

BUSINESS

... in the black community (Part II)

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

Neither the "Big Apple," "Sunset Strip," "The Loop," "Fisherman's Wharf" or the "French Riviera" can rival the Las Vegas Strip or Glitter Gulch of Fremont Street.

Beyond the glamour of the casinos and hotels is to be found a totally different Las Vegas. While the former is cosmopolitan and international in scope, the latter is ultra conservative. There is an inordinate number of churches and the people generally vote the conservative ticket.

In almost every section of town there are newly constructed housing developments, shopping centers, twenty-four hour grocery stores, banks, and other business enterprises. Those communities are economically "healthy," they contribute to the coffers of city, county and state governmental entities and they receive an equitable return on those contributions. Regrettably, such is not the case with all segments of the city. It is particularly not true of that area called the Westside.

Just over twenty years ago, March 1960, the local Chapter of the NAACP was instrumental in bringing to an end the segregationist practices which had existed here since the early 1940s. A goodly portion of the city was opposed to integration. Fortunately, it was realized that the kinds of racial demonstrations occurring in other parts of the U.S. would greatly, negatively affect Las Vegas. The powers that be did not cherish being put on the spot but, in effect, they had been made an offer they could not refuse. They relinquished and the barriers of segregation came tumbling down. There would, however, be hell to pay.



Photos by Willis

Old Cove Hotel Building

Black businesses, which had come into existence during the era of segregation, were affected. The thrust of the civil rights movement had been designed to terminate segregation in the public and private sectors. Once integration of facilities had occurred, Blacks, who had been restricted in where they could go, no longer were obligated to patronize Black businesses on the Westside. Those businesses did suffer. They had not thrived previously. To a large extent, most were undercapitalized and did not carry as complete an inventory as did other businesses outside the area. Most owners were not in a position to extend credit to customers and the general overall appearances of the structures were not something to write home about.

Unlike businesses in other parts of Las Vegas, Westside businesses had not been afforded credit from lending institutions which would have enabled

them to present a more pleasant appearance. Passersby saw what they saw and were quick to remark that "blacks did not maintain their businesses as did white businessmen." On its face, the statement was true. Further investigation reveals that white

businesses were initiated constantly. There were hotels, restaurants, night clubs, beauty salons and barber shops, fountains, and limited gaming. The latter had not experienced much difficulty in being licensed in spite of the limited capital of their



Mo Mart Hotel

businesses received credit from all entities. They were in a position to improve and expand. Such financial courtesies were not extended to Black businesses.

During the twenty year period between 1940 and

owners. Such had been the case because, during those two decades, white Las Vegans had chosen to exclude Blacks from their activities. Once that exclusion was terminated, efforts were made, either consciously or un-

consciously, to choke the life's blood out of the black business community.

Gaming, on the Westside, came under closer scrutiny than it had previously. The ultimate extent of the law was enforced — laws which had not been enforced too stringently before. Obviously, this was a cause of concern to Black business people.

Local blacks began to frequent other establishments outside of the Westside. The luxurious qualities of the Strip and Fremont Street overshadowed what the Westside had to offer. Just as those other places — the "Loop," "The Big Apple" and others — could not compete with Las Vegas, the same is true of West Las Vegas.

Small scale individual attempts to save or revive business activity on the Westside continued. For the ten year period of 1960-1970, some of those businesses survived. Basically they were small night clubs, beauty salons or neighborhood grocery stores.

By the beginning of the 1970s, those businesses which were doomed were gone by the wayside. During the decade could

few others. There were also such places as the Community Store, Gaston's Cleaners, McNeal's Quick-Check, Modernist Shop, Mom's Kitchen, Johnson's Malt Shop, Hamburger Heaven, Humdinger, Larry's Sight and Sound and others too numerous to mention.

The 1970s was a decade of turmoil for Black businesses. Midway through there were small demonstrations protesting the lack of loan availability from banks and other lending institutions. Insurance rates were/are much higher on the Westside especially for those in business. In so many terrible ways, the Westside has been "redlined" by builders, banks, basic black ballers, bigots and other businesses.

In 1975, the Review Journal printed an editorial encouraging revitalization of the Westside. It stated that "if more businesses or government agencies were located in West Las Vegas more persons from other sections of the community would be attracted there. That alone would help destroy myths about the dangers lurking in the Black neighborhoods too." It goes on to say that "except for West Las Vegas the metropolitan area has enjoyed a state of prosperity for many years. The time is long overdue for the black community to share in the healthy economic conditions which have made the rest of our community thrive. We urge those in positions of responsibility in both government and business to take a long hard look at ways of instilling new life into this vital section of our city."

be found such businesses as the Hideaway Lounge, Players Fashion, Love's, Woody's, El Rio, Mau Mau Room, Sugar Hill, Pan Afro Auditorium, Reubens, Town Tavern, Louisiana Club, The Brown Derby and some

The years of neglect have created a problem of major productions. What we are looking at today are 1940 needs through the price eyes of the 1980s. Clearly, had those items been addressed for-

(See Decade, page 17)