

# SOME THOUGHTS ON BLACK HISTORY MONTH

by Professor Roosevelt Fitzgerald

Often I am asked my opinion concerning Black History Month. Sometimes the question is asked directly and other times not. My view has evolved over the years and I'm certain, were someone to invent a time machine, such as that described by H.G. Wells, they would find evidences in support of this.

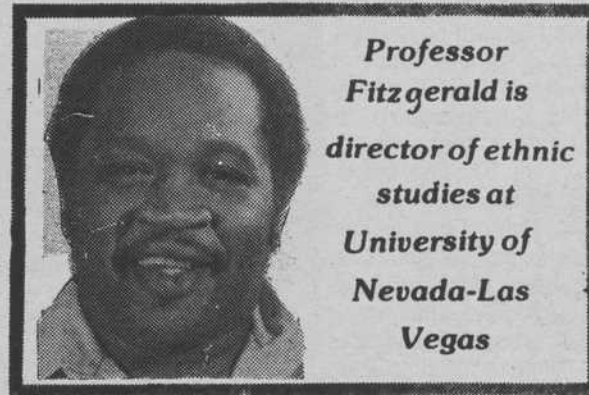
There was a time when I strongly opposed the concept of Black History Week. You can see just from that wording that my involvement with the occasion goes back for a number of years. Initially, Carter G. Woodson, who is considered the father of Black History Month, had the idea of setting aside one week per year in which the presence and contributions of black people could be acknowledged. He felt it necessary to do so because textbooks of the time did not adequately present the history of black people in the country or anywhere else. His primary concern, however, was the United States.

Based on what they had studied and learned from school textbooks, many Americans knew little more than about slavery in regards to the history of black people in the United States. In popular literature they were usually stereotypically cast in the roles of "mammy," "coon," "pickaninny," "rastus," "uncle," "sambo" and the like. In the

developing electronic media of seven decades ago, it was much the same. An argument might be made that it was even worse because even people who could not read could view the demeaning depiction and believe that what they were seeing was representative of what black America was all about. Woodson wished to dispel those stereotypes by providing opportunity for both blacks and non-blacks to discover a more accurate view of black people in our history.

Forty years following the inaugural Black History Week, upon reflection, I thought it preposterous to attempt to teach/learn all of the Black American History in just one week. I was offended that someone thought that there was only one week's worth of worthwhile information on the subject. I should not that these feelings were awakened at the height of the civil rights movement when many of us experienced a heightened sense of awareness about our place in the sun.

Sometime, thereabout, Black History Week grew to become Black History Month and I was momentarily pacified. However, on numerous occasions over the following few years I heard other black people jokingly comment on how the month selected for the observance was the shortest month of the year. Once again I was



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

compelled to feel that Black History was devalued.

Having studied and taught the subject for the past three decades, I find that even in a year's course it is impossible to adequately address the subject. What is done, finally, is what is generally done in any course having to do with history or almost anything else; representative topics are selected and the approach is made by providing a kind of road map and those students who indeed do have a genuine interest in the subject can build upon the signposts discovered. Clearly, it is impossible to address everything even in such a class.

Realistically, when such information is included in standard United States History texts, it displaces items which normally are there. If the same is done with other groups which have been traditionally excluded it would necessitate a "never-

ending-story" sized text that would be unmanageable in any one course. Still, over a period of years such a task might be relatively achievable. Hypothetically, if the salvaging could be initiated in the lower grades where elements of all groups--traditional American History, women, Native American, Hispanic, Black, Jewish, Asian and others, whose identities are established by visible differences, might be incorporated in school texts, such subject matter could become part of the norm for all.

To realize such an objective would involve effort and commitment by the entire educational hierarchy. Beginning with the authors and artists, the editors, the publishing companies, the school districts and the districts' textbook and curriculum committees, decisions must be made to terminate the practice of driving, in effect, certain

students away from the educational environment by, in effect, saying to them that neither they nor their ancestry ever did anything of value. Obviously, had they done so, those accomplishments would be noted in the textbooks.

The system has long known that something needed to be done but has been satisfied simply to say that the problem would be solved by the next generation. We have therefore passed the problem on from one generation to the next in much the same way we relate to environmental problems: "so long as the air, water, food and so on is sufficient to sustain me in my own lifetime, to heck with what happens afterward. So long as there is not racial turmoil to the extent that it reaches where I live and work, to heck with it." The "me" generation is not new.

Following the introduction of personalities, stories and bulletin board displays in the lower grades, to the same extent that it is currently, those previously excluded groups should be incorporated into the curriculum. Those changes, it would seem, would have positive multi-cultural effects on the values of an entire generation and the manner in which they view those who have physical appearances which are different than theirs and

even, hopefully, on how they view themselves.

In the secondary schools we would learn about the roles those groups have played in bringing our nation closer to the realization of a democratic ideal as the "holy experiment" might have suggested. Our's is an exciting and living history when it is fully acknowledged. Without the view of the "big picture" of it, it is boring and lifeless.

Recently we have cheered as Russia has initiated a process of educational overhaul in which they've begun to tell more of the truth of their history--including atrocities. They are moving toward bringing closure to their "dark ages." Only by our own owning up to the fact that our own history has not always been glorious and especially as it pertains to those excluded groups, can we begin to bring our own history out of the "dark ages." This new enlightenment throughout the world is welcomed. I would hope that we would do no less in moving forward and doing that which needs doing in order to bring closure to our racial problem. In the meantime I suppose it is yet necessary to take whatever opportunities there are to bring exciting history of America's minorities out of the closet.

## SCHOOLS

From Page 5

smart enough to be aware of this. They see these same commercials every day. And what's more, advertisements can be used as a teaching tool. College courses across the country teach students the inside out of commercial advertising. It enhances their analysis skills, their vocabulary and their critical thinking ability. These are skills that need to be taught when students are younger and more impressionable, and with Channel One teachers will have this opportunity.

But Channel One is more than advertising. It is much more, and its opponents obviously do no care to acknowledge this. Channel One is news and current events that are packaged and

designed for students so that they can understand how the news affects them. Channel One is enticing and invites students into a world that they are often reluctant to, or simply do not, enter.

The Educational Network is not a panacea, it is an opportunity. An opportunity to bump many schools from the "have-not" category, closer to the "haves." In a perfect world it would have no commercials. In a perfect world a government entity would support education adequately, but this world is not perfect.

The American schoolroom has changed very little over the past 50 to 100 years, but technology and the nature of the American workforce has changed significantly. Some schools have kept up with

## NTA Offers Coupon Books to Senior Citizens and Handicapped Persons

The Nevada Taxicab Authority has announced the distribution of subsidized transportation coupon books to senior citizens and handicapped residents of Clark

County, beginning March 1 through March 15, 1990. Beginning with the March distribution, the coupon books will be distributed every other month. The recipient must appear in person at the Taxicab Authority office, 1785 East Sahara, Suite 200, to register, Monday through Friday, 8 A.M. - 12 Noon. After an individual has registered, coupon books may be obtained for each distribution by mailing a check or money order for \$10.00 per book, along with a self-addressed stamped business sized envelope. The coupon books will be mailed within two weeks after close of distribution. Questions may be directed to the subsidized transportation coordinator at 486-6535, Monday through Friday, 8 A.M. to 12 Noon.

these changes and perhaps they do not need the technological resources and the educational opportunities that Whittle Communications' Educational Network offers. But the majority of schools, the "have-not" schools, desperately need this chance to move into the 21st century. Opposition toward educational partnerships cannot be permitted to derail this opportunity, because opposition to innovation will leave our educational system in the same state of inertia it has suffered through for decades.

**FOR ALL OCCASIONS**  
**Plants & Gifts**

**SPECIALIZING IN:**  
Non-Flammable Helium  
Balloon Arrangements  
Balloon Printing  
Conventions & Trade Shows

**• BIRTHDAYS • WEDDINGS •**  
**• GET WELL • SHOWERS •**  
**• JUST BECAUSE •**

**NO  
DELIVERY  
CHARGE**

**24  
HOUR  
DELIVERY  
SERVICE**

**254-1464**

**2217 Rainbow Blvd.  
Las Vegas, NV 89117**