

WILL THE REAL CHAMPION PLEASE STAND

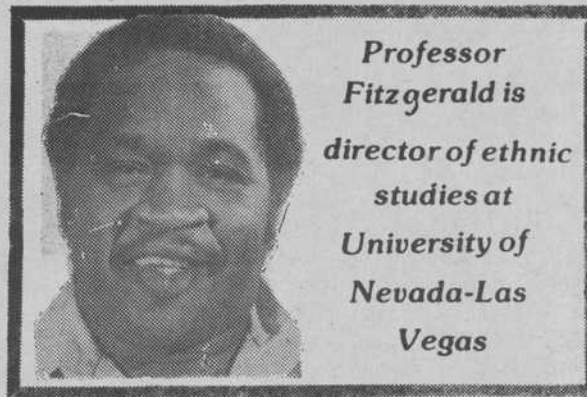
"Of all the rotten luck." That's what I thought in the early spring of 1989 when the road to the Final Four started and the Runnin' Rebels were seeded in the first round in Boise, Idaho.

Fifteen years earlier, I had been up in that country-camping. It was in the Bitterroot Mountains right along the border of western Montana. I entered the state on highway 12 out of Missoula and followed the Lochas River down to Kooskia where I cut north by northwest on that same highway to the North Fork of the Clearwater River just past Orofino. From there it was down to Lewiston and on south to Cambridge where I veered off to the north on highway 71 up to Hell's Canyon on the Snake River.

All told, I spent right at two months in Idaho and never had a problem with anybody. Beautiful country, terrific roads and camping and real nice people. The next decade, almost, I thought of returning to Idaho and seeing more of it but I could not find the time and then it was too late. The next thing I knew

there were reports of neo-nazis, skin heads, klansmen, survivalists and all sorts of other white supremacists all over the place up there. They held annual meetings at Hayden Lake, near Coeur d'Alene, with thousands in attendance. You probably saw something about it on television or in the papers. The biggest gatherings of bigots since Hitler met up in that neck of the woods. Fatigued, automatic weapons, men, women, children--brainwashers and brainwashees teaching and learning to hate black, brown, red, yellow and Jewish people.

It became increasingly clear to me that the new Idaho was nothing at all like the Idaho I had known. It was because of that transfiguration that my first thought, in early spring of 1989, when the Rebels were seeded to play the first round of the NCAA Tournament in Boise, Idaho, was: "Of all the rotten luck." Then it occurred to me that it was just the sort of thing the Selection Committee would do--send a



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by Professor Roosevelt Fitzgerald

team of primarily black young men into hostile territory.

Well, the joke was on them. You see, the overwhelming majority of those hate mongers that we've been hearing about in Idaho are not Idahoans. They are transplanted muck found in the backed-up sewage lines of America. We must guard against developing a negative, stereotypical view of Kansas and Kansans simply because the NCAA is headquartered there. Many of the people involved in the

recent decision which we all loath come from other places where if they didn't imagine they were superior to Las Vegas, the only things left for them to imagine they're superior to would be minority people.

As this past year's basketball season got underway there was indeed great anticipation for success. We were ranked one, two or three in all of the preseason polls and most of them had us ranked number one. Disaster set in right from the start. One of our

starters and the sixth man were academically ineligible for the Fall Semester. Then there were the one and two game suspensions followed by injuries to several key players. We had a makeshift team for much of the season and dropped a few key games. Still, the enthusiasm remained high. Much of our season--the past thirteen years--is analogous to Victor Hugo's novel *Les Miserables* where the relentless inspector Javert hounded Jean Paul Jean for years because he had once stolen a loaf of bread in order that his sister could feed her children. How many times must one pay for having made a poor decision? Over and over again for a lifetime? There is the law and there is justice. Are we to believe, as Kipling has said of the east and the west that "never the twain shall meet?" Are we to stand on the balcony of life and cry out into the night for justice as Juliet did for Romeo? Justice, Oh Justice. Where forth art thou? Will our incantations and lamentations be whisked away by the winds to forever be lost

among all the everlasting sounds waiving through the universe? Of course not. And we will not.

Who will speak up for us? What a wonderful time for these events to unfold. As the democratic ideal is spreading to other parts of the world, we can let them see how important it is. Soon there will be only one dictatorship left in the world where due process is gone with the wind and the power hungry gives a fair trial even as the hangman and his cohorts prepare the scaffold for the hanging.

The NCAA has set itself up in much the same way as were Medieval kingdoms. All of the universities are manors and the players are serfs and the concept of the Magna Charta has not yet been conceived.

Once again they have slapped us down and once again, like the phoenix, we will rise. We may not win this battle with them. We probably will be denied the opportunity to defend our championship. As a concession, they will probably

See FITZGERALD, Page 13

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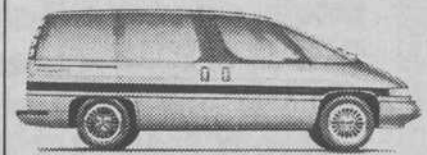
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