

The Big Trip

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

My father liked the Brooklyn Dodgers. He probably had such strong feelings about them for pretty much the same reason as did so many other Black people — Jackie Robinson.

not realize it at the time — I had not yet taken science in school, it had the smell of formaldehyde.



JACKIE ROBINSON

Before my family purchased its first automobile, once per year he would board a Greyhound bus and take highway 61 to St. Louis where he would watch the Dodgers and the Cardinals plays. He made the trip often enough that he became familiar with the route.

In 1956, my father purchased his first car. Actually, it was the very first car ever owned by anyone in the history of my family. I'll never forget it. It was a battleship grey, four-door Chevrolet sedan. He bought it from a local mortician and, even though I did

town which could only boast of being the place "where the old south still lives." Beyond that eulogy, there was not much more which could be said about Natchez — at least not at that time. The old south did indeed still live in my home town and it was as repressive and oppressive as a small town of 23,000 people could be. I could hardly wait to get out.

My father's love of the Dodgers would be my ticket out. Now that he had a car, rather than take a bus, he planned to drive. Additionally, he would take his sons with him.

The day before the big trip was quite a day around my house. Everybody was excited and making plans and getting the million and one things done which were necessary before making such an undertak-

ing. The alley off St. Catherine Street, where we lived, was filled with friends who came to offer advice on the best way to get to St. Louis. My father let them all talk but he did not listen to a word that anybody had to say.

For me, I brought water in in a galvanized bucket, poured it into the "foot tub" on the wood stove, spilt up some kindling, got a fire going, heated up the water, brought in the number three tub hanging on the wall outside of the kitchen door, built a fire in the fireplace in the "middle room" to take the chill off and eventually took a bath with lifebuoy soap.

We arrived at St. Louis at 12:37 p.m. It had taken us just a shade over eleven hours of straight driving to make the trip. We went right to the stadium, had lunch out of our big boxes, got tickets — no problem spending money, entered, went to the restrooms and afterwards round our seats.

I really don't know who won the game. I assumed that it was the Dodgers because my father was happy. The game ended, we went to the rest rooms, returned to the parking lot, had a cold snack out of our boxes, found a "service" station and filled up, got on the highway, went behind a bush to the bathroom, back to the car and headed south. About eleven hours later, we were home again. My mother hugged us all, in turn, fixed something hot to eat, and we, because of fatigue, went to bed.

My sleep the night after the big trip was restless. I had fragments of numerous dreams and they were all akin to the horror stories I had read and the monster movies I had seen at the Ace Theater — mean people, mean motels that would not rent us a room, mean service stations which would not let us use their rest-

would just pull off the road somewhere and we would duck behind some bushes. We did not want to do that but none of the service stations would afford us the luxury of using their facilities. We could spend our money on their gasoline but we could not urinate in their toilets. Something about that just did not seem right to me. I decided during the early morning hours that I would never buy gasoline at a place where I couldn't use the rest room. Fortunately, for me, it would be years before I owned a car — otherwise it would always be empty.

Once riding in old Baltimore Heart-filled, head filled with glee I saw a Baltimorean Keep looking straight at me

Now I was eight and very small And he was no whit bigger And so I smiled, but he poked out his tongue, and called me, "Nigger."

I saw the whole of Baltimore From May until December Of all the things that happened there That's all that I remember

Isn't it funny how one remembers such terrible things. Why I can even remember when I first arrived to Las Vegas. It was the summer of 1970. As with most people, I had to locate a place to stay. I initiated my efforts with thoughts of the location of my job site.

The first thing which I did was to look through the classified sections of the newspapers, find the names of different apartment complexes, make a list of them, use a city map to discern their locations and then make a second list of those places located within a certain radius of my job site. Once I had ten places listed, I then began to phone those places and in-

quire of vacancies. There were vacancies at each and the rent ranged from \$145 for a one bedroom to \$206 for three bedrooms. With that information, told that the rent would be \$165, \$50 deposit and \$50 cleaning for a total of \$265. Those or similar responses greeted me at each of the other eight

I began to make the rounds to view each and to make my selection. I should have known that it would not be as easy as all that. St. Louis all over again. I first went to the complex nearest the job and I was told that the complex had a "policy of not renting to anyone who had not been a resident of Las Vegas for at least six months."

I thought, "strange — perhaps here were have to sleep in the streets for six months." Oh well. On to the next closest. There I was told that for a two-bedroom apartment the rent would be \$300 per month — in spite of the advertised rate of \$165,

locations. I could have sworn that all of those people were in Natchez, St. Louis or Baltimore. Being a bit more sophisticated than I had been in 1956, I filed complaints with several local agencies. Nothing was ever done about the problem in spite of the fact that there was a federal open housing law in effect at the time. When it comes to some things, even some law and order people will break their own peculiar form of selectivity.

Such behavior seems more prevalent in matters dealing with housing than with any other areas. It is particularly

rooms, mean country where people in passing cars would yell out obscenities and racial slurs, mean overcast skies, mean everything. I had been certain that it would be better up there in "the north." Silly child, but, then, I am still naive enough to believe that somewhere in this country a person's skin color does not make a difference. I think I know where that place is — ground zero, Yucca Flat, Nevada Test Site.



Professor Fitzgerald is director of ethnic studies at University of Nevada-Las Vegas

I was later to discover that that mind boggling experience was not unique to my family. It invariably happened and, in some cases, continue to happen to every black person who has ever had the misfortune of taking to the open road. Countee Cullen, a black poet, probably put it best when he wrote on of my favorite poems: "Incident."



a \$200 deposit would be required, a \$100 cleaning fee and that I would be required to pay first, current and last month's rent in advance. The total amount which I would need to move in, not including having the power and phone connected, would be \$1200. On the phone I had been

true in those matters having minority people as participants. It does not stop there. White people who permit this to happen, ultimately permit it to happen to them. The discriminating personality, in the long run, does not discriminate in its discrimination.

Ethnic Studies Courses To Be Offered During Summer

The Ethnic Studies Program of UNLV will offer several courses during the summer months. All classes are upper division and will satisfy the multi-cultural requirements of the Nevada State Board of Education and the Clark County School District.

An early session will be conducted and will begin May 24 and end June 11. The title of the course offered during that time will be Ethnic Studies 450 and it will meet MTWTF, 6 - 8:30. The class will address the peculiar problems encountered by racial minorities in urban areas.

During Summer Session I which begins June 7, three classes will be offered. Ethnic Studies 405, which offers a survey of the four visible minority groups of the United States, will meet on MTWTF, 9:40 - 11:10. Ethnic Studies 460 is designed specifically for teachers

though not to the exclusion of others. The class will meet MTWTF, 11:20 to 12:50.

All of the above classes will feature lectures, guest speakers, media and class participation.

Ethnic Studies 499 which is an independent study class will also be conducted. There will be no formal class meetings. Each student will develop a research project and will work directly with the instructor on a one-to-one basis. All of the above classes will be instructed by R. Fitzgerald, Director of Ethnic Studies.

Summer Session II will offer one class of Independent Study which will be instructed by Dr. T. Miranda. This class will adhere to a similar format as Ethnic Studies 499 of the first summer session.

For further information, call the Ethnic Studies Dept. at 739-3610 or 739-3590.

THE LAST STAND OF THE 'OLD SOUTH' — EBONY

Pickens County, Alabama is a 42 percent black rural area where blacks are afraid to vote and black elected officials don't exist. The May *Ebony* examines this county that recently drew national attention when its two top civil rights leaders were convicted, by all-white juries, of vote fraud.

Seventy-year-old Mrs. Julia Wilder, president of the Voters League, and 51-year-old Mrs. Maggie Bozeman, president of the NAACP, were charged with cast-

ing absentee ballots for 39 elderly blacks without their permission. The two activists were then convicted and sentenced to harsh prison terms.

Alabama's governor responded to the black community's protests by releasing the two leaders into the custody of the Macon County Sheriff. Mrs. Wilder and Mrs. Bozeman are now involved in an unusual work release program that keeps them out of jail and away from Pickens County.

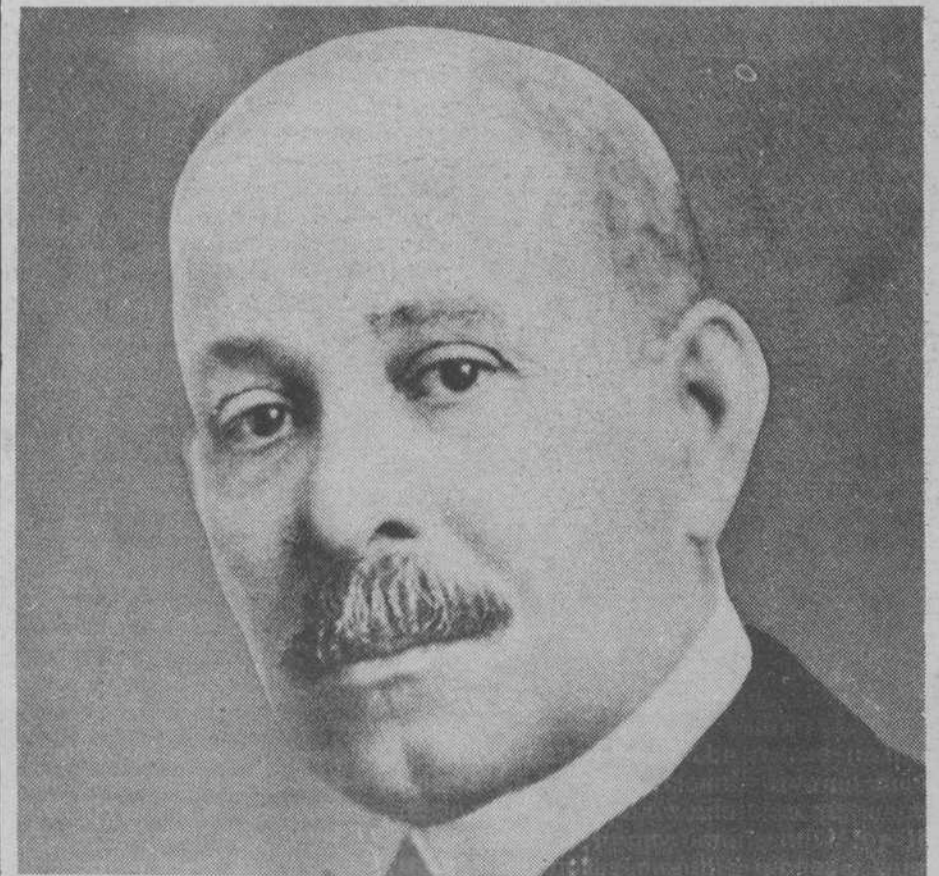


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