

SADDLE UP

1935. Everything was cheap but it didn't matter. Not many people had money and black people had the least. The country, nay, the entire world, the world where money existed was deep in the throes of the "great depression." In spite of all the hardship, there was still cause and opportunity for a bit of humor. In many ways laughter made the hardships just a little more tolerable.

"Say brother. Can you spare a dime?" "A dime. What are you going to do with a dime?" "Get a cup of coffee." "Coffee only costs a nickel." "I know. Will you join me?" Or: "Say brother can you spare \$400?" "\$400. What are you going to do with \$400?" "Get a cup of coffee." "A cup of coffee only costs a nickel." "I know, but I want to drink it in Rio." My favorite is: "Say brother, can you spare a nickel?" A nickel. What are you going to do with a nickel?" "Call a friend." "Here's a dime. Call them all."

Many people made fun of the dire straits in which they found themselves. On any given day in any city, town, village or in front of a country store, you could find a group of men who jokingly tried to out-harden each other. Here are some of the things they might be overheard saying. "We're so poor, our pancakes only have one side." "That's nothing. We're so poor, the roaches eat out." "If you think that's something, last night I saw a rat in the alley, sitting on a garbage can chewing on a piece of rotten onion and crying." Finally: "We're so poor that at our house the only way we can make ends meet is by standing back to back."

Yes, 1935 was a year to remember. It's a year I'll never forget even though I hadn't been born. I first heard about it over a decade later while I was still a wee tyke and with an abundance of childish curiosity. Part of my nature was to eavesdrop. The more people involved in a conversation, the more compelled I felt to listen in on what was being discussed. By the time I was five or six years old I had gotten pretty good at it. Many a night I would be discovered in my hiding place and chased off to bed but only to come stealthily back once the conversation had got-

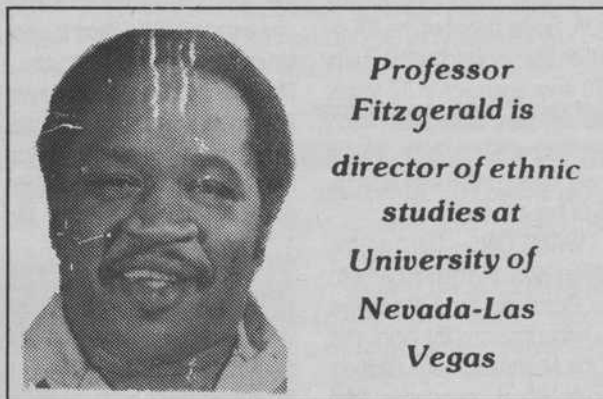
ten back in full gear.

I don't think I was unusual in that regard. I think most kids did it and do it. Part of the reason why I did and why others did and do was because the grownups rarely ever told me anything. I don't know why it is that so many grownups think children are incapable of understanding anything other than childish stuff. That may be true for some but it wasn't true for me and it wasn't and isn't for many others. Children want to learn and they have the desire very early in life. If they can manage to maintain that desire through all of the attempts to suppress their curiosity, they might have a chance to really develop their minds. If, however, ever time they ask a question they're told to go out and play, they stand a better than even chance of becoming dull and boring and anti-intellectual. What I think occurs when they are treated in such a way is they get the idea that knowledge is taboo rather than the golden fleece which draws us on into the great mental expeditions and adventures.

Anyway, it was during one of my forays of getting out of bed, crawling along the floor and positioning myself just beyond a doorway connecting a room where the grownups were sitting around and talking, that I overheard one of many amazing conversations.

Several of the men had served in World War II and even though that war had ended several years earlier, they still found both the need and the occasion to talk about it and some of the things that came before.

It had been in 1935 that Italy invaded Ethiopia and the world stood by and allowed the highly mechanized Italian army to have its way with the small, unorganized, ill-equipped Ethiopians. To call what happened a massacre would make it appear to have been a fair fight. Many black men from the United States found their way to Ethiopia and offered up their lives in defense of the defenseless country. By the end of World War II the Italians had been driven out but the damage done could never be undone. It was the age-old story of the bully taking advantage of the small and the weak, but that's



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how bullies get along.

Four years later yet another bully from Germany did the same thing to Poland and a few other small, weak countries. That time, however, the world powers bristled and entered into a great war to save western civilization. Too bad, that portion of African civilization represented by Ethiopia had not been deemed important enough to go to war about.

There have been other examples but there is neither time nor space to note them all. Instead, let's come up to today and what is happening in the Middle East with Kuwait and on into Saudi Arabia. A bully appears again and this time, for whatever reasons, the world bristles. The days and weeks

immediately following the invasion witnessed a galvanization of nations and especially the United States. Immediately soldiers were sent, from here, to curb the tide of the flow of aggression.

As I watched the newscasts showing the American buildup, in every instance there were blacks represented in all branches. Men and women, in uniform, going "over there" to fight for the interests of their country. In no previous military conflict has there been as clear a depiction of black involvement in America's military exploits. We have fought in every war since the American Revolution and our contributions have traditionally been ignored not only by the

military but also by the recorders and reporters.

Many of our soldiers were only eighteen or so when they served in Viet Nam. Now they're in the Middle East. We are beginning to hear some who wish to put a damper on America's involvement in this fracas, compare it to Viet Nam. They say it is going to be the same. I don't

know about such things. I got out of the predicting business years ago. Sometimes some of us become confused when we hear reports of what Hussein of Iraq has done lately with what Hussein of Jordan is going to do next. I don't get confused because, after all, Hussein one Hussein them all.

CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR TEST SITE WORKERS COMPLETE

During the 1989 Nevada Legislative session Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams sponsored Assembly concurrent Resolution Number 48 dealing with potential reduction in work force or the closure of the Nevada Test Site.

Under Assemblyman Williams' legislation, the Executive Director Stan Jones was assigned the responsibility of developing contingency plans for the near 9,000 Nevadans employed by Nevada Test Site. The employment of these people contribute millions of dollars to the economy of Nevada. "The closing of the Nevada Test Site or any substantial reduction in its workforce would have an enormous impact on our economy. We must have alternative employment for the workers at the Test Site," stated Williams when he learned the plans are now complete and in place.

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