeply on racial Indianhood –

what it should do in the world, what it should think, what it should look like. *Red Earth, White Lies* speaks his mind on such matters. Treating origin stories as received wisdom – while borrowing from science in a highly selective way – constituted a fundamental statement of racial allegiance. Red Pride guided what adherents to racial Indianhood should make of their origin stories.

Seeing the Chicken chatter about Vine and their heartfelt gratitude and warm acknowledgement, I saw how Vine Deloria had an influential place in the coop. An inspiration he was, a guiding thinker. On his path they traveled, the Closet Chickens. He was gone now, but they would keep going.

The Chickens didn't seem to know how Vine really felt. As evidence of this, the Chickens had been willing to listen to me. Vine hadn't been willing. To be sure, it wasn't as if the Chickens were willing to go with me down my path very much farther than Vine had been willing to go, but they were polite about it. Vine had limits to his patience with me. Some of the Chickens wanted to hear what I had to say; Vine had no reason to bother with me.

Surely Vine wouldn't have wanted to serve as the intellectual inspiration for the Closet Chickens, a Great Red Rooster. I felt sure of this. He wouldn't want such credit. In fact, he would shove away from that table angrily and stalk out of such a horribly offensive chatroom.

Wouldn't he?

Thinking this, I mulled over what it meant. I had failed to find a way to win Vine's good will, his support all those years ago. Reading *Red Earth, White Lies*, I thought the book positioned itself to advance the cause of Indian anti-science anti-archeology intellectualism and Indian race-based cultural separatism.

As I see it, in fact, following Vine's leadership the politics of racial polarity has continued to dominate discourse among Indians about archeology. He succeeded in passing along his vision of that world to the next generation of Indians in Indian country. He had an opportunity to help change things, to seek the kind of partnership and mutual respect that I espoused in my work, but he thought it wise to reject this approach.

It's true, however, that Vine might well have been willing to bestow his blessing on Cackle Hu-Yolk's paradigm of "decolonizing archeology." Particularly if those words mean showing white non-indigenous archeos to the door and replacing them with red indigenous... well, not red indigenous archeos, but red indigenous academics of some kind.

The idea of decolonizing archeology might appeal to him, but it seems more likely to me that Vine would have regarded Chickenry with a sense of dismay, if not outright horror. A dedicated and passionate advocate of anti-colonial pro-Indian ultra-tribal-indigenous-nationalism, Vine was an Indian super-patriot. In his

separatist vision of racial Indianism, Indians could bond through opposition to the white intellectual super-structures of colonialist archeology.

This doesn't leave much room for partnership between red Indians and white archeology. I got the feeling that a majority of Chickens thought they could follow Vine's leadership and yet somehow see themselves as promoting partnership between Indian country and archeology. However much Chickenry might appreciate Vine Deloria, I felt pretty certain that Vine would not have reciprocated. He'd surely feel very cool, if not downright chilly, toward the coop. And he for sure wouldn't stand still for being dubbed the Great Red Rooster of Chickendom.

Thinking of all the things I felt about Vine Deloria, we might arguably seek to sort out the personal from the professional. At a personal level it was certainly difficult for me to feel very much gratitude. He had lumped me in among his enemies. He didn't want to work with me. At a professional level, Vine's opposition wasn't informative in any usefully critical way. In my acceptance of the basic logic of doing archeological scholarship, he thought I had sold out to the sworn enemies of racial Indianhood.

In his mind, such situations might summon forth a certain amount of useful critical analysis, but he didn't shy away from opportunities for witty name-calling and clever racial smearing. Oddly enough, I understand this response. Objective scholarship and liberal courtesy in advancing professional debate are laudable standards even though dispassionate research is never done just with the mind – it is invariably done the way we do things with our hearts. But personal attacks are not deployed for the purpose of contributing to useful criticism. Instead, they have functional usage in shaping the politics that embed the production of scholarship.

In challenging race with my mind and heart, I always understand that I challenge the way people do race with their minds and hearts. This must always be kept in mind when we consider what kind of dialogue to have about race.

It's interesting to think about Vine's view of me and my professional aspirations now that I have given up race. Now that I oppose the very practice of racial Indianhood.

Maybe Vine had the gist of it after all, a foretelling of my future state of mind. To some degree, it is arguable that he saw in me someone who didn't feel much enthusiasm for the agenda of racial loyalty, of loyalty to the racial agenda of Red Pride. Fair enough. I don't support the idea of taking pride in racial loyalty. It's a racist thing to do.

I'd go farther. I think the whole idea of doing race the way Vine did it – and the way we all grew up doing it – is a bad idea.

Most people seem to think race can be benign, or even a good thing to do. Maybe we can change from treating race as biological to treating it as cultural. Maybe. I listen carefully when I sense that people are trying to make these points. So

far I'm unconvinced. Since racialism in all its forms distorts the nature of our humanity, race is inherently objectionable. At its best it is merely less repugnant than racism, its truly repugnant offspring.

Even so, seeing how racialists do bioracialism today, I can't really picture those same people doing race as pure culture. Racial Indianhood yields up a ready source of social power only so long as it is treated as if it tells an exclusive biological truth, a truth limited to people with putative "Indian blood."

But we should have choices. We should have the choice of doing race as culture and the choice of forgoing race in its entirety. And some people, no matter what happens, will never let go of treating race as a biological reality. When we do whatever comes next in this story, we must find ways to wish one another well, because it won't be easy for any of us. Some of us will feel alone. Afraid. Uncertain of our certainties.

A vast social reality stands up in our midst, in our world. The culture of race sustains this reality, the way we do things with our hearts and our minds.

Race is everywhere in our way of life. That's certain.

And Vine Deloria stands up at the pinnacle of the historical ideology of racial Indianhood. He stands for doing race and for handing it on intact. He devoted his life to this proposition.

I reject this agenda. Race is not a good thing. I want to be polite about it, but in the end I push my chair away from that table; I don't want a seat at that table anymore. You must go on with your meeting without me.

It isn't easy to sort out such things, I know. Yet it seems important.

It is certainly fitting to honor the accomplishments of our predecessors, and I agree with my nephew: Vine Deloria Jr's achievements deserve respect. But we are nevertheless free to raise issues that challenge the world as we know it, and to question the social realities that stand up in our midst.

What do you think, Chickens? When you look at portraits of Vine Deloria, your fabled Great Red Rooster of Chickendom... when you study the way his smile beams its colors down upon the people, beaming down from his colorful past into your... future....

Looking inside yourself under that glow, where do you stand?

*Closet Chickenology*

CHAPTER SIX

It's MLK Day 2006

Chickens, it seems appropriate today to bring to your attention a Jodi Rave article on Martin Luther King. Having seen Vine Deloria Jr eulogized in various tributes as the "Indian MLK," I'm now interested to read Rave's comparison of the black civil rights agenda to the current situation in Indian country today.

I think of extraordinary people like Vine who I've encountered in Indian country and who have been active and effective voices for Indian rights. I think, for example, of my cousin John Echohawk. John has a personal presence that inspires respect in everyone, and his leadership at the Native American Rights Fund here in Colorado has made a real difference in people's lives throughout Indian country.

I feel gratitude toward Martin Luther King because he stood for certain principles that my friends and I embraced in our youth, principles that I still admire. My view of him is simple. King stood for non-violent social change, and he looked for social justice by encouraging a peaceful transformation of American social and political systems. The development of trans-racial partnerships and the call for interracial mutual respect shaped the things that happened around him.

It disappoints me that the United States is so much under the sway of the neoconservative political vision – a vision that seeks to exert unilateral US military power as a direct way of asserting American ideals. The contrast that seems significant to me is a vision of bringing people together for a willingly shared purpose versus a vision that unilaterally seeks accommodation from other people in the world.

I raise this point because a Chicken exchange a few months ago brought up an invitation forwarded by Chicken à la Queen for examples of cultural leaders who have brought people together to peacefully transcend cultural differences. I had the thought then: Hmm, who are the "Indian MLKs"? Does Vine really qualify? What about my cousin John? Others? It felt disconcerting to suddenly have the thought, right or wrong: Indian people expect others to help them with social justice, but do "Indian MLKs" really stand for any vision of transcendent human social justice – justice for everyone?

When people like Chicken à la Queen and other so-called "non-indigenous" Chickens have the self-image of providing intellectual support for "indigenous" social justice, I accept their generosity of spirit, their selfless interest in righting social wrongs. I feel a warm glow knowing that people like her live with us in our world.

But I feel uncomfortable when I sense that the ultimate goal of “indigenism” is to empower a kind of cultural separatism and cultural self-determination that hopes for a world in which people like Chicken à la Queen are held at arm’s length, suffered and endured rather than welcomed in true partnership and love based on mutual respect.

In other words, do putative “Indian MLKs” see things in terms of self-absorbed unilateral racial empowerment, rather than in terms of integrative social justice? Perhaps theirs is not a world in which we come together to build a future, in which we stand for the dignity of all, in which shared visions of the world bring forth meaningful mutual respect. As my cousin John recently put it, writing in *Indian Country Today* in honor of Hank Adams: “...Adams taught us not so long ago to use their law and their history to protect our rights.”

King’s effect on America was to bring about changes in law that fixed civil rights for all Americans, not just for black Americans. He could have adopted the ideals of black separatism, but he rejected that option. He was a cultural integrationist. He laid down his life in the cause of challenging and changing an America that believed in institutionalizing a segregationist system of “their” and “our” laws. King believed that “their” laws should be “our” laws, fair for everyone. It seems misguided to summon up his example when so much indigenist advocacy actually promotes cultural separatism, a model of “their” history versus “our” history.

Pondering the vision of Martin Luther King for America, I feel doubtful that any “Indian MLKs” exist today in Indian country. I suspect that comparisons between the black civil rights movement and current “indigenous” social justice agendas are thin indeed. One stands for non-violent integrative social change for all and invites partnerships with the good-willed Chicken à la Queens of the world, while the other seems to stand for non-violent separatist self-empowerment and for counting on help from the good-willed Chicken à la Queens of the world.

Indigenists call upon the Chicken à la Queens of the world to transcend their racial loyalties and racial self-interests and to transcend their cultural limits and boundaries in order to do the right thing for indigenous rights. But “indigenists” are explicit about wanting stronger boundaries. Indigenism doesn’t favor the telling of stories in which indigenists ever plan to transcend their treasured color lines. I feel doubtful that the indigenist meta-narrative today allows any room for an authentic transcendent “Indian MLK.”

I hope that my view is wrong. Maybe I have overlooked something about the current state of indigenism that unites rather than divides people.

But it’s Martin Luther King Day in America today. Today all Chickens are created equal. All Chickens are fully Chicken – not “indigenous” vs “non-indigenous.” In my mind, today we’re in this together for everyone together doing this together in partnership together.

Maybe someday we'll even have a Chicken MLK – maybe Chicken à la Queen is already one of our Chicken MLKs. At least, I dream of empowering a meta-narrative in which racial separatism does not drive our communal hopes; I wish for a master story that speaks of common ground for us all in a shared world; I hope for an idealism driven by peaceful collaborative change rather than a neocon-like idealism that seeks to wield self-absorbed superpowers to unilaterally reshape the world.

It seems like a good day to hope for such things. What do you hope for, Chickens?

*Closet Chickenology*

CHAPTER SEVEN

If Ward Churchill Is Indian, Aren't You Too, Chicken Nuggets?

Hello biofeathered bantamologists:

As the years go by and I struggle to understand what I mean when I say that race is a challenging problem to solve rather than something to perpetuate, I sense that many of you disagree and plan to go on doing race because it's important to you and to your world, while others have trouble, as I do, with sorting out what it means to challenge the practice of race and to explain what this means. I don't wish to suggest that it's strictly a matter of taking a position; maybe so for some people, but for others maybe it's more a matter of deciding how you feel along the way.

Figuring out what to do about race isn't easy; one might well roam about feeling a little lost, wondering where to go next. Toward this end, I often use the coop as a place to let my mind wander. It's strange, you know, because so much of my life has been like that, not a journey with convenient destinations, measurable distances, a sequence of named places.

As you know, I've been exploring my sense of self and my notions of race and at times it seems important for me to say to myself that maybe we could change the world, couldn't we? No doubt for most of us, as in my case, changing the world seems less likely than the prospect of wandering about aimlessly and getting mostly lost while looking inside at who we've been, who we are, and who we'll become next. So for this reason, I give myself permission to say something foolish once in a while.

I'm no longer an Indian, that's certain, but maybe I'll always be an Indian in some sense. Realizing this, in my most recent emails I've deliberately mentioned "race & ethnicity," putting the two terms side-by-side to reflect a realization that I had last year while in the midst of wandering in the land of rangers and bears and hispanics and inward regions with no names, no maps, no clear destinations.

But while pondering the mysteries of race & ethnicity and wondering whether to say something about that, I started thinking about the treatment Ward Churchill has received at the hands of racial Indians in response to his claims of having Indian ancestry. I've been vaguely weaving in & out of the news about the Churchill situation over the last year & a half, and I think his Indian critics like Jodi Rave and Suzan Harjo are too tough on his lack of bioracial Indian credentials.

I make this observation because I think of race as a cultural behavior. I see race as a cultural construction that would gain clarity and meaning if we detach it from its pseudo-biological origins. With this in mind, I would treat race as a form of ethnicity, and I'd argue that we shouldn't treat ethnicity as a form of race. Moving along this path, this is how I ultimately meander into thinking that the quality of Indianness/Nativeness/Indigenusness should logically be treated as a purely cultural construction. And given Churchill's long exposure to "Indian" culture (whatever "Indian culture" might be in the absence of the now-detached verification of bioracial authority) Churchill surely has gathered more than a few drops of Indian culture in him by now, so wouldn't this make him a bona fide Indian/Native/Indigenous person?

In fact, maybe we can usefully apply what might be termed "the Churchill test" to sort out people who hold a faith-based belief in race as biology from people who accept the truth about race as pure culture. If you see Churchill as non-Native due to the absence of identifiable Indians in his family tree (to be sure, what is an "Indian" ancestor if race is cultural and not biological?), then you believe in the idea of race as something that is biological, not cultural. If you view Churchill as a legitimate Native American/American Indian/Indian/Indigene on the basis of race-as-culture despite the absence of any identifiable Indian ancestry, then you truly see race as a cultural construction.

I like this test because it tells us what we think. It tells us where we stand on race. With this test in hand, we can see where we are in life when it comes to race.

Anyway, all this roaming to & fro suggests another interesting thought. If we find out that we think of race as a product of culture rather than as an outcome of biology, and if we decide to be liberal about it and treat Indian ethnic identity in terms of something like a one drop rule, isn't Chicken Nuggets a legitimate Native American/American Indian/Indian/Native/Indigene?

Hello Chicken Nuggets! Surely you have gathered many drops of Indian culture in yourself by now. Surely you must admit this truth. Wouldn't it be wrong for you to deny the existence in your sense of selfhood the many drops of Indian cultural exposure that have helped to shape who you are? Aren't you an Indian? I'd guess that everyone on this list has at least one or two drops of Indian cultural blood.

Chickens, according to the logic of my wandering mind, would you agree that Chicken Nuggets is an Indian and he should admit it? I presume that most of you are reluctant to come this far with me. Fair enough. I feel doubtful anyway that Chicken Nuggets feels comfortable with this journey and the way I've decided for him that he's an Indian. It's not that I want him to be an Indian, it's just that in some sense he is, and he might as well admit it.

Mulling over the identity of Chicken Nuggets for him, we can usefully question the liberal one-drop cultural standard, of course, and weigh in with ideas about how many cultural drops it takes to be a viable ethnic Indian, black, white,

hispanic, asian, whatever. I favor the view, for example, that I'm an ethnic black person (based in part on my years of listening to the Rolling Stones and from the fact that I own an Eminem CD), knowing that others may well quibble with my argument.

But the point is that culture does not respect pseudo-biology and its Maginot lines drawn in the ever-shifting sands of selfhood. Culture gets inside us whether we want it to or not. Identity and selfhood must necessarily be mysteriously complex artifacts buried deep inside us, because we need adaptable personal resources to aid us in negotiating our way through the many nuanced social situations we face each day. Decisions about identity must reflect that complexity. What do you find when you spend time excavating yourselves in the dark, Chickens? Who are we?

All my wandering aside, from the evidence I've seen in Chicken chatter, race is not particularly complex. It isn't usually treated in the coop as the kind of purely cultural production that I describe along the road I've followed here. Instead, the constructions of Nativeness and Indianhood seem to be employed most commonly as if race were an inflexible biological reality with clean edges and not a messy matter of pure culture, so it seems fair to say that the doings of Chickenry mostly seem aimed at the destination of enacting and perpetuating race in its traditional biological incarnation.

There's a map on the wall of the coop and we all pause to see how far we must go to bring more Indians into archeology, and to get white archeologists more sensitive to partnership, and in the end, to move toward decolonizing non-Native archeology as a profession. Aren't the Closet Chickens doing race? Or does it have to do with something that isn't strictly race, like anti-colonial historical analysis?

For those of you who endorse the idea of decolonizing archeology, the history of race ought to be of some interest as something created in Europe – an ideology that slipped its wandering way across the ocean to become thoroughly domesticated in America as a production of colonialism. The idea of being Indian didn't originate with Indians, though racial Indianhood is heartily espoused by Indians today as if it had been dreamed into our lives by some enlightened Indian philosopher, rather than cooked up by colonialism and Enlightenment science. When we enact racial Indianhood, we are clearly embracing the enactment and perpetuation of the legacy of colonialism. I don't mean to attach a moral judgment to such enactments, but proponents of anti-colonialism often do just that, seemingly unaware of the fact that promoting Nativeness without challenging race implies moral acceptance of the legacy of colonialism.

As I see it, the decolonization movement in Indian country has to do mostly with countering "white" power with "Indian" power. Isn't this race at work? Shouldn't "decolonizing archeology" have something to do with challenging the way race is done in the discipline today? Shouldn't the challenge to colonialism involve a

careful rethinking of race? Shouldn't truly committed decolonizers hesitate to promote the idea of being Indian and the notion that there is such a thing as a biologically white archeologist? Or is it our real intention as a group in the coop, as with the Ward Churchillians, to accept race and to feel good about being Indian and to bond over being Native & non-Native and to simply refer to colonialism as a putative problem while actually being bent on perpetuating it via race? If only race and being Indian were truly and reassuringly biological, and not so confusingly cultural!

It's easy to go along with race, I know. For this reason, I can't imagine that Chickens would ever permit Chicken Nuggets to be the Indian that he is. I can't imagine that Chicken Nuggets himself would ever feel comfortable acting on his all-too-real drops of Indian/Native cultural identity, even though he may well choose to sit down to a breakfast of cornflakes, have lunch with a corndog, feast on roasting ears at dinner, and later a movie with popcorn – all the while saying to himself and to the coop: "There's nothing Indian about me!"

I sometimes suspect that this is the coop's true destination: to have a world in which Chicken Nuggets can never explore his Indianness because he lacks the proper pseudo-drops of racial blood. Not that I want him to be an Indian. After all, I'm not an Indian, that's certain, but maybe I'm still an Indian, culturally speaking, and maybe Chicken Nuggets really is an Indian, culturally speaking.

I think it's important to ponder such things because it seems to mean that we can cultivate many marvelously adaptive and integrative ways of being ourselves, but only if we redefine race as ethnicity and only if we reject the idea of treating ethnicity as if it were race. Because race as biology is not only wrong, it is inflexible, immutable, insurmountable, separatist, oppressively colonialistic. Ethnicity, on the other hand – if not tainted and suborned by the warping cruelties of unchallenged racialism – seems self-empowering because it is readily configured to enhance our power to choose who we want to be, to express who we are. We can truly change; we can become many new things; we can wander and get lost inside ourselves once in a while.

Sometimes I feel idealistic and I see how ethnicity explains the character of our coop. Or does race better explain who we are? I feel afraid sometimes. Whatever hopes or fears I feel about race, it is my suggestion that race should be transformed away from rigid pseudo-biology and toward elastic cultural ethnicity.

But another potential option with widespread appeal deserves exploration – an option that inherently calls for careful and thorough attention from believing adherents to bioracial Indianhood. Four years ago at the 2002 SAA, Super Chicken made a comment to me that I've been pondering ever since. Hearing my wandering thoughts about race during the indigenous archeology session, he reminded me of a

viewpoint that serves as a fundamental truism among Indian law practitioners. He noted that what the field of Indian law addresses is not race but rather sovereignty.

Can racial Indianness be redefined according to sovereign status, founded on some kind of nationalistic citizenship rather than pseudo-biology? Frankly, I don't see how emphasizing sovereignty while advancing the notion of an "Indian" nation avoids reliance on race.

But more importantly, a major purpose of my discourse on race is to place before us all my tea leaves and crystal ball and my seven-day weather forecast in order to foretell the coming transformation of the lonely and weirdly fateful anti-race position into a not-so-lonely and vastly fateful anti-race social movement in America. What will this mean for the future of our racially embedded concepts of Indian tribal sovereignty? What is the future of Indian treaty rights and racially constituted federal Indian law?

What role, if any, might the Closet Chickens as a group play in sparking inquiry on these questions? If groups like the Closet Chickens stay silent, why would precedent-bound lawyers bother to take notice of the changing face of race? I foresee that if Indian legal theorists and Indian anthropologists choose to avoid thinking about this important issue, change will nevertheless come, for that is the most predictable aspect of race, the way its form and practice and meaning keep changing over time.

What is the future of racially designated Indian sovereignties in the United States? My foretelling on the point is silent and somewhat foreboding. I take little comfort in seeing how Indian tribes are enshrined in the Constitution, for example, since the Constitution has undergone numerous changes and will no doubt continue to change.

Chickens, you may take seriously or take lightly my characterization of Chicken Nuggets as an ethnic Indian, but postponing careful consideration of race will not keep change at bay.

Anyway, whatever the future holds or does not hold as I wander in & out of the coop, I know I have little to offer in the way of any particular destination. For now, I'm content with a more self-centered exploration of who I've been, who I am, who I might become next. So I plan to keep wandering, changing into the person I really am.

And, to be sure, I do presume that if we wish, we really can change the whole world along the way. At least, I give myself permission to say foolish things like that once in a while.

*Closet Chickenology*

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Cloudy Summer Solstice 2007

In the Closet Chicken coop I have taken a particular kind of intellectual journey. Struggling with the ideology of race, it has been useful to get up from my perch every so often and issue pronouncements, experiment with ideas, and wander randomly in & out of racial identity issues. I have valued this mode of thinking out loud.

So what have I learned along the way?

I have seen the power of race. It is a compelling force in the social world. It can be mined for ways to organize human society. People invest themselves wholly in the formation and assertion of racial Indianhood and other such artifacts of racial culture. And it is clear to me that the predominant mode of race at present continues to assume falsely that a biological logic is what sustains race.

I have chosen to give up the superpowers of racial identity. Race has no biological justification, and this is an important reality. For those who give up race, we must question and reject not only the structures of private racialism, but also the public practices that intend to perpetuate race in our midst.

In the coop a popular option is for Chickenry to agree that race has no validity as a characterization of human biological diversity, but what we Chickens do is the sociocultural practice of race. If this is not merely an effort to hide the practice of bioracialism under the cover of cultural ethnicity, then it leads to certain logical outcomes.

One outcome is that it is necessary to give up the use of biological authenticity tests. This means that racial Indianhood is just as equally valid for Ward Churchill as it is for Vine Deloria Jr. Being Indian is just as authentic for German hobbyists as it is for participants in the Southern Plains Indian powwow circuit. In fact, since race was created in Europe, not Oklahoma, European hobbyist Indians stand closer to the magic fount of racial Indianhood than far-off American Indians.

Another implication is that racial culture of every type exists in everyone who experiences it – everyone arguably retains drops of racial Indianhood in America. The United States is thus an Indian nation whether or not people acknowledge it. So is Germany, for that matter. I approve of this outcome to the degree that it seems useful as a major new weapon to deploy against unilateral racism. People will find it

difficult, if not impossible, to discriminate against racial groups with whom they acknowledge a common identity.

A rather crushing problem exists for this mode of race. It becomes impossible to define racial identities without the anchoring definitions that flow from pseudo-biology. If practitioners of racial Indianhood agree that race is false biology, then anyone can claim to be Indian, and no standard is available to pin down and define the details and overall character of Indianness. Racial Indianhood becomes so slippery a concept as to be useless as a source of social power.

For this reason, the power-wielding proponents of race might not prove very willing to permit race to become truly cultural in its character. The culture of bioracial Indianhood will doubtless show its true colors by fighting to maintain and police artificial bio-boundaries.

Another option will be for adherents to racial Indianhood to assert citizenship in an Indian nation as the basis for Indianness. But what is an “Indian” nation if race is pure culture and if Germany can be a cultural Indian nation?

In short, racial Indianhood is doomed without bio-logic to sustain it.

Even so, a final last-ditch option will be for some Indian advocates to embrace an outlook that sees science as inherently anti-Indian, with scientific anti-race scholarship being deliberately designed to further assault victimized Indian people. This ugly option will no doubt prove attractive to determined exploiters of the politics of racial polarity.

With that said, devoted adherents to racial Indianhood may have good reason to fear the academic world. The academy holds a notorious reputation for eventually getting around to discarding discredited ideas over time.

In terms of the academic practice of Indian racial identity, specialists in “Indian studies,” in “Indian history,” and in anthropological scholarship in general have an urgent obligation to lead the way in advancing a newly reconfigured study of racial Indianhood in light of the realities of race. This certainly must mean giving people useful insights into the status of racial Indianhood as a social construction bereft of its biological underpinnings. To conduct business as usual, or to quietly claim to be doing race as pure culture without openly calibrating into this practice the implications of race’s fundamental change in status seems unscholarly.

In fact, the future is decidedly bleak for racial ideologues who have found comfortable niches in the academic world.

I suddenly see that scholars who make race a topic of professional discourse should decline to practice race. Doing scholarship means not only following where evidence leads, it also means crafting trustworthy conclusions that account for the evidence in a conscientious way. In this case, the evidence is clear: race tells a lie about the nature of humankind. The academy has a responsibility to rethink its present-day approach to race studies.

The open and unabashed practice of race – an admitted warping of the nature of humankind – by credentialed scholars automatically implies a somewhat doubtful commitment to following the logic of an evidence-based process. People should beware of scholarship on race that proceeds on the basis of embracing its practice. Scholars who deem it of little consequence to promote a major falsehood deserve credibility problems, and such scholars, if not rejected outright as legitimate academicians, must be expected to shoulder an extra burden to show why their scholarship is to be trusted.

We do not entrust the teaching of astronomy to committed astrologers. Modern-day alchemists have no place as credentialed academic interpreters of chemistry. Scholars have a duty to at least feel a personal objection when faith-based creationists are placed in control of the academic teaching of human origins. We should feel dubious about women's studies programs that have as their agenda the fostering of a 19<sup>th</sup> century acceptance of female intellectual inferiority.

Placing students in the hands of professed racialists guarantees perpetuation of unscientific notions about humankind. To rely on historians and anthropologists who have as their express intention the purveying of un-nuanced race-based interpretations of humankind and human history is to guarantee perpetuation of a historical consciousness warped by the discredited dictates of race. Committed racialists ought to hold a dubious place in the production of a truly scholarly legacy of epistemology.

I have little reason to doubt that American universities will continue for the near future to serve as full-fledged partners in the propounding of public racialism. Public education seems unswayed by any significant recognition of the problems of race. But acceptance of the contention that race has been discredited has meaningful implications for the future of faith-based racialism in the academy.

Race persists in the academy because racialists have power, not because race is a good idea. In university culture, popular ideas have a way of becoming unpopular and dropping out of fashion and then out of sight. Will race continue into the far future as a foundational basis for academic discourse?

Racialists beware. For I peer into my tea leaves and I check the seven-day forecast and I study my crystal ball, and I see... hmm....

Yes. I see it now. We don't need the help of pseudo-science to tell us that scholarship has a predictable way of eventually moving on from outmoded ideology.

*Closet Chickenology*

CHAPTER NINE

Sites of Selfhood

Whether we grasp the meaning, the perfect words  
For esoteric certainties, the knowing of knowledge  
Dismantling hidden mysteries inside layer after layer  
Of selfhood, our peering into depths, oceans of stone  
Swimming from shore to shore, fog to fog, life to life  
We might as well sing a few pleasantries on the way  
To the next excavation of our lives, treasure every  
Moment of friendship, welcome one another kindly  
With our hearts and with our minds, so many layers  
Of meaning are never easy – it can be no other way  
I will share my secrets of selfhood, real & imaginary  
A complex numbering of facts hidden deep inside us  
The reconciliation of our various selves in the world  
Lifting me out of myself, all my sorrows and my joys  
Whatever happens next & the meaning of meaning  
Culture is a secret river of gravity far underground  
It pulls at all our wandering feet & defines our lives  
Inner truths ready to shape us at the right moment  
Dig deep, Chickens, and let us feel free to feel free  
In our journeys, in our truths, I can't explain why  
It is so difficult to sort out the seeming obscurity  
Of options & alternatives that may or may not be  
I can only manage to sing the essence of the song  
A dim compassion for understanding the beautiful  
Radiance of whispering along the way, just like this

*Closet Chickenology*

CHAPTER TEN

I Peer Into Chicken Noodle's Mirror

*So it wasn't very long after the end of the second millennium of the Common Era that the fabled Closet Chickens appeared. They took comfort in one another as they faced the end of that time and the beginning of something else. In their vision of the future, in the something-else that would follow, I saw that the Chickens would begin by enacting race. But it would have a new face: "indigeneity."*

*Chickenry would together embark into a future in which archeology would learn to become indigenous. The Chickens would decolonize archeology and remove it from the exclusive control of oppressive and insensitive white colonizers. Indians would empower themselves as a race. Toward this end the Chickens would help each other and their chatter would be heartening as they went forth to perform their almost impossible feats in the world, battling injustice, empowering Native racialism, creating indigenous archeology; studying the details under the surface, layer after layer... lifting up a corner of the earth to see the past, to change the future.*

*It would be serious work indeed. But they would also laugh together and be supportive and warm in their coop. For the coop would change the status quo into something positive. And if they couldn't change the world, they could at least enhance what they liked about it.*

*And the Chickens would do race, yes. They understood that race had a serious flaw, a serious problem: it told a lie about the nature of humankind. They heard the news about race but could not stop themselves and they went on doing it anyway. And this seemed good to them, something good to aim at. This was the essence of their dream.*

*Full of hope they were; for they were the Closet Chickens.*

When the next millennium opened for business, I stepped inside of it and entered the coop. Pausing to think of the Closet Chickens, I often smiled to myself. Their optimism and enthusiastic idealism felt good to me. I listened to them and they... some of them listened to me.

In the warmth of the Closet Chicken coop I shared the glow of it, even though I didn't share their vision of things. As I saw it, the fundamental logic of the coop rested on acceptance of biological racialism. Wasn't this a problem? I thought so.

Maybe other archeologists and anthropologists accepted the practice of race and race was just something that everybody did. Maybe race had always been done that way in American archeology and in the academic community and throughout the American world, and maybe even beyond in the wider universe. And maybe the Chickens would do it like that too.

But we didn't necessarily have to do the things of race the same way everyone else did those things. We could do it differently. Standing just inside the entrance of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I began to consider what to recalibrate.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the idea of race as an explanation of human biological diversity had been rejected by academic anthropology. For some reason, however, race hadn't died in the academy. It was still going strong in the next millennium. It had given rise to the Closet Chickens. What would we do with it?

Maybe the coop could be different. We didn't have to do the kind of archeology and anthropology that had characterized and filled the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Maybe we could help each other figure out what to do with race – things that I would never think of by myself. I appreciated their chatter. I stood inside their magic circle and asked for their help.

The coop seemed an opportune place to play with ideas and implications. Whatever response Chickenry might have to my thoughts, I needed a place to experiment with saying things about race that might sound wise or foolish or both.

Speaking my mind, I felt surprised at first when I realized that the Chickens intended to just proceed anyway with race as their unquestioned bond. Race would define the coop. The Chickens would enact racially based indigeneity, racially based nativeness, racially based Indianness.

Even so, feeling my way into the beginning of the millennium, the coop seemed full of hope, and I found myself thinking that whatever came next in my life, maybe I could do it among these archeologists.

Excavating myself to look for the inward meanings of selfhood and racial identity, I wasn't an archeologist, so it was necessarily a somewhat clumsy enterprise. I must have looked like a looted city in those days. As the coop arose and made itself in the image of race, I reminded myself that it hadn't been easy for me to question and challenge race in my life. Race is profoundly personal. People don't usually want advice about profoundly personal matters like racial identity even when they ask for it, and no one had asked me for any advice.

All the Chickens had things they wanted to say in the coop. Important things. Whether or not any of the other Chickens ever took up the challenge of confronting race with me, it would be interesting to hear their chatter. In those first years of the coop, I tried to say things that mattered, but did I know what mattered?

I had to keep trying to figure it out because race is fundamentally damaging to our humanity. It distorts the nature of humankind. This is a profound truth about

racial identity. It does not reveal to us a mirror-image of ourselves; instead it distorts what can be seen and the stories we tell about what we think we see.

We should reject race. If this option does not yet seem a realistic choice for most people, we can at least learn to treat race as culture.

Race doesn't dwell in our physical selves; it sits deep inside the more mysterious workings of our minds. Knowing that race is not an inherent manifestation of the physical self, we must redefine the whole elaborate social structure of racialism as a purely social artifact. Race is a set of malleable guidelines, not a rigid biological reality.

Detached from the anchor of biology, we should recalibrate race into cultural ethnicity. And if we treat race as a form of ethnicity, then racial identities become optional for everyone. This outcome is inevitable because when we free race from the illogic of pseudo-biology, we must also drop the associated biological authenticity tests. Liberating ourselves from pseudo-biology, racial identities become self-empowering options subject only to the exercise of personal preference.

This mode of race might well perpetuate racialism, but it is at least an inclusively integrative cultural alternative to the traditional practice of race as a set of exclusively segregated identity structures. We need not do this as race. Instead, we can redeploy race into pure ethnicity. In so doing, we free ourselves to acknowledge that all Americans have absorbed varying amounts of cultural racial identities of every color. Everyone has absorbed racial Indianhood in varying degrees; everyone has more than a few drops of black culture; everyone has some cultural Hispanicness and Asianness and whiteness.

Recalibrating race into ethnicity, we enhance the ways we can connect with each other. We can take open pride in our mutual ethnic Indianness, our mutual ethnic blackness, the manifold complexity of ethnicity as pure culture. And taking pride together like this, it would be impossible to practice racism. This recalibration of race would put an end to racism.

Treating racial identities as optional for everyone, as cultural ethnicity available to everyone – treating race as an inherently inclusive outcome of culture, not biology, this strategy would undermine the exclusive preferential ranking of racism because the practice of bioracialism is the basic ingredient necessary for the practice of racism. Truly hoping to defeat racism forever, we must defeat race itself. In defeating race, let it be seen for what it really is and for what it has actually always been: flexible ethnicity hidden under inflexible pseudo-biology. Liberated from racial biology, we can negotiate all we might wish across the complicated terrain of ethnicity and personal identity.

If we wish, we really can choose to give up race.

Thinking such things at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I stood up in the coop and spoke to the Closet Chickens. Whatever I said or didn't say, I said things

the way you say them with your heart. The Closet Chickens paused in their doings and listened.

I said, *Let us free ourselves and be free.*

*We'll be free, I said, Free at last.*

*I kept saying things like this. It was an exciting time for the Closet Chickens at the beginning of the third millennium of the Common Era. I stood inside their magic circle and they made me feel very welcome. I loved the warmth of their excitement and their enthusiastic idealism.*

*I glimpsed them as they spoke to one another in their communal coop. And they went here & there upon their errands, doing all the things they did. They held their celebrations on alluring green islands. They convened to consider the underlying truths they sought, the deeper mysteries adrift inside the world. They gave names and took them. They were determined, wise, proud.*

*I stood elsewhere upon my paths in the world and often heard rumor of their mysterious doings. I saw that they didn't want to come with me on my journey. Even so, some of them listened to everything I said. And no one knew what to do about it; some of them listened closely and it wasn't easy.*

*I feel sad when I think of this. And I feel happy, too.*

*Let us feel foolish and wise and sad and happy.*

*Let us feel free to feel free.*

*And they listened upon their pathways in real time. And upon my twilight path oblique to theirs, upon my path in imaginary time, I watched them as they set forth to make a difference, as they saw it, a good difference.*

*For they were the Closet Chickens.*