

# THE CONTENT OF OUR HISTORY

History is nothing more than a recorded account of events which have occurred. That account is influenced by the point of view or the frame of reference of the recorder. Before the development of writing, just over 4000 years ago or so, history was in no one's hands but in the minds and memories of selected members of individual groups. There were no nations as we know them today. Population centers were much smaller and the smallest of them were comprised of however many families who, in many ways, were probably related.

We're talking about a time much further back than four thousands years ago. In the days when there were clans, small villages, cultural groups, city states and on to the appearance of civilizations, the methods of maintaining records evolved and became more complex. Surely we can see that when there were only a few people living within the confines of a specific area, it was much easier keeping track of them all. As the numbers grew, however, it became necessary to become selective. Initially, the names, dates of birth, accomplishments, birthdays, marriages, and so on served to give bulk to local histories.

As societies became more complex, we find the introduction of laws, religious practices, economic trends, military events and technological innovations replacing those more mundane events which, because of the regularity, no longer held significance for the larger group but only for the individual families.

Still, the histories of the groups represented the entire group. While it is true only the names of the governmental leaders along with those leaders in religious and military areas began to appear in print, they were all representative of the entire group. They were Sumerians, Kushites, Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Cathergenians, Phoenicians, Hebrews, Babylonians, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Incas, Aztecs and others — all the same.

Within each of those groups there was a designated person whose responsibility was to remember all of the data pertaining to the group. That information included births, deaths and everything in between; who begat whom. Obviously, such histories were restricted and

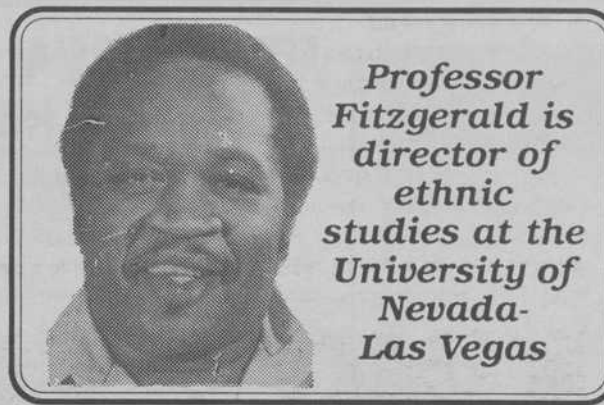
gave only a narrow view of the events and the doings of the time. No one felt any the worse for wear because the same thing occurred with everyone. For so long as those societies were monolithic no problem of the sort of one group perceiving itself or being perceived as getting more or less attention than other groups within that society could possibly occur. As groups became more heterogeneous the opportunity of such perceptions increased greatly.

Still, in the old world where such interminglings did in fact take place, there was rarely a time when any one group who had migrated or been brought among the population ever amounted to such numbers as to warrant inclusion in any fashion other than that decided upon by the native group which invariably was the group in power unless the native group had been over run by an invading force who in turn suppressed the native group as was the case of the Romans and the Greeks, the Assyrians and the Kushites, the European and the Native American Indians.

Old World history is substantially different than that of the Western Hemisphere and especially that of the United States. The native groups were overthrown and the immigrating groups seized power.

The latter group decided what was important and they decided what would be included in the history of what they called the "NEW NATION." Between 1776, the year the "NEW NATION" was conceived, 1787 the year it was born and 1865 the year it came of age, in many ways it excluded many of its inhabitants from actually being a part of it.

Even though it had proclaimed in 1776 that "all men are created equal," it continued its practice of slavery. Even though its Constitution, drafted in 1787 was to represent a democratic republican ideal, one still had to be free, male, white, twenty-one



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by Professor Roosevelt Fitzgerald

years or older and a property owner.

Obviously, this excluded not only black people but many others including women, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. While excluded, these groups had no claims to citizenship. Not having such claims they had no platform to air whatever grievances they might have had so they went unaided. With the passage of the Civil War Amendments beginning in 1865 and ending in 1868 which brought about the end of slavery, the extension of citizenship to the "freedman" and the right to the ballot, those earlier restrictions on who were active citizens began to be eliminated.

Much of the social history of the United States might well be centered around the efforts of those groups who were omitted from the protections and rights of the "NEW NATION" to become a part — certifiably a part of the United States. While the 15th Amendment extended the right to vote to black men, it did not include black women or any other women. Women would not get the ballot until the adoption of the 19th Amendment. Ownership of property as a prerequisite to voting was outlawed with the adoption of the 24th Amendment and, finally, the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to eighteen.

Once all those groups became citizens, their presence and the record of their presence in this country ought to have

become bona fide portions of the history of this country. To date it has not. Certainly, there are books having to do with previously excluded groups but they are separate books.

They seem to suggest segregation of our history right along with the former segregation which has existed in this country and, to some extent, continues to exist in the minds of many people.

There is a competition or a conflict or a war currently going on to determine who and what will be included in the history texts of the United States. Those

groups which have traditionally been excluded to the exclusivity of the history of the United States as being the domain of the white male by continuing to go, hat in hand, asking for inclusion in those texts. It is my feeling that this is not the proper stance or avenue to take.

It is not our task to request that our history be included in the history texts of this nation. This is especially true of those texts used in our public schools. We are citizens of the United States. Not one-quarter citizens. one-half, or one-third citizens. We are citizens. We belong here. We've been here all along. What this country is partially a result of

all our efforts and not just the efforts of white male Americans. We are not talking about anything extra. We are not talking about anything in addition to. We are talking about the facts and the fact is, the history of the United States is the history of all its people — no matter who they are.

My recommendation would be that, in the future, parents of children who are enrolled in the school, not allow their children to read United States History texts which do not sufficiently include the history of their American ancestry and thereby be belittled by the absence of that history.

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