

Roosevelt Fitzgerald

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never heard of any refusal to employ Colored people and that he would take the matter up immediately on his return to Boulder City, and see that provision was made for their employment of the work when and if they had the necessary experience.

On the basis of the evidence, three conclusions may be suggested: (1) Mr. Bechtel was either not cognizant of the absence of Blacks from the work force or it did not matter to him; (2) Blacks were required to have experience and whites were not; and (3) affirmative action of any sort did not exist at that time. Whichever the case, it is clear that in order for the rights of Black people to be protected, safeguards beyond those for whites were necessary.

It was charged that while Blacks were expected to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens of the U.S., their rights as citizens

were ignored and not protected. Just as white Americans had, with the Spanish-American War and World War I, answered the "bell," the same was true for Blacks. "When the call to arms came in the Great War our government called for American citizens, regardless of color. There are many ex-servicemen among the local Negro settlement. Many of them are unable to obtain work." Hawkins and Pickens did not hesitate to point out the discrepancies of the condition Blacks found themselves in. It was a harsh brutal truth which most Americans would just as soon not admit.

As preparations got underway for the actual construction of the dam, the condition of local Blacks worsened. By the end of November, 1931, there had been 3800 letters of response written to job seekers by the local labor office and the numbers of arrivals were increasing daily. The influx of newcomers to the area lessened Black chances of employment. It was

becoming increasingly clear that Blacks would not be hired so long as a single white man was out of work and in need of a job.

In May of 1932 Pickens returned to Las Vegas. Conditions had not changed and the NAACP was adamant in its efforts to bring them about. His second visit was highlighted by an open meeting in which there were several influential white people — Nye Wilson, Mayor Ernie Cragin and Leonard Blood of the Labor Office. Pickens' address extolled the contributions blacks had made in the historical development of the United States. Once again the thrust of the meeting was to indicate to white Las Vegas that Blacks were citizens of the country and the community. His plea, as usual, fell on deaf ears. The habit of excluding Black from economic development did not seem to be of concern to any but Blacks. Rather than look for reasons to hire Blacks, reasons justifying their not being hired were

developed in abundance.

In a number of cases men, in search of employment, brought their families with them. The very best of conditions were terrible for most. Zane Grey, in his BOULDER DAM gives a fairly accurate portrayal of life in southern Nevada during the early 1930s. The kinds of housing and the presence of thousands of job seekers is very well illustrated. Today, in Clark County, there are people who were here at the time of the construction of the dam. Some of them have interviewed and taped and their recollections of those days have become a part of the pages of history. Only in rare instances are there similar artifacts recorded by/of Blacks. Once again the evidence is scanty.

When we consider that the number of Blacks who were here, nearly 500, and the number who were unemployed, nearly 500, we must wonder how they managed to survive. Most did without the basic necessities. They lived in cardboard shacks and ate whatever food they could find. They received little or no aid in spite of the fact that there was aid to

be had. White newcomers who found themselves in similar straits were met by the "welcome wagon." Blacks were termed vagrants and as such were arrested and placed on work gangs for the city or they were very forcefully asked to leave town. What has been described as the "pioneer spirit" was not all that Christian — but then — no one has ever claimed that pioneers were "Christians." If they were they were inconsistent and a Christian is either a Christian at all times or merely a faker. The constables conspired with the other cooties and without care of conscience they constumaciously caused "colored" people to compute their chances of countering their adversaries' continually calcifying christianity.

Fortunately, Blacks persisted. At a meeting between representatives of the NAACP, the CCLPA, Six Companies, Senator Tasker L. Oddie and Secretary Wilbur of the Department of the Interior some meaningful decisions were finally made. It was decided that there would be "no further discrimination against the employment of

Colored labor on the Hoover Dam. It was finally admitted that discrimination had been taking place in the hiring practices. Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, in writing to Arthur McCants, the president of the local chapter, said that he had been notified by Mr. Ray Lyman Wilbur of the Interior department that "When additions to the force are made, the company will arrange to give employment to Negro labor." Almost as soon as this occurred, the local government advertised for laborers for a sewer project. A new requirement was attached — prospective workers had to be property owners. One step forward and one step backwards.

At that stage the dam was one-third finished. Blacks were still playing catch-up. At almost every opportunity to do the right thing — whites, in position of authority, maintained their perfect record of opting to do the wrong thing. After all, it was only at Black peoples' expense. It would yet be some months before the first Blacks would be hired on the project.

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Fire Education

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for the 1980-81 program is \$48,388 of which \$39,529 (approximately 81.7%) is for personal services, \$6,335 (approximately 13.1%) for supplies, \$769 (approximately 1.6%) is allocated for services and \$1,755 (approximately (See Fire, page 23)



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