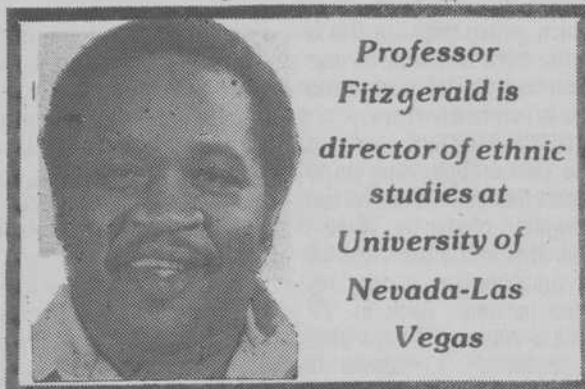


# ALL THAT CHAZ

by Professor Roosevelt Fitzgerald



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

Back in the good 'ol days, where I come from, black people stood a good chance of getting into trouble just by walking past white nite clubs. They would have a few of us around working one job or another and after they would have had one drink too many and one drink was usually that, they might call us some dirty name or other and those who were lucky enough to have a girlfriend with them would show off their masculinity by kicking us in the butt or worse. You know — showing off and having a big laugh but always at our expense.

Those who frequented such places alone always seemed to congregate together, pass a bottle around, get soused and when they were unlucky in finding somebody to take off to a berry patch or an erstwhile lovers lane, would simply... with us. It's no wonder they couldn't get any girls — they obviously didn't know what girls looked like.

Yes, those were the good 'ol days — the days that have been glorified in all of the fanatical craze over the 1950s. The 1950s were much more than "Have Gun Will Travel," "Route 66," or the updated jaded version of it which is passed off as "Happy Days." It was a time when a sizeable percentage

of our nation's population were prevented the right to vote and those in authority—those pledged to execute the Constitution misunderstood and murdered it. It was a time when people like me could not try on a pair of shoes or pants or jacket or hat before paying for it. It was a time when if restrooms were provided at all there were signs that read, *Men, Ladies and Colored* and the latter was never considered either of the former and the place, while never being cleaned, boasted the seal of approval claiming to be sanitized.

You have any idea what a toilet, and that's what they were, smells like with years of caked up urine and feces in the bowl, seats that are hairy with mold and an air quality that would make you puke just by opening the door is like? That's what we had. It was a time when places provided small back windows for us to be served food in a bag and we always had to wonder if the contents had been spat upon. It was a time when we had to sit on the back rows of seats of busses or stand if they were filled even if there were empty seats to the front of the color line of demarcation. It was a time when banks wouldn't provide financing for us to buy homes and un-

ions kept us out and we couldn't go to the bowling alleys or the swimming pools or sit downstairs in the movie houses. It was a time when our parents were humiliated day in and day out and had to look upon their children and wonder what had they brought them into. It was a time when the present was bleak and there was no future and our past had gotten lost on the way to the history books. It was a time of rage and suppression of that rage, a time when we watched our country airlift food and all sorts of other stuff to West Berlin just to show the friggin' Russians that they couldn't... with the U.S. of A. and all the while the U.S. of A. was... with us.

They could've broken us back in the 50's if we had

not been as strong as we were and pushed us and finally, like the fellow said in the movie "Network," two decades later, we got "mad as hell" and decided that we were "not going to take it anymore." All hell broke loose. They call it the civil rights movement. We fixed most of the things about the country that were broken. We got off our knees and started marching, sitting-in, demonstrating, boycotting and some were saying "if we can't have it you ain't going to have it either 'cause we're goin' tear it up." After some preliminary stonewalling, things started changing faster than major league managers with the New York Yankees under Steinbrenner.

The signs came tumbling down. Places that wouldn't

let us in shut down and moved — probably to South Africa. Some organization called the Deacons For Defense started shooting back and the Klan's guns quieted down for the first time in a century. We voted the old bigots out and a few new ones in but we cleaned it up bit by bit.

The face of black Americans changed. The despair that had been seen was replaced with hope, the desperation with determination, the nightmares with dreams. We started making a little money, getting more education, better jobs and housing and health care. Things were really looking up. Matter of fact, they were looking up so much that some of us stopped paying attention to the days of our lives. We were being sweet-talked and what we thought was love was merely a new version of the same old story. A same 'ol story that started out as a mere trickle and grew into a raing torrent of late 20th century racism with three-piece suits but the same old cotton.

"Isolated events" they called them. Ha. They were happening all over the country and they were happening to a generation of us who had not been prepared to be able to recognize it as soon as it showed its ugly head.

It was happening to young eighteen, nineteen, twenty on up to thirty year olds who had either not been born or were so young as to have been unconscious of the ravages of the times of their first ten years in the greatest country the world has ever known.

Back in the 1920s, they had told Marion Anderson that they don't take negroes in a certain conservatory of music in Philadelphia. Back in the 1930s, they had told Henry Aaron that they don't take negroes in pilot training. Back in the 1940s, they had told my dad that they don't take negroes in the labor unions. Back in the 1950s, they had told Linda Brown that they don't take negroes in certain schools in Kansas. Back in the 1960s, they had told James Meredith that they don't take negroes in "Ole Miss." Back in the 1970s, they had told all of us to take the "point" in Nam and that they don't take no for an answer. Here in the 1980s, they have told us that they don't take negroes at Chaz's Night Club in Las Vegas, Nevada 89120.

I had a professor at Jackson State University back in the 1960s — a professor of biology. His name was Greenfield — Dr. Wilbert Greenfield. He could really get into a lecture. Sometimes he would get to going and it would almost be as though he was in a trance. When he'd snap out of it, he would look out at the class and ask: "You dig that jazz?" I learned more biology from that man than had been discovered at that time. In other words, I learned to imagine that which never was but still, today, in Las Vegas, on Tropicana and Swenson Ave. where they keep black patrons standing in line while they allow all others to enter, I'm reminded of Dr. Greenfield and I ask the question: "What is this Chaz?"

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spiring "I Have A Dream" speech beautifully encapsulated the aspirations, hopes, and demands of millions of oppressed citizens, and reinforced his position as the moral leader of the struggle symbolized by the march.

The march was successful because it brought together a broad coalition of religious, political, civil rights, and labor groups. Moreover, a point often forgotten is that it was not purely a civil rights march. The issue was "Justice and Freedom." For Mr. Randolph, freedom meant not only the elimination of Jim Crow laws barring blacks from public accommodations and facilities and denying them the right to vote. Freedom meant economic justice, the elimination of poverty, vocational training and job placement programs, a fair minimum wage, a broadening of the Fair Labor Standards Act, and a federal Fair Employment Practices Act outlawing dis-

crimination by federal, state and municipal governments, and by employers, contractors, employment agencies, and trade unions. These were all part of the 10 demands listed on the program handed out to all the marchers.

Today, 25 years after the march, social and economic justice remains elusive for millions of Americans, particularly blacks. And while millions have, despite the persistence of racism, taken advantage of the avenues of progress opened up by civil rights victories facilitated by the march, millions more continue to be alienated from the social and economic mainstream. So, as we remember the march, recall the historic day, we must remember those for whom Mr. Randolph's vision and Dr. King's magnificent dream remain unfulfilled. We must remember them in November, when our eyes once again turn to Washington and the election of a new Administration. In 1963, we marched in the streets; in

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the grounds by law, to economic common ground, with the challenge to move to moral higher ground." After witnessing the audience burst into applause in response to Jackson's plea, I wondered if the euphoria of that moment will later translate into a real new direction by the Democratic Party.

Now that the dust has settled in the aftermath of the Democratic National Conven-

1988, our march is to the ballot box and for political empowerment.

tion, millions of African Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and progressive white Americans are looking for specific marching orders. Among the Rainbow Coalition, it is a given that there is very little if any sentiment of support for George Bush to be the next president. Yet, it will be a gross overstatement for anyone to conclude that millions of African Americans and others will automatically support Michael Dukakis.

The truth is Jesse Jackson still has the support of the millions of voters who cast their votes for him. While

there is a general appreciation for the role that Jackson played at the convention, there is still in the minds of many a feeling of disgust and dismay at the way Jackson was finally treated. Where do we go from here? We must go to the polls in record numbers if not just to vote for Dukakis, but just as importantly to vote against George Bush and to vote against the devastating legacy of the Reagan years.

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