

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 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

theatre 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

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