

"LETS CELEBRATE"

I've agonized over what to write for this issue commemorating the birthdate of our country. Yes, I said "our" country and I say so in spite of the fact that there are many who choose to believe, still, that we are not all Americans. I don't know about you but I am as American as the next fellow and there is no one in this country who is going to tell me otherwise.

My thoughts are a result of the past, the present and the future. As a young boy, back in Natchez, Mississippi, a town which, then, boasted of being a place where "The Old South Still Lives," I had occasion to memorize the Declaration of Independence, the greater part of the Constitution and to read about much of the heroic deeds of those who played a part in the founding of this nation.

The story of the Minutemen always fascinated me. As a child I wanted to be a minuteman. I wanted to always be prepared just in case my country needed me to defend it against any enemy.

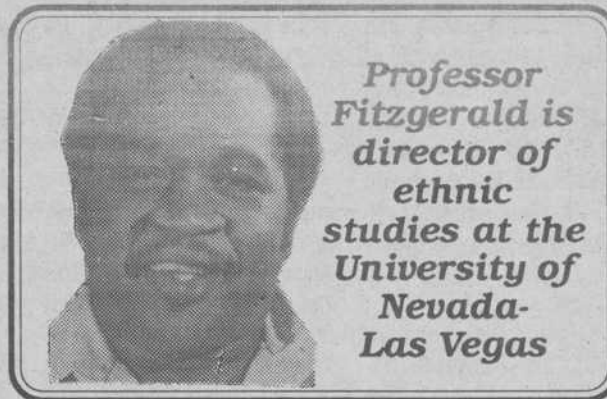
As I grew up my thoughts were always on the day that I would be called upon. I read those words and they had meaning for me. In that great innocence of childhood I foresaw myself leading a band of the Green Mountain Boys, suffering and worrying through Valley Forge, in the chase at Yorktown and, even before any of those, in the city beaming and spilling over with brotherhood writing a document that people for hundreds of years would read and associate with my name. I would sit at a small table with only candles for light and I would write: "We h these truths to be self evid that all men are created equa What a feeling. For all of years that people had been this planet, it would be I v would first write that "all men created equal."

Those are powerful wor They are especially powerft you mean them. I would. Iwo imagine myself, standing bef a body of men and proclaimi "...Give me liberty or give death." That's how import liberty is—so much so that i worth dying for. To die

something so important takes all of the apprehension of dying away. From those days of long ago times, I remember growing up and falling in love with my country. I would fight for it. I would die for it. Why, I would even live for it and give to it the fruits of my efforts; physical and mental. Yes, as great as my country was, my destiny would be to make it even greater. I listened, read, observed—I took in everything that I could in order to better prepare myself for the call.

Never would Thomas Paine's charge rang true of me. You know of what I speak. Remember, he was the person who wrote: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country." Never, I thought, during those time of my own forging, would I ever shrink. I was just a child but I was in the process of becoming conscious.

Puberty brought more than the usual changes. I was right in the throes of it when the Brown case was rendered. I will never forget the degree of my bewilderment at discovering that the Bill of Rights did not apply to me. I asked my parents about it and they honestly had never heard of the Bill of Rights. They were uneducated and the way life was, was the way it had always been for them. They didn't know that they were entitled to anything. They didn't expect anything and they ultimately lived their whole lives without ever being treated decently. What angers me about



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by Professor Roosevelt Fitzgerald

that is that all their lives they were Americans and no one ever told them what that meant. I asked my teachers at school—I attended Catholic school—I asked them about how the Bill of Rights applied to me and about equality business of the Declaration of independence and was quoted something from the Bible but never told that somebody was breaking the law by not letting me be an American. I re-read those documents. Maybe I had missed something. Maybe they had said that Negro's (that's what we were called back then) were not Americans. I became more mixed up than waste products excreted from the body's stern. I dug deeper looking for answers.

What I found was the path to being a social activist, an agitator and you know what an agitator does; agitate. I agitate a lot of people. Most of them are still unconscious such as I was when I was a child. I especially agitate those who are still convinced that they must go, hat in hand, asking for that which is their birthright. The burden of safeguarding our rights is on government.

However, so long as the illusion is allowed to persist that we must have some sorts of special legislation, above and beyond that of "normal" people, we allow ourselves to be placed in the unenviable position of having our adversaries believe that our "Bill of Rights" is optional and at their pleasure.

The law is clear; anyone born or naturalized in this country is a citizen. There is no discussion. There is no debate. There is nothing to negotiate. There is nothing mysterious about this. Borrowing a phrase from the Declaration of Independence; this fact is self-evident.

Today we are celebrating the 215 anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and we must understand what that means to black people; not much. I do not say this to display a lack of patriotism but only as a statement of fact.

The founders, for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was "taxation without representation," saw fit to bring about an end to the conditions under which they lived in their relationship with the "Mother Country"; Eng-

land. The leadership convinced themselves and then each other and then the masses that their condition was intolerable and that they were being oppressed by England.

They were. The laws were unjust and that contributed greatly to the growing militancy among the colonials. That militancy ultimately led to the violent overthrow of the government. Thankfully, the founders realized that unjust laws ought not be obeyed.

As is often the case, people have a greater tendency to be conscious if that which offends

or oppresses them while, simultaneously, being oblivious to their own oppressive behavior toward others. While the founders were focused on independence they failed to notice, initially, that there was a greater evil present; slavery. They were willing to fight and to die for their own independence even while they denied freedom to those they enslaved. It would be another 89 years before freedom came to the slaves.

Yes, I will celebrate Independence Day but I will fly the flag at half mast. See you at the parades.

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