

THE SPITBALL SOLUTION

It whizzed by my ear like a bee. Reflexes caused me to slap the side of my face--so certain I was that I was about to be stung. Nothing happened and the adrenalin surge which I had felt subsided. Before it had drained back into its cup, my ears were bombarded with what can be described only as a shriek. "Who threw that spitball?" The entire third grade class was as quiet as Ronald Reagan when asked of his contributions to healthy race relations in the United States. No one moved. No one looked up. I don't know about the others, but I didn't even breathe for the full time between that initial outburst and what came next. "I want to know who threw that and we're remaining right here, even if it takes all night, until I do." I had no idea who had thrown the spitball, but I did have an idea from which quadrant of the classroom it had originated--behind me and to the left.

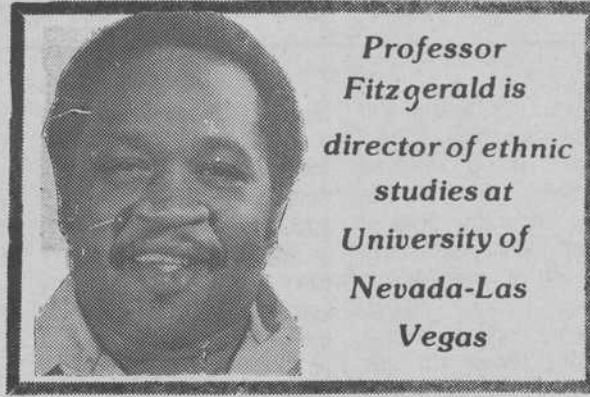
The teacher sat there and stared with the meanest expression I had ever seen on a face since that day in a department store, in Natchez, Mississippi, in 1949, when I had tried on a baseball cap before my father had paid for it. All of us became nervous and that was especially true when the bell, dismissing school for the day, sounded. "Stay where you are. Don't leave your seats. No one will move until I know who threw that spitball."

I glanced at Robert, Willie and Jesse. They had the same concerned look on their faces as I am sure I had on mine. We knew the rules as did all the other children: no spitball throwing, no thumb tacks in chairs, no gum chewing, no laughing, no smiling, no talking and no fidgeting around. We never did any of those things because we knew better and because we didn't want low marks in department on our report cards. Our parents might be somewhat lenient if we did not get the very best scores on exams but they definitely would not tolerate bad marks in department. My father used to say to me and my brothers: "Just make sure you don't let your mouth get your ass in trouble." We obeyed the rules, and, in so doing, while we did not expect to be rewarded, we certainly did

not expect to be punished. After all, when one is punished after having obeyed the rules, the rules are debased.

It was dark and almost six o'clock before we were finally allowed to go home. When I got home my mother asked me where I had been. I told her the entire story. Her only response was: "Where do they get them teachers from?" My father, who had been out looking for me, just looked off into the distance for a moment before he spoke. He was not an educated man. He had only gone as far as the fifth grade. He did, however, know right from wrong. It was, perhaps, because of his limited education that he was so critical of the alleged educated. He was known to have said: "They may know how to read and write, but they sure ain't got no sense." This time he was much more philosophical. "They got what they wanted. They punished the boy who threw that thing. They know they did because they took everybody. Always been that way; ever since Adam and Eve. They messed up and the rest of us got to pay. Guess they figure if it was okay for God to punish everybody, then it's okay for them to do it too. That's why I don't go to church, cause it don't make no difference if you go or not, your chance of going to hell is better'n your chance of going to Heaven, especially since the whole bunch of us gets punished whether we do anything wrong or not."

In case you're wondering, all of this came to mind a week or so ago when I pondered on the fact that University Road/Harmon Avenue would no longer be a thru-street on the campus of UNLV after-April 13. This closure came about because there have been some people speeding through the campus or driving under the influence of one thing or another or both. They, of course, broke the law. The way they're punished is by punishing everybody just like that third grade teacher did when I was in third grade. Just as it was too much work for that person to find out who had thrown the spitball and just punish them, that person took the easy way out and punished even the innocent. I hope that person didn't attempt to teach civics



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by Professor Roosevelt Fitzgerald

or government. No telling what they would have done when they ran across that line about innocent until proven guilty.

Now, those of us at UNLV, and I am certain it is the majority, are told, in effect, that we are going to be punished whether we're guilty of any infractions or not, because it's too much work to seek out the guilty and just punish them. The phenomenon is so similar to what happens to every Black man when "a" Black man robs a convenience store or shoots somebody, or assaults somebody or even insults anybody. Do you remember back in the old days when there were some who said: "If you're going to be charged for it, you may as well do it?" I wonder if this might not be exactly what is taking place in the larger society with so many of the younger ones among us.

There's more to this than merely what appears apparent. The parking problem on campus is like the soil of parts of the midwest--growing worse daily. Anymore, when one enters the campus, from either the west or the east, if a parking place is not found in that area they must exit the campus, drive over a mile, reenter on the other side, search for a parking place there and, if one is not found, exit the campus once again, drive over a mile, reenter on the side entered first and go through the process all over again. In going through this process during the first two weeks of the new procedure, I have found that I am now required to fill my car with gasoline on Thursday rather than what had previously been once per week on Sunday night. The new system is both time-consuming, energy-consuming and more

costly, along with being unfair.

Lately, it has become fashionable for some to say: "Life isn't fair." I can accept that on a literal plane. Life is chancy and usually happens when you least expect it. Life, however, in its relationship to fairness is dif-

ferent from people. People make choices. They can choose to be fair or not to be fair. Here's an example for you. Pearl Harbor was bombed in December of 1941. Suddenly, we were at war with Japan. There was some concern that there might be Japanese agents at work in the country and I have no doubt that there were. We needed to do something about bringing them into custody. It would have required a lot of hard work like the spitball thrower, the speeders--and, even though we like to say that we are a nation of hard workers, if there's a way to circumvent that, we will do it. The way that we solved that little problem was by "rounding up" every person of Japanese ancestry and that way we would be sure that we got whatever agents there

might be.

In recent weeks there have been some tremendous changes in the fishing industry. You have probably heard about what Sunkist and a few other tuna canneries have done. They will no longer accept tuna caught in nets where dolphins have also been caught and killed. Tuna fishermen have resisted this for years. Too much work separating tuna and dolphins, they say. Finally, the industry has said: "TOUGH. That's your job. If you can't do it, we will find some fishermen who can and will." Dolphins no longer must pay, with their lives, for a tuna catch. Non-spitball throwers shouldn't pay for throwers. Non-speeders shouldn't pay for speeders. In short, the innocent should never pay for the guilty and, frankly, I'm getting tired of it.



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