

A New Era: Blacks In Las Vegas Media

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

One of the things which most Las Vegans are offended by is the apparent belief, held by many, that "nobody lives here." That image is quite common in the minds of many tourists who visit here and it is partially caused by the almost total absence of indications, to the contrary, of life off the Strip. The image of Las Vegas as simply being "sin city" is the one most often merchandised by media concerns.

The same is true of later civilizations stretching from ancient Greece through the Renaissance. The art work was not only functional but also

doubt of the winner, Americans have been up in arms whenever the decision has gone against us. Collectively, we say "we cannot rely on the Russian judges for a square deal" or "we could have won if we had more representation on the judges panel."

In our state, Nevada, similar scenarios take place between the "north" and the "south." Here it ranges from the distribution of state funds to the placement of professional schools within the University System. It also entails such seemingly frivolous but apparently not things as inclusion in the State's magazine, NEVADA. Less than two years ago, an issue appeared in which no reference was made to activities in southern Nevada. Southerners, especially Las Vegans, were incensed. Letters were written to the magazine and to local newspapers. Editorials were published condemning the exclusionary act. It had only happened that once, but it was enough for southern Nevadans to be miffed.

Such practices, historically, are everyday occurrences for Blacks. The reportage, pertaining to Blacks, has been lax. Historians and other researchers have been hard put in gleaming from the chronicles of Nevada, any consistent acknowledgement of the presence of Blacks. That has been an American reality. It probably has its roots in slavery and the attempt to disown its existence along with disowning Blacks.

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan wrote, in UNDERSTANDING MEDIA, that "the historians and archeologists will one day discover that the ads of

our times are the richest and most faithful daily reflections that any society ever made of its entire range of activities." That was not altogether correct. There was little accurate advertisements which had included Blacks had been, at the very best, representation of Blacks in the ads of the day. Most derogatory. Such had been the case with such things as "the gold dust twins," "mammy," "cream of wheat," "Uncle Ben," "Aunt Jemima" and hundreds of others.

The 1960s was also the decade in which the Civil Rights movements came vividly into focus. Hardly a day passed, during those turbulent years, that newspaper headlines or the evening news on television did not impress upon the senses of Americans that there were indeed Black people in America and that they were upset.

In 1954, David Potter had written, in PEOPLE OF PLENTY, that "If we seek an institution that was brought into being by abundance, without previous existence in any form, and, moreover an institution which is peculiarly identified with American abundance rather than abundance throughout Western civilization, we will find it, I believe, in modern American advertising." His was an excellent analysis of the reality. As technological changes continued to occur, that reality became even greater. One of the questions growing out of that period, was "how will black people be utilized with those innovations?"

Advertising, as part of the efforts of media entities, has always played a

major role in selling. To "create" images to catch people's eyes, penetrate their brains, warm their hearts and cause them to act" is the task of advertising. If it worked like poisonous gas on some, considered valuable by the news reporters of the time.

During the early years Las Vegas was served initially by only one newspaper — the Las Vegas Age. Others star-

reporters. They allowed Las Vegas, remained their racial perceptions to white oriented until the mid 1950s.

Prior to that time, outside of the area of news reporting, the only other references to Blacks was

until the mid 1940s. Black entertainers, appearing in local hotels, were featured but that involved a totally different aspect of Las Vegas. It had little to do with the quality of life experienced by Blacks but only with their involvement in the entertainment industry.

The Review Journal did run a cartoon series during the 1940s titled "Boots And Her Friends." One of the main characters was a large Black woman in long dress and wearing a "head rag." She was a maid and her comments were always on the order of "dumb" but wise statements, filled with "negro" humor. Along with that series, could be found an occasional joke in the humor section. An example of that is the following: "Yessuh, I knows one shoe is black an' the other one tan — that's the second time this maw'nin' it happened." There was also a report of a new play being planned by Eddie Cantor in which a Black man would be President of the U.S. and he would have an all Black Cabinet. The highlight of his administration would be characterized by the lack of concern he would have for battleships and the esteem in which he holds a new barbecue joint.

Black involvement in the media probably had its beginning in 1955. Bob Bailey and Alice Key did a radio show for the Moulin Rouge Hotel. For the rest of the decade, theirs would be the only voices of Blacks to be heard on the Las Vegas radio waves.

The Las Vegas Voice first appeared in 1963. It continued its publication for the next seventeen years. A recent change of ownership interrupted its

circulation but only for a short term. As of June 24, 1980, it once again is being published.

In 1961, TV 13 brought Bob Bailey on the air. He was the first Black to appear on a regular basis. He hosted a late night movie and was responsible for securing his own sponsors. He was not part of the general staff of the station.

A few years later, Rev. Prentiss Walker was host of a religious-community affairs show. It was sponsored by local builders who were involved on the westside. The same company also advertised in local newspapers. Even though the homes were built in a black community for black people, the newspaper advertisements adhered exclusively to the use of white models or white graphics. The policy of not using Blacks in locally produced commercial advertisements continued to be practiced by most businesses throughout the 1970s.

Roosevelt Toston was the first full time staff member of a local television station. He served as news reporter for Channel 3 until moving on to become affiliated with the Convention Authority. Ray Willis arrived upon Toston's departure. Willis worked as reporter and later as anchorman for the late edition news. Following Fred Lewis' resignation, Willis became News Director for TV 3. He remained in that position until his departure to take over the reins as Information Director for the Clark County School District.

During the mid 1970s, Clay Bighwaters worked with KLAS as both sportscaster and weatherman. Paul Dawkins became the only Black on television news following Willis' departure. He worked as a reporter and ultimately became anchorman for the late news on KLAS. He is now the weekend newscaster at KLAS. Lee Winston has been a mainstay at KLVX. He has directed specials having to do with the minority community and the community at large. It has been because of his presence that there have been at least two Blacks on local television since the early 1970s. Private stations have seemed to follow a revolving door policy as far as Blacks are concerned. When one would leave, the replacement would be Black and if there were a Black already at a station, other stations would not have Blacks in front of the camera.

The 1980s have brought about some changes. Today there are several Blacks to be seen daily on television. Dr. Porter Troutman is current host for TV 3's Minor Key program which airs twice per week. Patricia Jarman and Holly Echols are both reporters & Jo Ann Dix is an assistant producer. In just the past several weeks Bobby Florence has become a weekend sports announcer. Slowly, local television is giving Blacks an opportunity to become involved.

One of the innovations introduced by Willis, while at KORK-TV was "Minor Key." Initially it was designed to be a medium in which the concerns of Black Las Vegans could be aired. It evolved into a television program in which such needs of the entire minority community could be aired.

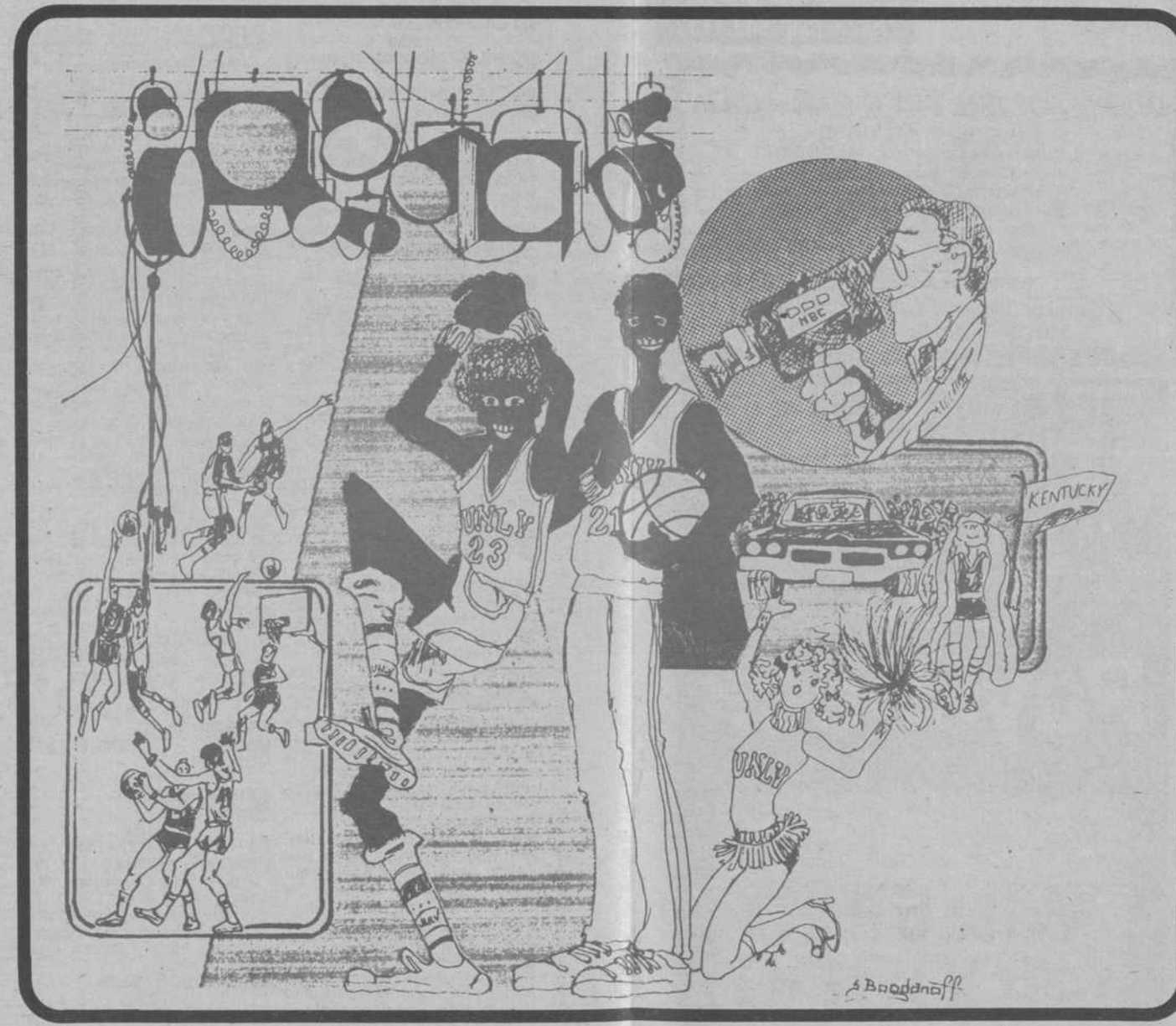
Ed Brown, veteran pioneer broadcaster, emerged on the Las Vegas radio broadcast scene during early 1974, coming into the market

with, at that time, 27 years of experience. He served as General Manager of WNJR, Newark, N.J. before relocating to this area. Brown joined KVOV Radio as General Sales Manager. Shortly afterward, he became the station's Vice President and Assistant General Manager.

He also has brought strong journalist credentials having once served as a newspaper publisher. Currently writes weekly sports columns for one of the city's papers and writes extensively for the LAS VEGAS SENTINEL; and serves as Las Vegas sports reporter for the Sheridan Broadcasting Network. He has a daily program each afternoon on KVOV known as "Ed Brown Around Town."

Another broadcaster in the Las Vegas area with long tenure is Ghino Barmore, program director at KVOV. He has been on the air in Las Vegas longer than any of the current broadcasters, radio or TV. KVOV Radio is the only black oriented commercial station in the area.

The newspaper industry has not changed overly much. There is only one Black reporter, Bob Palm, with a major local paper. There is still little reference to blacks in advertisements and television commercials. The medium is the message. The signal which is currently being read about Las Vegas is that the private sector is still convinced that to allow admission to advertisement activities would be an affront and not amenable to the age old adages so adamantly adhered to and admired by archaic American admen.



too bad. The photographs taken and the stories written seventy-five years ago on the occasion of the founding of Las Vegas, were devoid of any reference to Black people. The artifacts of that historic day are all white on white. Blacks were here, but their involvement was not

ted but they were short lived. The second newspaper to arrive on the scene was the Evening Review. For the most part, the reporting by both papers on matters pertaining to Blacks, was in the area of criminal activities. All of the reporting, whatever the assignment, was done by white

generally stereotypically or derogatorily done. Policies do change & so do attitudes, but only when they are no longer expedient.

Through the 1920s and 1930s, there were few photographs of Blacks in local newspapers. That did not begin to change



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his message has come across very well. Several thousand years ago, the ancients used a kind of picture writing. In some places it might have been termed hieroglyphics while in others it was simply called pictographs. Even before either of these were developed, prehistoric people were drawing pictures on the roofs and walls of caves. The pictures illustrated those things which were important to them. They were mostly represented Eastern Bloc countries. In animals which were a necessary part of their

representative of the different groups of people who lived in each place. The art and other representations of different groups of people have given us exposure to their media and we have learned more of them by having done so. Until this year, one of the things we have been able to depend on during this century has been the Olympics. In conjunction with that, we have also come to expect bickering from the Western and Eastern Bloc countries. In each event in which they have been the slightest