

# The Continuous Cycle

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

When Paul Anka was singing "Put Your Head on My Shoulder" in 1959, he had no idea as to how close to home he was hitting. I know they say that grown men are not supposed to cry but, then, grown men are not supposed to beat up on little children or women or the elderly. In 1959, I often felt like putting my head on someone's shoulder and crying like a baby.

My feeling that way was not due to any physical pains but to pains of the spirit. I had been a pretty good student and it was already an acknowledged fact that I would be valedictorian of my class. It did not matter much, however, because I did not quite meet the criteria necessary to go into any one of a number of post secondary occupations or careers. I was sad because I had no prospects and there was no reason for me to believe that those circumstances would change. I was happy because I was finishing school not because I saw it as an end but because, even though it was not a beginning, it was a kind of testimonial to my hard work, good luck and caring parents.

I felt about it that way because where I lived Black youngsters were not really supposed to accomplish anything. That's what I had heard anyway. I am not all that

certain that that was indeed the case. Everybody I knew went to school and most were indeed graduating. Additionally, a large percentage were going on to college and upon graduation they were securing positions throughout the state of Mississippi teaching school. You see, teaching school was just about the only thing waiting at the end of the tunnel for Black Mississippians who completed college.

There was some good and some bad in this circumstance. The horizons of Black youth were limited. We could not aspire to such occupations as doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers or business managers. Only teaching. We could have an opportunity at the latter because, in spite of the ruling handed down with the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision of 1954, there were yet places in the United States where people could break the law with impunity and nobody would do anything about it.

I do not know what I wanted to become or even if I wanted to become anything. Perhaps, the only thing that I could realistically aspire to was to simply become eighteen years old. Now that I think about it, there was no

real reason for that either. Mississippi, after all, was a dry state which sold liquor illegally and, on top of that, did not care about black children. I purchased my first half-pint when I was only eleven years old. I worked until the wee hours of the morning at the movie theater where I was a janitor so I was out "all hours of night." I had a morning job at one point which required my getting up at two in the morning in order to be at work at three. I had no need to become eighteen years old. The only thing I hadn't done before I turned eighteen was to register for the draft. They sent me out a reminder for that just a few weeks before that birthday. Three years later I would've died of suffocation had I waited for a similar reminder to be certain to go down and register and vote. Cannon fodder.

The one significant lesson which I learned as a youngster is the harder one works the less money one is paid. I had done a little pulp wooding, worked in the cotton fields of Robinson's Bottom, house painter, custodian, sugarcane worker, pea picker, citrus harvester, longshored, and dozens of other temporary jobs. They all only paid pocket change. The real money was being made by those guys who sat behind the desks. Everybody I knew wanted to get a "desk job" and so did I. There was only one problem — they were

not hiring us to those jobs. The closest we could expect to get to a desk job would have been with a rag in one hand and a can of Pledge in the other.

What to do. As the school year drew to a close, there were rumblings on the horizon. It seemed that a few schools in my neck of the woods would be required to integrate the following fall. It would be just a matter of time before Natchez would be required to follow suit but it would be another ten years before

tended Black neighborhood schools within that community. Upon their matriculation into the secondary schools they attended schools in the white communities. Las Vegas, you see, had half a school district which was segregated and the other half was integrated. Las Vegas has always prided itself in being different.

At the time when the greatest amount of good could have been achieved in terms of children learning to get along with children of

"bridges made over their heads." They had been class presidents, secretaries, treasurers, on the teams, cheerleaders, in the choirs, and all of the other extra-curricular activities were concerned. In Natchez, we were on the outside looking in all the way. By the time we graduated from high school, even though we had been shown in a million different ways that we were scum, we had a pretty good idea of what our true value was.

attended integrated secondary schools but they were almost on the outside looking in as far as extra-curricular activities were concerned. In Natchez, we were on the outside looking in all the way. By the time we graduated from high school, even though we had been shown in a million different ways that we were scum, we had a pretty good idea of what our true value was.

stores were hiring Black managers with business degrees, no law firms were hiring Black attorneys, only on rare occasions were Blacks with degrees in education being hired outside of the westside and on the westside there were only so many positions for teachers, no newspapers were hiring Blacks with degrees in journalism and the same could be said about all other areas.

dents. It was not unusual. The campus at Reno, in its history, had served but a handful of minority students. To a certain extent, the cause of this had its origins in the secondary schools throughout the state.

Since Black children had not been encouraged to take college preparatory courses, there were few who indeed did qualify. Some of the teachers at the university extension here were also teachers in the public schools. There is no reason to believe that simply because they were now teaching on a "college" campus that somehow they would miraculously terminate whatever racist orientation they might have possessed. It was indeed a continuous cycle.

According to reports, as far back as the early 1940s, Black students of Las Vegas were being directed away from the college preparatory courses. The question generally raised was "what would you do with a college degree anyway?" No hotels were hiring Black executives with accounting degrees, no

The University of Nevada Reno opened a southern branch in 1957. It was initially called Nevada Southern and it later became University of Nevada Las Vegas. The first classes were conducted primarily at Las Vegas High School. The overall enrollment was low and that was particularly true of minority stu-



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such would occur in Las Vegas. Already we had discovered that "with all deliberate speed" could mean a whole lifetime or just a matter of years. It might move swiftly or it might move at a snail's pace. In the instance of the Supreme Court ruling of 1954 it would indeed be the latter.

Las Vegas was different from Natchez, Mississippi. The greater portion of Las Vegas' black population resided on the "westside." Black children, through the elementary grades, at

other races, Las Vegas' children were segregated. Suddenly, in junior high school, the students were called upon to experience a kind of culture shock by attending school with people who were not only strangers but who also looked differently and of whom they had heard all kinds of strange stories. It worked both ways.

By the time integration in the schools could be experienced, Las Vegas' students were well into adolescence. Certain attitudes had already been formulated and different camps existed within the schools.

Black children who had had positive personal experiences in their elementary schools were now hav-

Certainly, in Las Vegas, Black students

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- Here is a list of the other measures on the Nov. 2 statewide ballot:
- Question 1** — Constitutional amendment to give property tax breaks for conservation of energy.
  - Question 2** — Constitutional amendment to guarantee the right to keep and bear arms.
  - Question 3** — Constitutional amendment to allow the state Legislature to authorize courts below the District Court level to defer and suspend criminal sentences.
  - Question 4** — Constitutional amendment to prohibit reduction of a life sentence without parole or death sentence to a sentence that would allow parole.
  - Question 5** — Constitutional amendment to adjust the boundary of the state so that parts of Nye and Lincoln and all of Clark counties would be included.
  - Question 6** — Constitutional amendment authorizing imposition of an estate tax no greater than the credit allowable under the federal tax.
  - Question 7** — Amends the Sales and Use Tax Act to allow a tax on materials used to manufacture a mobile home.
  - Question 8** — Constitutional amendment to exclude household goods and furniture from taxation.
  - Question 9** — Constitutional amendment to exempt all food, including food served in restaurants, from taxation.
  - Question 10** — Allows issuance of bonds for libraries.
  - Question 11** — Creates an office of consumer advocate for public utilities within the attorney general's office.
  - Question 12** — Initiative petition for a public utilities consumer advocate.

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