

PROLOGUE

Redd Foxx loved the story. Flip Wilson said it would be as widely read as Alex Haley's *Roots*. When I met these two celebrated black comedians backstage at the Landmark Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas not a trace of Redd's famed vulgarity left the stage with him. I was a struggling writer, a nobody, and these two men welcomed me with unrestrained enthusiasm. Then Sallie died in 1981. Shortly after that Redd died. Sadness overwhelmed me. *Black Exodus* and its wealth of material gradually lost its pressing importance and I lapsed into a state of crippling indifference.

Some forty years later the international outrage to the killing of George Floyd last year in 2020 by that white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, awakened the desire within me to resurrect—and update—*Black Exodus* and with it, its purpose to ameliorate race relations. And even more important now, highlight Sallie's part in the story like I never did before.

Considering our journey down from the stars, and our astonishing gift of consciousness and self-awareness, no sentient being is really a nobody. We all have a story within us just waiting to come out; And since you don't have any preconceived notions about me, we can start out here with a clean slate.

I was a 3rd class radio operator in the navy (that's a corporal in the army) during the Korean War and I had a friend, Allen Blandon, who like me, was from Texas. And every conversation he started, started with *I used to do this. I used to be that. "An old used to be."* And he'd go into a long, long detailed explanation. A regular fellow, but he'd bore you to death.

So I'll make this mercifully short when I say *I used to* have Redd Foxx, best known for his hit television series "Sanford And Son," chomping at the bit to make a movie out of *Black Exodus*, my raw unfinished manuscript. It was a highly controversial and provocative novel about the blacks and my first attempt at writing. Surprisingly, Redd wasn't bothered at all by this. The publicity campaign he had in mind for the book was staggering in scope, even by Hollywood standards. And I thought I was the one who had the guts and imagination. This was when the blacks, with righteous indignation, were burning down their ghettos across the country in the late 1960s and '70s.

Following Sallie's death, Berkley Publishing and several top Hollywood producers were intrigued with the new novel I was working on, *More Than A Warrior*. My biography of retired CIA operative and Green Beret MSgt. Howard Upchurch, who was the role model for

the mad, majestic Colonel Kurtz portrayed by Marlon Brando in the 1976 blockbuster film *Apocalypse Now*. Together, we made nearly 200 audiocassette tapes of his life . . . and in the process he became my best friend. I only bring this up because Howard plays a crucial role in *Black Exodus* later.

For a variety of reasons, nothing ever came of the two stories. “A noble experiment that failed,” as one of my friends put it, summing up those fifty years. Ten on *Black Exodus*, forty more on [*More Than A Warrior*](#).

Like I mentioned earlier, last year George Floyd was killed by officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis, his consciousness gone; erased forever. All for the unforgivable sin of trying to pass a \$20 bill for cigarettes that Floyd may, or may not, have known was phony, which set off a spark that ignited a firestorm of protests across the country again. Not nearly so much in violence like that time in the 1960s and ‘70s, but . . . well, let me show you a headline from a recent newspaper: “CHAOS IN AMERICA! LIFE IS CHANGING FOREVER.” Suddenly all my thoughts crystallized around that one headline. For the first time, ever, other countries were taking the plight of our black citizens (and to a lesser degree, brown and Asians) to heart and examining their own troubled race relations at home. As incredible as it sounds, racism was under intense attack from all quarters. It seemed as if the world’s conscience had had enough.

Excited, I heaved myself off the couch. Damn. Maybe, just maybe, *Black Exodus* was relevant again. *Wouldn’t that be something, huh, Sallie*, I thought, taking her framed picture down from the wall and holding it close while I paced about the room. *I’ve got to, I’ve to get the book or the movie out for you this time, honey*.

I broke out my old manuscript. It needed work to bring it up to date, but nothing like those ten years Sallie and I put into it back then. I say me and *Sallie* because without her working like a slave at executive secretarial jobs all those years while I tried to write there wouldn’t be a book.

Before I get into the story proper, I think it would be a good idea if I started out with Redd Foxx first and our unlikely friendship. And then go on to tell you about my bizarre encounter with Alex Halley, author of *Roots*.

In the last couple of years I’ve undergone a sea change in the way I think. I was wrong, so very wrong about marriage between the races in my story. But I did it with the best intentions at heart. But, as we all know, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Ironically, the solution to our race problems was right here in my writings all the time staring me in the face. But I wouldn’t accept it. Not with my old mind set. I’m talking about James Coleman, an eminent sociologist, and his solution, which I initially spurned. It isn’t a perfect solution, not by any means. *But it’s the only solution*. He was far more of a realist than I was. You can find Coleman in Chapter 5: The Meeting on page 55. And later in The Focal Point on page 130.
