

The Best and Worst of Times

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

I thought that I had seen everything but now I wonder. Maybe I have, but everything keeps repeating itself in something of a different guise.

I'm going to remind you of a series of what is seen by some as isolated events and by others who are more inclined to observe those isolated events and also to observe the connections between those events as some kind of apparent "conspiracy." There is definitely a continuity. I do not remember who it was, perhaps you can look it up, but someone once wrote, "No man is an island." Do you remember having read that little piece somewhere along the way? Anyway, I thought it was not only well written but that it had quite a lot to say. I remember now — I think it was Ernest Hemingway.

It reminded me that nothing just happens to an individual without it having an effect on everybody. Everybody includes even those whom the party of the first part would not have met. Each of our lives are intermingled and each interrelated. However, we do not bear the burden of what another does not do we exalt in another's accomplishments in the first person even though each, both negative and positive, affects us.

We must be constantly aware of what transpires in our immediate territory and the further away from our center of concern events occur, the less we need be aware but aware, to some extent, just the same. The difference, I suppose, has something to do with the gravity of that concern. There are those occasions when events halfway around the world affect our lives. Generally those are events over which we have no control. Poland, Ireland, the Middle East, Argentina, San Salvador, Mexico, India, South Africa and other places experience volatile events almost constantly and even though we might not be acquainted with anyone living in any of those places or, for that matter, we might not even know where those places are, those events are of such world shaking force that they do indeed impact not only on the human condition of those places but also on us.

How can we not be

concerned about those things — starvation, wanton killings, and other general acts of terrorism and oppression? It is happening, collectively, to a large majority of the world. Something must be done or the world will fool around and destroy itself.

We need not go to Moscow, Havana, Warsaw, Beirut, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Calcutta or other such places to see those kinds of things. They happen here — all around us — every day. Children are being brutalized economically, murder and mayhem are rampant. The difference between here and other places is that we call those things by another name — a name with which we are becoming more and more accustomed — CRIME.

I think it would be safe to say, at this point, that all is not well with our planet. We would also probably agree that in spite of this, those who are being victimized are almost total strangers to us. Therefore, we cannot readily identify with those numerous strange problems of all of those strange people in those even stranger places.

I had a friend who once spent considerable time in the Orient. He worked for the State Department. He learned to speak several Oriental languages, worked in international affairs and was a diplomat of international repute. After a number of years, he returned to the United States and visited his hometown. This is a story which he told me: A childhood sweetheart, who had completed her university work and begun a career in teaching, bumped into him on his first day back at home. They made small talk for a while and did a bit of reminiscing. As they were about to part, she asked if he would visit her class and give a talk on the Orient. He agreed. After all, he was an expert. Little did he know what he was letting himself in for.

On the designated date at the appointed hour he arrived at his old alma mater only to discover, to his dismay, that her's was an elementary school class. He had never delivered a talk to a group of youngsters. It was, however, too late to back out. What to do? Actually, there was no choice. He gave the kind of talk that he would have given to a gathering of the United Nations Security Council.



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The talk was, thankfully, abbreviated.

When he concluded, he asked the group of second graders who had paid rapt attention for three-quarters of an hour; if they had any questions. One little bright-eyed, beautiful, baby version of Brigit Bardot raised her hand. "Yes," he said. "You said that there were millions of Chinese children who were daily going without food," she said. "Yes. That is correct," he replied. She squinted her baby blues, twitched her little nose, tilted her head to the side and looked him dead in the eyes and said: "name one." He could not.

Just because he could not do it did not mean that what he had said was not so. Not by a long shot. But, as far as the little girl was concerned, he had just been telling her and her classmates a "story."

Such is the dilemma we face when considering the far flung facts facing the hordes of people the world over who fall victims to the formidable forces of oppression.

Not being able to attach a name, visualize a face or see the condition creates an atmosphere in which we can only empathize with those victims in a remote kind of impersonal manner. They are not really real people. We need those cultural oriented tags to in order to identify or to at least define the subjects in discussion. We have really become a kind of audio-visual oriented society.

Let us, therefore, take all of those factors of oppression and look homeward where we can find the visual aids. Once we do so consciously, the picture which we see is substantially different.

Endangered species. You heard about those before. You watch Wild Kingdom on Sunday evenings with Marlin Perkins. We can see that there are worldwide organizations which are concerned about those species of life which are becoming extinct. Money is pouring in, groups are meeting and lobbying Congress and all sorts of other things are being done to save the alligator, the otters, the eagles, the timber wolves, bighorn sheep. The list goes on and on and on. There is another group which has not yet been added to the list of endangered species but it should. As a matter of fact it should be done right away. Daily, there are fewer and fewer and that is having a perverse effect upon future generations.

I am not speaking of hawks, or those small prehistoric type fish, or such. I am speaking of "BLACK MEN."

"Look homeward angel." That sounds pretty good. One day someone will write a book with that title and someone else will probably make a movie about it. Now that I think about it, both of those have already happened. So much for that good idea. You ever notice that every time you have a reasonably good idea you find out that someone else

has already had it. It is most difficult to generate good ideas anymore. On those rare occasions when you do think of something which has not been thought of before it is usually quickly termed worthless.

I have not lived here for too many years but for those years which I have been here I have observed a kind of gradual, consistent erosion of Black men in our "fair" community. It seems that each time one goes through all of the moves, fulfills all of the requirements for a position, does all of the thankless dirty work and begins to become well thought of, suddenly the bubble bursts. Why? How does it happen so frequently? How does the system get away with it time and time again. Is the system blind or cannot the public see? Is it apathy? Is it as one of the victims suggested in another arena, that we are

peopled by a bunch of "nutless and gutless" wonders? Do we figure that as long as it is not happening to us that we need not be concerned? "It's none of my business," Leroy said when Jesse's face was pushed into the dirt. Have you seen Leroy lately? No. You know why? It's because his face is now in the dirt and no one gives a . . . What about when it happens to "no one?" There won't be anyone left to care.

Oh well, we'll just keep on cruising along as usual. Thinkin that everything is alright is long as we're keeping our heads when all about us others are losing theirs. "Every man for himself, and God for us all." What childish ways we seem to run adult lives. It is no wonder that the system plays and toys with us.

Let's get serious "sports fans." The war indeed "is begun."



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