

BLACK HISTORY MONTH, PART II

by Professor Roosevelt Fitzgerald

During his term as President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, on the occasion of a film festival in New York, said: "A great deal of what the remainder of the world learns about America it gets from the movies."

The same might well be said of Americans. It is no secret that we, as a nation, watch more television and see movies more often than we read books. In large part, our notions of what America is and what it was before comes from the "silver screen." Unfortunately, those depictions are not always historically accurate.

Those inaccuracies do have consequences especially in light of the basic purposes of media; to educate, to entertain and to persuade. When we consider the abundance of stereotypes found in media and its wide range of coverage, it gives us cause for concern. It is stipulated that most groups are indeed stereotyped in media. The long-range damage to some is not only in the same format but also more often. Additionally, the stereotypes are somewhat weakened by the presence of differences in characterizations for those groups. This is especially true of electronic media.

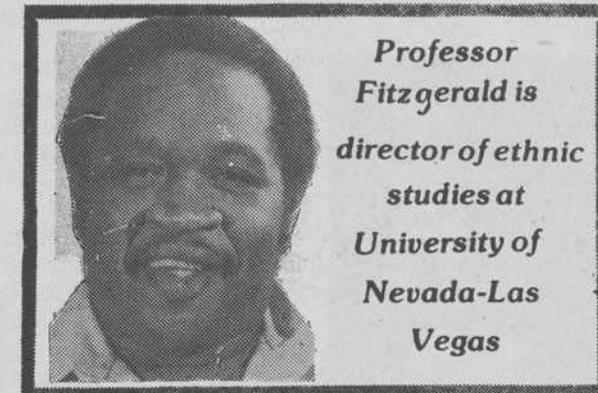
With minority groups such choices are not generally present. Their presence in a movie or television scenario is almost an aberration and singularly so. They're either comic relief, the criminal, the holier than thou, the scapegoat or the victim. Their presence is rarely in sufficient numbers as to allow for choices for identification or role models. It is almost as if the media wishes to convey that there are no choices--that an audience either accept what is given or nothing. Those limitations create the circumstances for damaging, one-dimensional stereotypes to persevere.

That circumstance is compounded by the absence of other available sources of refutation (i.e. texts, pictures, news items in print media.). So, what we ultimately learn about racial groups is, in large measure, determined by what we see in the movies or on television.

Black organizations have, for years, clamored for changes. We have seen the results. Since the release of the movie "Birth of a Nation" in 1915, wherein black people were charac-

terized as rapists, pillagers, arsonists, cowards, ignominious and ignorant blights on our national history, there have been some small measures of progress. That progress has had some positive effects on those of us whose value systems were not yet in place before the arrival of such films as "Ragtime," "An Officer and A Gentleman," "Sounder," "Roots" and a few others. Those chances of being freed from the anchors of the past are challenged by a bevy of the other sorts of films and television shows - "The Jeffersons," "What's Happening," "Good Times," "Superfly," "Alien," "Benson," "Soap" and other such parodies. The masses, yet, are tempted to believe that when blacks are not involved in criminal activities that they are just joking and "jivin'" around. No, I haven't forgotten about the "Cosby Show." Even though it is unrealistic in its presentation it is not enough to off-set the barrage of stereotypes which the collective others present us.

So long as the one-dimensional view is merchandized and subscribed to, black people will continue to receive collective blame for the diviant behavior of a few and after having achieved something noteworthy, be told: "You're not like the



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February 9 - On this date in 1906, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, the poet, died. He is known as a poet of his people and published his first volume, Oak and Ivy in 1893. His contribution was unique in the literature of his time and is remembered for his poems many of which were written in "Negro dialect."

February 10 - On this date in 1780, seven blacks from Dartmouth, Massachusetts petitioned against taxation without representation.

In 1961, Henry Lewis conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra during its regular season. It was a major achievement for a black conductor. In 1968 he was named musical director of the New Jersey Symphony.

February 11 - Frances E.W. Harper died on this date in 1911. Her first volume of poetry, Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects, was published in 1854. During the first five years, 10,000 copies were sold. Her best novel, Iola Leroy, the Shadows Uplifted, was published in 1860

rest of them" and, those who are unconscious, will accept such comment as a compliment.

and it was the first novel written and published by a black woman.

In 1961, Robert Weaver became Administrator of Housing and Home Finance Agency of the federal government.

February 12 - The NAACP was founded on this date following a series of race riots throughout the United States.

Bill Russell, basketball star and the first black to manage a major professional sports team in the United States was born on this date in 1934.

February 13 - Issac Murphy, the first jockey in racing history to have three Kentucky Derby winners died on this date in 1896. In 1882, he won forty-nine out of fifty-one starts at Saratoga and in 1884 he won the first American Derby aboard the horse Modesty.

Absalom Jones, the first black rector in the United States died in 1818.

February 14 - Federick Douglass, immortal abolitionist, orator, editor and statesman was born a slave in Maryland in 1817.

February 15 - Ernest E. Just, noted biologist, was awarded the first coveted Springarn medal by the NAACP in 1915.

Nat King Cole, legendary singer and jazz pianist, died in 1965.

The Southern Stove, Hollow-ware and Foundry Company, a cooperative, was organized on this date in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Its aim was to provide both income and workshop training.

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