

A CITIZEN & A TAXPAYER



High school graduating class of 1883, Virginia City. Standing, left to right: Clarence Sands, Principal Van Wagenen, Valedictorian Mark Averill, Harry Lynd. Seated, left to right: Annie Fraser, Mamie Hanning, Jennie Ford. Courtesy of Nevada State Historical Society. Clarence Sands was one of five children born of David W. and Laura E. Sands; according to the Census of Population of 1880, he was born in Nevada in 1868. His family was one of the leading black families of Virginia City. His father was a trustee of the AME church in 1867, occupied several posts in Ashlar Lodge of Prince Hall Masons and in the Grand Lodge, was a leader in various social activities and was also active in the black community. Two of Clarence Sands' sons are still living in the San Francisco Bay area.

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

The April 1980 issue of TODAY'S EDUCATION, the journal of the National Education Association, has an extensive article pertaining to violence in the schools. It shows how what was once considered youthful pranks in the past decades, have escalated into out and out warfare. The violence is usually inflicted upon teachers and administrators by students. It is to be found, in one degree or other, in the majority of urban schools and in most of the remainder.

It is estimated that the amount of funds channeled into repairing areas of facilities, damaged by the destructive antics of some students, is in an amount which would finance the positions of 50,000 additional teachers. Innovative educational programs suffer because of the appropriation of funds for maintenance. The above is only one kind of violence.

There are other kinds of violence to be found in the schools. One type is not the sort in which a measurement of its destructiveness is immediately evident. It is a violence of the mind, the spirit and the very essence of the person.

It is a kind which does not cost money. It does take its toll in esteem, ambition and productivity. It causes the victims to withdraw into isolatedness and to create a system within the system.

This unacknowledged violence had its beginning a quarter of a century ago with the Supreme Court ruling of Brown vs. Board of Education. As a result of that decision the schools of the United States were to cease segregationist practices. In some portions of the country there had been de facto segregation and de jure segregation existed in most of the remaining portions.

De Facto segregation exists, according to

some, because of tradition and not because of any legal sanctions while de jure exists because of legal statutes. The latter statement is correct. The former is not.

De Facto segregation did not "just happen." It was brought about by numerous governing procedures, including zoning, site selection, and gerry-mandering which was condoned by local, state and federal governments.

The conditions which brought about the need for Brown vs. Board of Education was not created by Black Americans. Once the ruling was made, there were some "Americans" who felt that they had a choice as to whether they should obey that law.

Beginning in 1954, efforts were initiated to subvert the law. That was the case everywhere segregated schools existed and it was the case here in Las Vegas.

In 1954, there were less than 60,000 people living in all of Clark County. Had meaningful attempts been made, then, to integrate the schools it would not have required much effort. There was only one high school here at the time and less than a dozen K-8.

One of the major objections Las Vegas has offered in opposition to integration has been an abhorrence to forced busing. Las Vegas has always favored the neighborhood school concept. The neighborhoods of Las Vegas were yet segregated in 1954.

The numbers of people involved were few. Had the city not ascribed to a

policy of housing segregation, in violation of the law, the problem here would have resolved itself. White Las Vegans wanted its cake and wanted to eat it too. Their chance of evading the impending crisis was missed as a result of their thinking (perhaps unconsciously) that black Las Vegans would simply disappear.

The cowardice which prevailed then helped initiate the first of the school crises in 1965. That year marked the beginning of a series of racial disturbances in the schools which continue until now.

The population was not stagnant. It continued to increase from year to year. Each year the problem became more difficult to solve. More schools were constructed. More segregation occurred in those schools by virtue of restrictive covenants in housing. The westside grew larger and blacker.

More black children attended segregated elementary schools and were required to be bused to secondary schools.

Following the end of the 1965 school year, the next seven semesters in the secondary schools seethed with the sentiments of seditious segregationists. The schools were ordered to integrate. The good citizens opposed it. Excuses ranging from "constitutional rights" to "God given rights" were used. Numerous anti-integration groups were formed.

Operation Bus Stop, Concerned Parents League and, to some extent,

Parents Who Care were the three most outspoken. One of their representatives stated that "Since a black attorney brought the suit, only Negroes should be bused." It would have been interesting to analyze his logic had the attorney who brought the suit been white.

The responsibility for carrying out the Court order was squarely on the shoulders of the Clark County School District. Its Board was hesitant to accept the responsibility. It appeared that some of the membership was more concerned with not doing anything which might negatively affect their political ambitions either for higher offices or for reelection.

The climate was obviously one in which most white Las Vegans opposed busing. It was equally obvious that because of the condoned segregated housing patterns that busing would be necessary in order to achieve integration. A truly splendid recommendation was made: "make the busing voluntary."

Those white citizens who recognized the worth of integration were willing to comply. The majority were not. The burden of making the voluntary busing successful was placed on the shoulders of Black children.

Someone said "since it is their desire to integrate the schools, it is only fair that they ride the buses." Black children, with that theory, would ride the bus for their entire educational experience. The "law and order" people, once again, had

decided which laws they would obey and which they would not. The absence of logic in their thinking was superceded only by their sporadic spewing of spurious squawking through their sodalities of simpering simpletons.

Those years were quiet. Black Las Vegans waited for the law to be abided by. They had a long wait. In the midst of the struggle a new Superintendent, Dr. James Mason, was hired on July 1, 1966. No real changes occurred. Perhaps the one statement which best summarizes his perception of democracy is: "This is the only country in the world where you're allowed to have prejudice."

Clearly, sometimes the meaning of freedom gets out of hand in the minds of the uninitiated. Probably, the time he spent serving as a consultant, on retainer, for Educational Materials Research Company of La Jolla, California could have been better spent. Of course, he did not recognize that by purchasing \$1,500,000 in books from that company might be construed, by some, as a bit of financial hanky panky. He resigned on May 12, 1969.

There had been minor racial problems during January and February of 1969. Black students were becoming more incensed over the lackluster manner in which integration efforts were being handled. They were recognizing that not only were they being asked to "pick up the tab" for integrating the schools but they were also not really



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participating in the normal functions of the schools.

There were no Black administrations in the secondary schools, no Black coaches, no Black cheerleaders, no Black history, no late buses in order for them to participate in after school activities and very few Black teachers.

They asked for these things during the 1960's but they were denied. Their level of frustration had risen to an all time high.

On the heels of the Las Vegas Riot of early October, 1969, some decided not to ask anymore. A series of disturbances occurred at several schools and a number of Black students were arrested. One "American," Mrs. B. Thorn, wrote a letter to the editor several months later.

She said that: "If these agitators want to cause trouble, fights, name calling etc., then why don't they go to another country (?) They don't because they know they

wouldn't last, they would be gunned down or strung up by the neck.

A few more killings must abide by the laws of our land or leave it." Obviously, she did not realize that the law, of the moment, said "integrate."

A Review Journal article of May 29, 1969, inadvertently sums up the situation. In describing the Court hearing on integration it states "A packed courtroom of blacks, whites, and some children..." The children were not cognizant of the color problem.

No child is born a racist. It takes a lot of time and effort on the part of parents to bring about that phenomenon. When a racial slur is made in the home and a child asks as children do; "What is a n----- mom or what is a h-----y dad" and receives an answer, therein we would have sown the seeds which will raise a new crop of rabid racist rascals repugnant to the rationale of the Republic.

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