

'Then It Dawned Upon Me With A Certain Suddenness That I Was Different From The Others'

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

You can tell that things are going badly when Black youth does not get a chance to be terrified out of the water by either Jaws or Jaws II. In so many ways, movies are a mirror of the realities of society. Think about it for a moment. How often, during this century, have you seen a portrayal of Black youth, in which something good or positive is taking place? Seldom.

During the 1950s a number of nuclear energy and science fiction films were released. Most of them had to do with the almost total destruction of the human race. There were always a few survivors. With the exception of "The World, The Flesh and The Devil", with Harry Belafonte, all of the survivors were white. The world of the future would, by those delineations, be all white. Black people have been presented as extras not only on the screen but also in real life. Such has happened because their differences have been viewed as inferiorities.

"I remember well when the shadow swept

across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England, where the dark Housatonic winds between Hoosac and Taghkanic to the sea. In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting cards, -- ten cents a package -- and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card, -- refused it preemptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with certain suddenness that I was different from the others..."

W.E.B. DuBois penned those lines in 1904 in his first major book: THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK. He suggested that similar revelations, sooner or later, come to every Black person. They have to get used to it because they cannot get over it. Ours' is a society in which the color of a person's skin can still make him or break him. The fairer one's skin is, the fairer society is to that person. No one likes to hear such truths, but then, I am not running for office.

For over 115 years,

Black people have had to endure the stigma of second class citizenship. Few political leaders have assumed the responsibility of ensuring Blacks equal protection before the law. That bit of protection which Blacks have had, have come about as a result of their constant petitioning for equity. From time to time some whites, in authority, have responded and have accepted the responsibilities of their offices. Any child can accept responsibility once it has been delegated. It takes, however, a much different kind of person to assume responsibility.

Each generation of Blacks have been told that the "changes cannot occur over night -- that things will improve for/with the next generation". For generations they have been told that. Some have begun to believe it. Black people have been put off for years with such rhetoric and yearly the youthful yearnings of youthful yeomen are deflated like yeastless cup cakes as the yahoos in the seats of government debate the Constitutional guarantees and rights of Black people.

A year after the publication of THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK, Las Vegas was founded. Most of those who arrived here during that early spring were adults. They had great plans for the new town. They realized that the future of Las Vegas hinged on the young -- their children and their children's children.

For the first half century of its existence, all children of all races attended the same schools. There was no segregation in education, only in expectations. White children were given the opportunity to run the gamut as far as ambitions were concerned. They were encouraged to be doctors, lawyers, architects, carpenters, plumbers, engineers and all of the other career choices. Such was not the case for Black children. If they thought of remaining in Las Vegas, the height of their ambitions could only be maids, porters, janitors or all around handymen. The respectable professions were closed to them.

There were few role models for them locally. All of the successful

people were white. This told them, in no uncertain terms, that they were doomed to mediocrity. Why study? Why learn to read or write or do arithmetic? The only thing waiting for them at the end of the tunnel was a broom and

a mop. Some Black parents, in spite of the obstacles and lack of opportunities, did encourage their children. Apparently they hoped that the insecurities of their "neighbors" would disappear and thereby, (See Roosevelt page 21)

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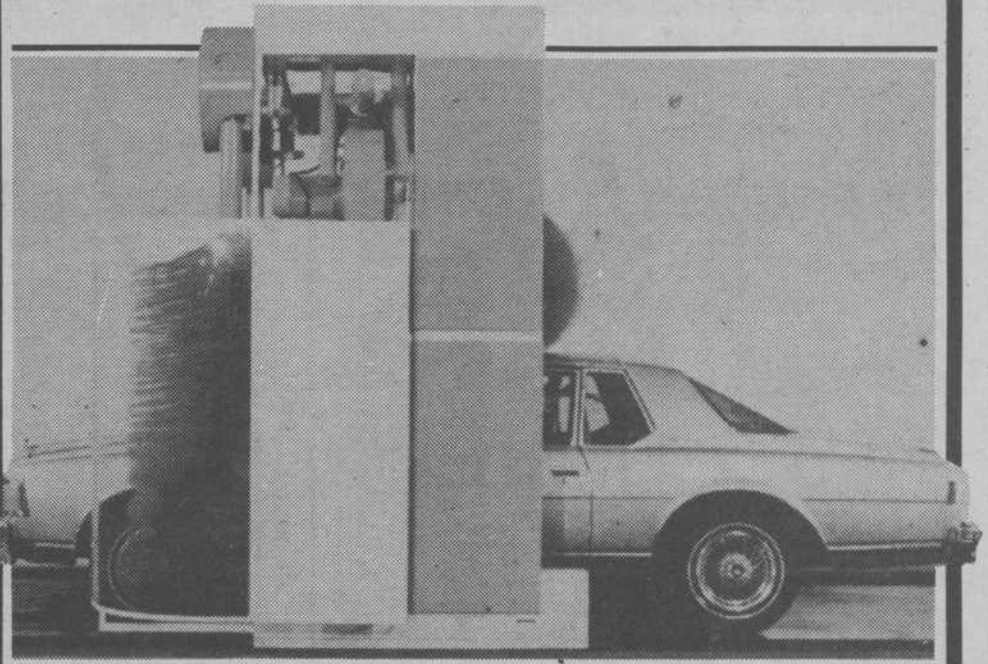
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