

Manifest Destiny U.S.A.

ALBERT MURRAY

IT WAS during those never to be forgotten midwinter night tell-me-tale times in the semicircle of miscellaneous chairs around the brick-red and mortar-gray fireplace beneath the Mother Goose chime-clock mantelpiece that old Uncle Jerome, the jackleg freelance preacher, who was once an Escambia County plough hand and then a Piney Woods rosin collector and was now a United Fruit Company banana stevedore, used to deliver more sermons than he ever preached in the pulpit of any actual bell-ringing-and-tolling stained-glass-plus-organ-harmonizing church.

Not that he actually thought of them as fireside sermons, even though he paused from time to time to acknowledge an *amen* here and a *tell the truth* and *spread the message* and *share the wisdom* there. What he actually called them was elucidations of the preordained. “Gentlemen sir! Talking about destiny. Talking about everything conceivable to the ever so fragile and ever prone human mind. Everything from the miraculous seven-day beginning and the void.

“Talking about destiny. Talking about preordination. Talking about manifest destiny! Yes, the Lord works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform. His blessings to bestow. Talking ’bout manifest destiny, gentlemen sir, and we, everybody in this room, we’re all here in this U.S. of A. today because God wanted us here! Because he had a mission for us here, A HOLY MISSION FOR US HERE. It’s all right there in the Bible, which makes it a holy mission and also ironic if you get my latter clause. He had us shipped all the way across the Atlantic Ocean just like he sent old Jonah to Nineveh and the belly of a whale! It’s all right there in the Bible to be sure. But is also right there in the encyclopedia, and the history books. The first thing the good Lord always does for people when he has some special precious mission for them to fulfill IS TO GET ’EM OUT OF AFRICA. Just like he got his especially precious

“Manifest Destiny U.S.A.” was the last work of fiction Murray wrote. He wrote it in late 2004 and early 2005. It appears here for the first time.

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Hebrew children out from down in old Pharaoh's Egypt land by parting a dust-dried trail right down to the Red Sea for them to walk across carrying whatever they could take with them to the Promised Land.

"And he got us bargained away from them old scar-faced black west coast African chiefs and brought us over here across the Atlantic Ocean in the bowels of them old slave schooners just like Jonah in the belly of the whale. Don't take my word for it. As for Unka Jo Jo, how he got all the way over here, this far from his home folks in Africa, and he'll tell you about how his tribe was raided by another African tribe with different scars on their face and sold him to the slave merchants that brought him and a hundred and some odd others all the way over here in that same old *Crowtillie* or *Flotilla* or whatever it was that you can see the ruins of right down there in the bogs and cane brakes just beyond the Chickasabogue L & N Bridge where Chickasabogue Creek flows out into the Mobile River on its way to the Alabama River.

"But my main point is this. God had a profound purpose for getting us over here. And that purpose is to save this very special nation. (Talking about the ideals and prospects it's based on.) So it can stand and light the way as man's last best hope on Earth. Then it was as if he also said but the story will also be ever so ironic and contradictory. Because my intention is for them to light up the nation and I'm putting 'em in a position of the lowest of the lowly so they are going to have to push the nation up rather than pull it up.

"So they brought boatload after boatload of us over as slaves and just look what it did to the white folks. Most of whom as the history books tells us were the lowest of the lowdown poor white trash of Europe. It just about drove them crazy with *phantasmagoria*. Our very presence gave them the notion that they were bred and born to be some kind of heavenly species that we were put on Earth to serve.

"So there's where old Abe Lincoln come in. The good Lord said I elected old Moses to get my special children out of old Pharaoh's Egypt land after all those many years of bondage. So now this time I'm designating old Abe. Because this time is not about getting to the Promised Land, this many people are already here, so it's my will be done amen.

“So here come the one and only Abraham Lincoln. Now you take old Abe. Now old Abe was a bred and born cracker if there ever was one. I’m talking ’bout a natural born raw-boned narrow-assed Kentucky hillbilly. But he was the one the good Lord picked out to give the mission to, and he was the one that sent for old Ulysses S. Grant, and old Grant knew exactly what the situation called for; and when he got ready to throw his knockout punch he sent for old Sherman, who was the one he had left in charge down south after they took Vicksburg.

“So when old Grant gave old Sherman the fire and brimstone orders for that march across from Mississippi and through Atlanta to the sea, before heading up the Atlantic coastline states in case he needed him to help take Richmond, that brought everything that many steps closer to the fulfillment of the good Lord’s plans for bringing us all the way over here to this neck of this planet.

“Because he had a profound and indispensable purpose for us over here and that purpose was to help save the nation so it could become that last best hope of mankind on earth until Resurrection Day. Talking about manifest destiny that was already on the way even before old Jefferson pulled off that big Louisiana Purchase deal with old Napoleon. So, here come the Buffalo Soldiers, to make up for what old fancy-pants Custer couldn’t do, soon as the army would let ’em join the cavalry.

“Not that any of our people thought that the Lord had anything against the Indians as such because we knew that he created them along with everybody else just like he made old Pharaoh and everybody else and everything else, it was just time to move on. It was just time to move on beyond bareback riding and them wigwam ways of living. Just like you move on when the lightning strikes all them square miles of virgin forest, and what about those tornadoes and earthquakes?

“And I never heard tell of our holding no grudge against the Indians, quite the contrary. All my life I’ve always heard about how them expert Indian trackers used to welcome our runaway ancestors into their territories and then misdirect them old cracker patrollers and runaway slave hunters as to which way they seen them heading.

“Talking about the good Lord’s will and mysterious ways, that brought us to where we are today with all this work we

still have left to do. Why do you reckon that free public school education didn't come along until old Abe got us freed from the status of bondage in slavery and into the human status of citizenship, which was supposed to carry along with it the right to express our will as citizens at the ballot box. Now just think about this, when these old millionaire's peckerwood crackers we got down here in this part of the nation most of us still living in got up the Ku Klux Klan to keep us from registering and voting, God's will be done they didn't worry much about our children learning their ABC's and numbers, so long as it didn't interfere too much with planting and harvest times, as a matter of fact, come to think of it, it was some of them same old mean white folks right here that helped us keep some of the little hooky playing rascals of ours from dropping out of school altogether by hounding them with threats, putting them in juvenile jails called reformatory school, or putting them out on one of those country farms until they came of age.

"I don't know maybe it was also a part of the good Lord's master plan that most of us didn't seem to take to the books right away, like they did to voting. Anyway, the white folks didn't seem to mind the few of them that did as long as they didn't go to the class in the same school along with white children, although they were supposed to be studying exactly the same books, prescribed by the same state board of education. Talking about the good Lord's mysterious ways.

"Come to think about it, maybe it was also a part of the good Lord's plan that the first free generations shouldn't show too much interest in school because look what happened when everywhere you look they were heading for the ballot box in such droves, scared to death a lot of these Dixieland die-hard Confederates and started them running around acting like even after all these years we've been over here helping them to build this land up to what it had become, acting like we didn't deserve our chance at having the same kind of life everybody else had a chance at. And I'm talking about the very ones that got where they got to be today at our expense.

"Of all the people from across the north waters of the Atlantic Ocean, here they come talking about some kind of predestined white supremacy, just like nobody don't know doodlyquat about how raggedy and hungry every last one of

them was way back when they barely did manage to make it over here from. I'm not talking about the ones that spreaded themselves all over the earth exploring and discovering new lands and things to take back to them castles and cathedral towns back home.

"I'm talking about the ones that came over here because they figured they had a better chance over here over in the wilderness with the wild animals and all them Indian war tribes than they were ever gonna get back where they came from. As a matter of fact, the history book tells us that a lot of them got shipped over here right out of them stonewall prisons and dungeons. Maybe that was the good Lord's mysterious ways of taking care of them. And just look what they're doing with their good fortune.

"No, as the truth is the light, just about every last one of them, except maybe a few gypsies that don't ever intend to settle down anywhere, thought of themselves in flight, in a word escaping from somewhere, even though nobody was patrolling and pursuing them.

"Who knows what the good Lord has in store for this young generation we have coming up now. But as for myself, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the arrival of that new principal over there at that school ain't a godsent token of things to come. He look like a boy, and he sound like one of them boy-evangelist preachers.

"As soon as he hit town he made the round of all the churches, and when the pastors introduced him and invited him to say a few words because it was just a week before the new school term he had the whole congregation saying amen to salvation through book learning. Like getting religion for soul salvation during revival time.

"I mean gentlemen sir, brothers and sisters, he was a pistol! Suffer little children to come unto me before the tardy bell rings. I mean one and all with hair combed, nails clipped, shoes shined, clothes cleaned and pressed, all assignments prepared for hands ready to raise for recitation and blackboard exemplification and sandtable demonstration. Dotting their I's, crossing their T's, and pronouncing their G's. Talking about godsend there it was because there it is right here amongst us, right over there near that part of Bay Poplar Woods. And talking about

close to home, here's this little bright-eyed boy sitting right here amongst us, taking all this in from that chimney corner over there. He's already that kind of school pupil been getting attention since the third grade when his homeroom teacher put his name on the principal's early bird candidate list. Talking about Whit and Miss Melba's little old Scooter boy. Right now you can ask him about all this I'm talking about and he can go get a book and read it to you and show it to you on the map.

"Gentlemen sir I am a witness, talking about God's will and our mounting expectations, let us look at how our heavenly father hides his mysterious ways right out into plain sight. Professor B. Franklin Fisher, fisherman of boys and girls for his four-star recipe for all-American men and women.

"So I'm telling you like that other Ben Franklin way back when they first come up with the notion of writing down a document declaring their separation and total independence from old King George and England. Old Ben Franklin said put your name on the dotted line and support this thing because the fact of the matter is we're all in this together and if we don't keep on hanging together, we're gonna keep on being hung separately."

Then he said *gentlemen sir as I am a witness* and there was only the cozy midwinter night toctication of the Mother Goose mantelpiece clock as its minute hand moved on closer and closer to the chime time for leaving and when old Mr. Donohue who also worked on the waterfront near the foot of Government Street came by to shake hands on the way out the two of them also patted each other on the shoulder. Then instead of Mr. Donohue saying *amen* or *x on the dotted line*, he said *I done told you*.