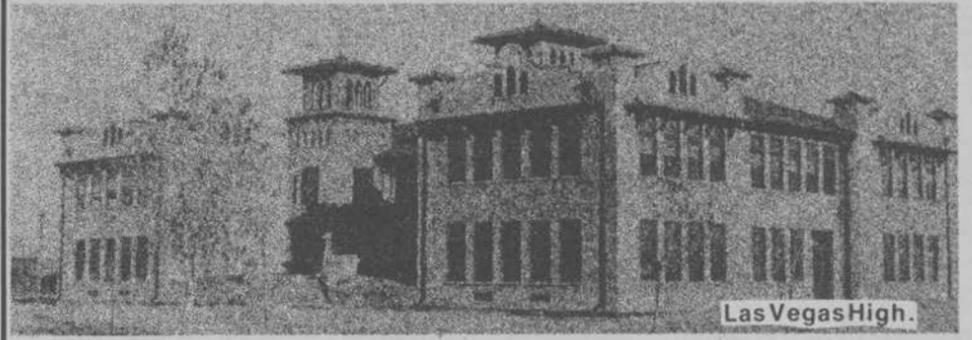


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Las Vegas High.

PLEASY VERSUS FERGUSON ...laid to rest

by
**Roosevelt
Fitzgerald**

Minus one day of its 58th birthday, Plessy vs. Ferguson was laid to rest. It was just twelve years short of the proscribed four-score and ten. It had, however, lived and flourished much longer than it should have. It had been born during the afternoon of May 18, 1896. It should have been a "still" birth. A Supreme Court whose membership was sympathetic to attitudes of racism prevented that.

Justice Henry Brown served as spokesman for the Court

which upheld a Louisiana statute of 1890 which required railroads to provide "equal but separate" accommodations. It ruled that "a statute which implies merely a legal distinction between the white and colored races...has no tendency to destroy the legal equality of the two races, or re-establish a state of involuntary servitude." The ruling introduced "separate but equal" thinking to domestic affairs as they relate to racial minorities. Las Vegas was affected by that ruling. During its early territorial days, Nevadans had debated the plausibility of separate educational facilities. During

Constitutional debates in the Territorial Legislature, almost every section of the developing State Constitution addressed the presence of racial minorities. Between the years 1861-1873, the question of whether white children and others would attend the same schools was hotly debated.

stitutional debates in the Territorial Legislature, almost every section of the developing State Constitution addressed the presence of racial minorities. Between the years 1861-1873, the question of whether white children and others would attend the same schools was hotly debated.

SEPARATE SCHOOLS

When the issue of compulsory education arose, delegate C.N. Noteware of Douglas County wished a manner as not to "compel men to send their children to the same schools with the children of Negroes, Chinamen

and Indians." Marcus D. Larrowe of Lander County also preferred "separate schools for the blacks." Even with the establishment of a University, similar views were prevalent. There was a provision for free tuition for both male and female white students.

The first school for Blacks in the state of Nevada was opened in Virginia City in January of 1866. For the next half dozen years, those Blacks who attended schools attended on a segregated basis. By 1873, Black children were in attendance in most schools throughout the state.

The number of Blacks

in nineteenth century Nevada was small. In 1860, there were only 44 Blacks who still lived in the area of First and Ogden Streets, there was no other school in 1880 and that decreased to only 134 by 1900. Between 1860 and 1940, the Black population never equalled 1 percent of the total population of the state. In 1940, there were only 664 Blacks and this comprised 0.6 percent of the state's population.

Black teachers were to be found only at Westside Black schools. All administrators were white. Fitzgerald became the first Black Principal in Clark County in 1956. He was assigned to the Madison Elementary School.

It was partially due to the realization of that INTEGRATED SCHOOLS statistic, that the level of Black involvement in the 1959, conditions for Black educational system of the state diminished. This change, was especially pertinent on a small scale, Blacks in light of the fact that, during the nineteenth century, rarely were there more than fifty Blacks in the state who were school age. By 1873, there were reports of Black children attending schools in the northern portion of the state. There was little or no settlement in the southern part of the state until the turn of the century.

There were few Blacks in southern Nevada for the first half of the 20th century. During the early years of Las Vegas, there were no segregated school facilities. Between 1905 and the late 1930s, most Blacks lived in the downtown area. Like other students, they attended either the Fifth and St. School, the Westside School or Las Vegas High.

WESTSIDE SCHOOLS "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal". Those words were spoken by Chief Justice Earl Warren on

An elementary school opened in Henderson during the early 1940s. As the population increased and the "Westside" became predominantly Black, additional elementary schools were constructed there. These, like other schools in Las Vegas, were segregated because housing patterns were integrated. By the mid 1940s, except for limited integration at elementary schools near the town area due to the

rem-swift sword.

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