

THE COLOR OF TRUTH – August 8, 1955

Saturday August 6th – 8th 1955
Red Dog, Alabama¹

Code: I.6

Production #: 65013

First broadcast: Wednesday May 3rd 1989

Rating: 15m viewers

1990 repeat: 17.6m viewers

Duration: 47m42s

Also Known As

AUGUST 8, 1955 (Draft Script)

GEGEN DEN STROM [AGAINST THE CURRENT] (Germany)

MISS MELNY ET SON CHAUFFEUR [MISS MELNY AND HER DRIVER] (France)

IL COLORE DELLA VERITÀ (Italy)

COLOR OF TRUTH (The Quantum Leap Book)

Guest Starring Susan French,
Royce D. Applegate, Michael D. Roberts,
James Ingersoll, Kimberley Bailey

Written by Deborah Pratt

Directed by Michael Vejar

"How would you get such a stupid notion in your head?"

"Look, like I said I was hungry."

"You take my advice, boy. You don't get that hungry."

TV Guide

Sam (Scott Bakula) confronts racism when he appears as a black man in the Deep South of 1955, and he alters the life and conscience of the elderly widow he works for.

Trailer

ANNOUNCER: Imagine you're white, in a diner, when everyone sees you as a black man [poor version of leap in effect used]



AL: In the South in 1955, that is dangerous.

ANNOUNCER: You experience prejudice...

TOAD: He's gone too far.

ANNOUNCER: ...and rage.

NELL: You've got no right!

SAM: It doesn't end with this, Sheriff.

BLOUNT: That's entirely up to you.

ANNOUNCER: Then your family will be forced to pay a terrible price.

SAM: What are you waiting for?

DOCTOR: We don't accept coloured here.

SAM: The hell with the law!

AL: Sam, you gotta get out of this!

ANNOUNCER: *Quantum Leap* moves to its new night, Wednesday.

Leap In

Sam sits down in a café and looks in the mirror. He realises why everyone is looking so shocked: he's black.

Awards

Deborah Pratt became the first winner of the Lillian Gish Women in Film Award for Best Writing for a Drama Series for this episode. She later recalled Don sitting next to her at the ceremony, saying "'we just never win these things, and so don't be disappointed' and so they said my name – and I didn't move!"²

¹ The caption states 8th August, however Miz Melny confirms the episode starts on a Saturday, so has been moved to the 6th. The final scene takes place at midday so is assumed to be the day after most of the action, although Sam still has blood on him, meaning it might be the 7th.

² Deborah Pratt, *The Star Bright Project*, March 5th 2021

Cut Scenes

Despite just being a very early draft, the first version of the script (dated March 2nd 1989 and entitled "August 8, 1955") is very close to the final version. The opening montage skipping back over prior episodes is not in the script, but it does contain a brief moment in Jesse's house where Al takes a look in the pantry, a scene of Toad and Billy Joe drinking and complaining about Jesse/Sam's actions (which were lost for the fourth script, dated March 14th), and a final dispute between Sam, Miz Melny and Clayton. The final scene has Sam leaping into the body of a pimp called Big Ben. The fourth version also has some minor changes (mainly in camera angle suggestions) to the chitlin scene.

Ziggy Stats

Ziggy starts with an 86.7% certainty that Sam is there to save Melny, later rising to 96.2% (the script reads 92.6% – Dean Stockwell may have transposed the numbers in error).

Al's Outfits

Al first arrives wearing a purple shirt and trousers, silver shoes and a black jacket. Later, at the hospital, he wears a crisp white shirt with a silk red waistcoat, a grey and white tie and silver trousers. In the prison cell, he wears a yellow shirt and trousers, copper tie and shoes and a long brown overcoat.

Al's Loves

Al hopes that if he could reach out to Miz Melny, he could be seen by younger women too.

Music

In the script, Nell's car stereo plays Billie Holiday: *God Bless the Child* (1941) when she picks up Jesse.

28m27s: Nell sings a traditional gospel song, *Right on Time* (aka *You Can't Hurry God*) while driving away from Miz Melny's.

42m25s: Al sings *We Shall Overcome*, a

protest song published in 1948.

Allusions

Al talks about the "Pitch In" litter campaign which started in 1971.

Al calls Miz Melny "Scarlett O'Hara", in reference to the 1936 novel *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell. Further references are made in *So Help Me God*, *Miss Deep South*, *The \$50,000 Quest* and *The Leap Between the States*.

Al mentions an Aurtherine Ruth who integrated the University of Alabama. Although no such person existed, an Aurtherine Lucy was the first black student to attend that establishment in 1956.

Sam feels like the Wicked Witch of the West when making chitlins. Other references to the Oz series written by L. Frank Baum (1856-1919) take place in *Blind Faith*, *Thou Shalt Not...*, *A Single Drop of Rain*, *Knights of the Morningstar*, *Obsessions*, *Foreknowledge*, *Loch Ness Leap*, and *Mirror's Edge*.

Al compares his interactions with Miz Melny to *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64, 1985-9, 1994, 2002-3 and 2019-20). Other references to the show are made in the *Genesis* novelisation, *A Portrait for Trojan*, *Another Mother*, *Star Light*, *Star Bright*, *Revenge of the Evil Leaper*, *Prelude*, *Pulitzer*, *Double or Nothing*, and *Obsessions*.

In the script, Toad watches *The Millionaire*, a TV show that had started in January of that year, 1955.

On the wall of the jail cell is graffiti claiming "Jesse James slept here" (an outlaw, 1847-1882) and also quotes Louis L'Amour (1908-1998) with the words "when guns are outlawed only the outlaws will have guns".

Production Goofs

Jesse smiles before Sam does in the diner mirror.

When Sam lifts his head up to look in the rear-view mirror at Miz Melny, you can briefly see Bakula's own hat moving out of view before Howard Johnson comes into view.

Clayton Sherwood Trafford was originally named Clayton Sherman Trafford in the script, and this is the line as filmed. Melny's line after Clayton confronts Sam is visibly dubbed.

We see Jesse's reflection in the door window after Sheriff Blount walks through it. From the angle used, we should also be able to see Jesse's reflection before this. Watch the green lamp post in particular.

At the hospital, Al reflects in the hood of Miz Melny's car.

In the jail cell, Al's jacket brushes against Sam's bed frame.

When Sam gets out of jail at the end and looks back, Bakula's reflection is visible in the courthouse doors.

Dubious Logic

If Miz Melny visits every Saturday, how has Charles' grave got so covered in weeds?

Why does Al not tell Sam about Nell's accident? It's likely this didn't make any major news publications for Ziggy to research, but Al seems to have been able to pick up other changes in the timeline immediately. This would have been a really useful one for him to spot.

Losing Touch with Reality

Miz Melny says they are going where they have gone "every Saturday afternoon", the cemetery. However, based on the date, the episode starts on a Monday. In the draft script, she does shortly after state that Clayton believes she's going senile, so this could be a hint.

Ziggy calculates an "86.7% certainty". Strictly speaking, it's only possible to have a "100% certainty". Usually in the series, the phrase is a percentage "chance", or "probability". Only *Good Morning, Peoria* repeats this error.

In the draft script, Toady watched *The Millionaire* on the first evening of the episode. *The*

Millionaire aired on Wednesdays, while August 8th was a Monday (and Miz Melny suggests the leap starts on a Saturday!)

Production Notes

The leap-in effect is replaced and upgraded from its appearance at the end of the last episode, with the standard flip to negative being animated – this animation would continue, enhanced in various forms, for the rest of the series. Effects artist Roger Dorney noted that after *Genesis* he and his partner Dean Kelly "had some free time, and sat down with the animator [Harry Moreau]... and a bunch of us just kicked around ideas" which continued to develop through the first season.³

Deborah Pratt was inspired to write this episode when she heard of a story "about a man who worked for 35 years and sat in the kitchen every day while she sat in the dining room and had her tea."⁴ She recalled the troubles she had proposing it: "It was a very special show to me. Don was very nervous about the subject matter and felt it might be too early to have Sam do something as daring as leap into a man of colour: 'Maybe season three,' was what he first told me. It was Brandon Tartikoff, God rest his soul, who told me to go for it. The script came in with Brandon's blessing and Universal studios, NBC network and Don stood behind it 100 per cent."⁵

She explains how this episode began being used in schools: "I got a letter from a group of teachers, who recorded the show... and played it to the time where Sam walked in and sat down at the counter, and stopped it. And I think they were ten years old, second graders, and she said 'what do you think happened?'... The kids were furious!... It gave them a point of reference of how far they have come."⁴ She was proud of the finished product, noting especially "how incredible Susan French's performance was."⁶

³ Roger Dorney, *The Observer Issue 6, Summer 1992*
⁴ Deborah Pratt, *The Leap Back 2009 [convention]*

⁵ Deborah Pratt, *Blog Critics, December 10th, 2010*
⁶ Deborah Pratt, *The Star Bright Project, March 5th 2021*

Red Dog is said in the script to have a population of 6709 – it appears this was copied exactly for a sign that Sam drives past early in the episode.



The town square was shot on the Warner Bros. backlot (and not, as often assumed, on the Universal backlot in the *Back to the Future* courthouse square). This set was most famously used in *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979-1985), and much later would be used as the permanent home of the fountain from the opening credits of *Friends* (1994-2004). The bandstand in the photo below can be seen over Sam's shoulder as he confronts Sheriff Blount outside the courthouse.



This episode features the first example of Al relocating in or out of the scene, as he runs after Miz Melny. Previously he'd appeared just by talking from off-screen, sometimes to Sam's surprise, and we'd only seen him leave a scene three times, always by a doorway. This would become a mainstay of the series, although the effect this time is slightly unusual

in that he fades out rather than 'pops'. As fourth-season editor Michael Stern recalled, "the director would yell 'freeze', and whatever the scene was, all the actors would then freeze, and Dean would then come into the shot ... and the director would yell action. And hopefully it didn't look like a jump cut, meaning everyone moved."⁷



Bakula appeared on the May 2nd 1989 edition of *The Pat Sajak Show* to promote this episode the day before broadcast. Referring to concerns over the ratings, he later said "the 'Driving Miss Daisy' episode really saved the show".⁸ This appears to be one of the first references to *Driving Miss Daisy*, which has stuck with the episode ever since, although at the time this show went into production it was best known as a play, and therefore unlikely to have been a major influence. The movie version was released December 1989. Pratt herself recalled that *Color of Truth* "was written before *Driving Miss Daisy!* People have said that to me before – sadly *Driving Miss Daisy* didn't make a social commentary that evokes change."⁶ The French title of the episode is a reference to the French title of the film: *Miss Daisy et son chauffeur*.

Bellisario later described this as "definitely one of my favourite episodes,"⁹ perhaps because "there's a big part of a lot of us that would like to think that a lot of those problems are over with and done... but to put a white man in a black man's body and then have people

⁷ Michael Stern, *The Quantum Leap Podcast*, April 14th 2022

⁸ Scott Bakula, *The Quantum Leap Podcast*, June 8th 2015

⁹ Donald P. Bellisario, *A Kiss With History: Remembering Quantum Leap DVD bonus feature*, 2004

treat him like he's black... it presented a very interesting show. Because we are all the same inside."¹⁰

Familiar Faces

Royce D. Applegate returned to the series in *Play Ball* as the radio announcer and Michael D. Roberts in *The Leap Between the States* as Isaac King. Howard Johnson cameos as Jesse again in *Shock Theater*.

A Seating Controversy

Al mentions Rosa Parks. 1955 Alabama was not unique in its prevalence of segregation in the US, although it became one of the most well-known times and places just weeks after this leap. At the time, the law ensured buses had sections specifically for blacks and whites, separated by a sign which the driver had the power to move if necessary to ensure all white people could sit, even if black people had to stand. On December 1st, a driver in Alabama found several whites standing due to lack of seats, and immediately re-designated several seats for them. Most of the black people in that row dutifully stood up, but one Rosa Parks refused, instead simply moving to the window seat. She was later arrested for this action, which became one of the key moments in the history of civil rights in America and started the Montgomery Bus Boycotts (which Al, generalising a little, states started "four months today").



¹⁰ Donald P. Bellisario, *The Arsenio Hall Show*

The Project

One loose thread left dangling from *Genesis*: Had Tom Stratton been selected specifically for Sam's leap, or was it a random act of God? Tom is, after all, roughly the same height, age and skin colour as Dr. Beckett. Sam's shock in *The Color of Truth* that he could leap into a black man might suggest that Stratton was indeed targeted by the Project staff, and Jesse Tyler's age and skin colour is a real cause for surprise (or perhaps it's just a conclusion they've reached after several very similar leapees). This theory is somewhat contradicted by *The Leap Back*, where Sam states the leap was "targetless".

Al implies he can see the leapee (later confirmed in *What Price Gloria?*) when he makes a joke about his experiences being enough to curl Sam's hair.

This episode marks the first time we would see Al shouting to characters outside the Imaging Chamber (in this case Gooshie). He had also previously interacted with the committee inside the Chamber in *Star-Crossed*. Shouting to Gooshie to "centre me in on..." would be heard again in: *A Portrait for Troian* (first asking Gooshie to ask Ziggy, then later Gooshie directly), *Another Mother, Leaping in Without a Net*, *The Boogiemán*, *Piano Man*, *Glitter Rock*, *A Hunting We Will Go*, *Permanent Wave* (twice), *Running for Honor* (twice), *Temptation Eyes*, *A Song for the Soul*, *A Leap for Lisa*, *Trilogy Part I* (twice), *Trilogy Part II* (twice), *Dr. Ruth*, *Blood Moon*, and *The Beast Within*. He would twice call directly to Ziggy, in *Maybe Baby* and *Runaway*.

Ziggy apparently has a "control mouse".

This is also the first time we see an adult able to see Al (although perhaps only in part), as Miz Melny believes he is her late husband. It's not directly explained why she is able to see Al, although it's likely to be because she's near death (more directly explored in *The Leap*

Home Part II – Vietnam); we also know from *Shock Theater* that the mentally ill can see Al, so if Miz Melny is senile as the original scripts imply, that may also be a contributing factor.

Notes and Observations

Pratt's Pharmacy, and Nurse Ethel Pratt would seem to be named for writer/producer Deborah Pratt.

After the opening credits, we see a montage of clips from every episode so far (this is even the case on the VHS version which had leaped straight from *Genesis*, so would have been a little confusing for a new viewer). This sequence is missing entirely from the draft script, although appears in slightly modified form in the draft script for *Play it Again, Seymour* (with mention of this episode and *Camikazi Kid* included).

The leap in is much longer than it had been at the close of *Double Identity*, showing Sam approaching the counter and sitting down (this in effect fixes a 'goof' from the earlier episode, which implies Jesse himself was the one that took a seat. This of course would have been unlikely unless Jesse was also a revolutionary).

The location of this leap is Red Dog, Alabama. The town does not exist, however a famous statue by this name – made from scrap metal – resides in Northport, Alabama.

Melny says "it's hotter than Tophet in here"; Tophet is a term for hell, originating from a location in Jerusalem where human sacrifices were burned alive for ancient gods.

Sam is shocked to hear Al say the phrase "a lot of my friends are black", as it's often used to excuse a racist comment (although here it seems much more likely that Al is being genuine in his use of the phrase).

Chitlins are a classic Southern recipe. There are many ways to make them – usually with cleaned pig intestines and boiled pig maws (stomach) that are then added to a pot for several hours with various vegetables (in the first draft script, Al suggests garlic, lemon,

pepper; cloves, allspice, marjoram, and vinegar; in the fourth he suggests garlic, onions, red pepper; and celery; for broadcast the red pepper was switched for green). The smell is known to be quite powerful.

Sam is in three places at once at some point during this leap, as August 8th 1955 is the leap date of *Trilogy Part I*, and of course, his toddler self is in Elk Ridge, Indiana

This episode is the first to end with the words "Oh, boy!" as Sam leaps into *Camikazi Kid*. It would later become a tradition for each leap out to end this way, through to the end of the series.

The laserdisc version came with chapter titles: The Color of Truth / A Comfortable Experience / A Black Man in the South in 1955 / Cookin' Chitlins / Shakin' Up the White Folks / Hurting Somebody / The White Hospital / Miz Melny and Albert / Changing People's Minds / The World Isn't Just / Lunch at Miz Patty's

Alternate Versions

The 1990 repeat led into a repeat of *How the Tess Was Won*. It's not known how the flashback to *The Right Hand of God*, which opened the repeat of *Tess*, would have been handled.

The first few seconds of incidental music are missing from the German-language version, and the background music in the first scene in the cafe plays a second earlier in the Italian version.

All the singing is dubbed in France by the French actors, while the Italian and German versions use the original English soundtrack.

End Credits

A 22-second edit of the theme backed with four stills from the episode.

Review

This is the first major "issue" episode, tackling with maturity the history of racial segregation. With 30 years of hindsight we know now that

sadly Sam and Al's assurances that segregation was a thing of the past is definitely not the case, and this episode is as relevant now as it was on first broadcast. Certainly, the concept of a white man in a black man's shoes is one of the best ways to explore not only the problems faced in the 50s but also perhaps open up some viewers' eyes to the sheer randomness of being born into a particular race. French's Melny character is played wonderfully, being both racist and sympathetic in equal measure (a far harder challenge than befell the other guest performers in the episode) and we start to see a depth in Stockwell's performance that would only grow in later years.

Guest Cast

Susan French	Miz Melony "Melny" Elizabeth Charlotte Trafford ¹¹
Royce D. Applegate	Sheriff Blount
Michael D. Roberts	Willis Tyler
James Ingersoll	Clayton Trafford
Kimberley Bailey	Nell Tyler
Michael Kruger	Billy Joe Bob
Jeff Tyler	Toad
Jane Abbott	Miz Patty
Elyse Donalson	Nurse Ethel Pratt ¹²
Howard Johnson	Jesse Tyler ¹³
Christopher J. Keene	Doctor
J.T. Solomon	Effie

¹¹ Referred to as Melny in every other source, *Quantum Leap A to Z* suggests this may be short for Melony (the UK edition suggests Melanony, presumably a typo), and also provides her middle names. The use of Miz (rather than Miss or Ms) is from the draft script.

¹² Surname from her badge

¹³ Spelled Jessie in the script, the back cover of the VHS/laserdisc and in *The Quantum Leap Book*, but Jesse in the end credits, and in the *Shock Theater* end credits and script.