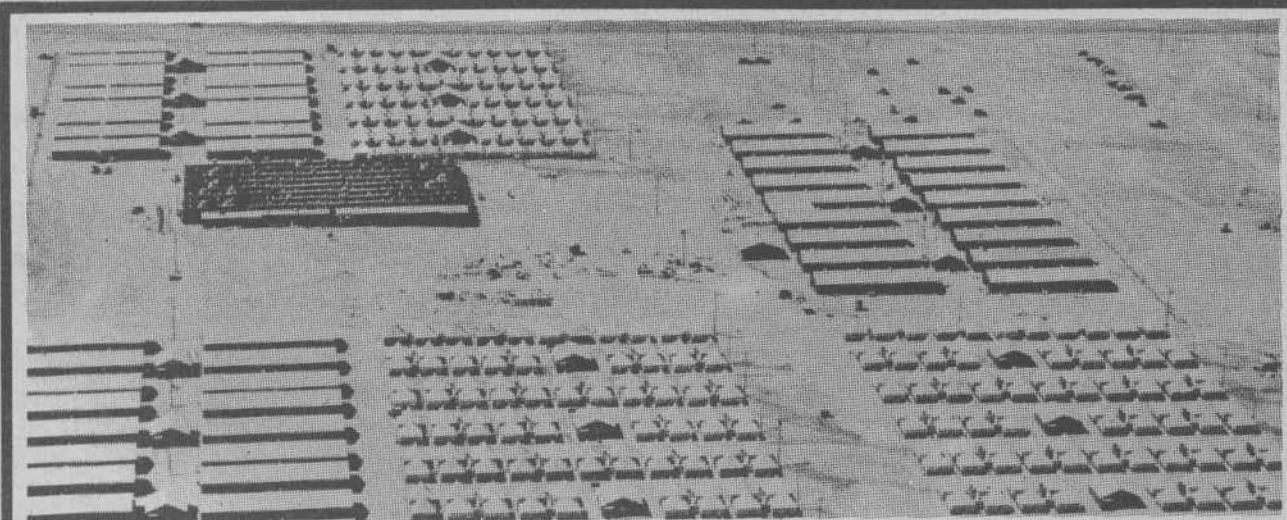


Equal Opportunity In Employment? What Do You think?

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald



THE AVAILABILITY OF LAND, WATER AND POWER and a mild climate combined to attract Basic Magnesium Incorporated to this site halfway between Las Vegas and Boulder City in 1941. Soon red steel columns rose from the sage-covered sand which in 1942 were enclosed by asbestos-covered sheet-steel and concrete. Inside the buildings a fantastic assembly of fur-

naces, grinders, tanks, mixers, and countless other contraptions processed magnesium oxide into solid forms of wartime uses. Above are construction camps with dormitories, tents and commissary, while below access roads wind through shops and storage areas. Three of ten chlorine production units are at right.

Waiting. That is what Blacks were doing in Las Vegas midway through 1932. They were waiting to be hired on the Boulder Dam project while others were going to work and earning a living. Blacks were watching, waiting and hoping that the power structure would relinquish and permit them to work. A year and a half after the project had been initiated and after whites who had been hired on the project had earned more than \$2,000.00, Blacks were still waiting. They had to provide for food, shelter and other necessities for their families the best way they could.

By today's standards, that amount of money does not seem like very much. In 1931, however, it was a great deal. The workers were earning, at the very minimum, twenty dollars per week. Rooms were renting for as little as three dollars per week for those who were not living at the dormitories at Boulder City. A dollar per day for food was more than sufficient and, for those with families, ten dollars per week furnished their weekly needs. Blacks did not have access to

those luxuries. No matter how much they would earn in the future, it would never off-set or make-up for that which they were not then earning.

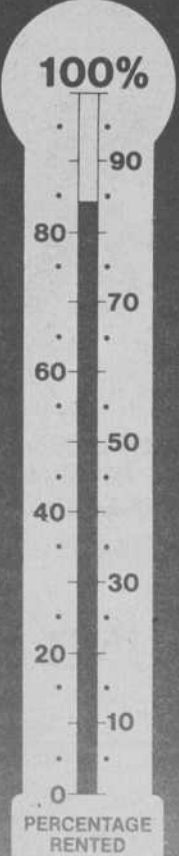
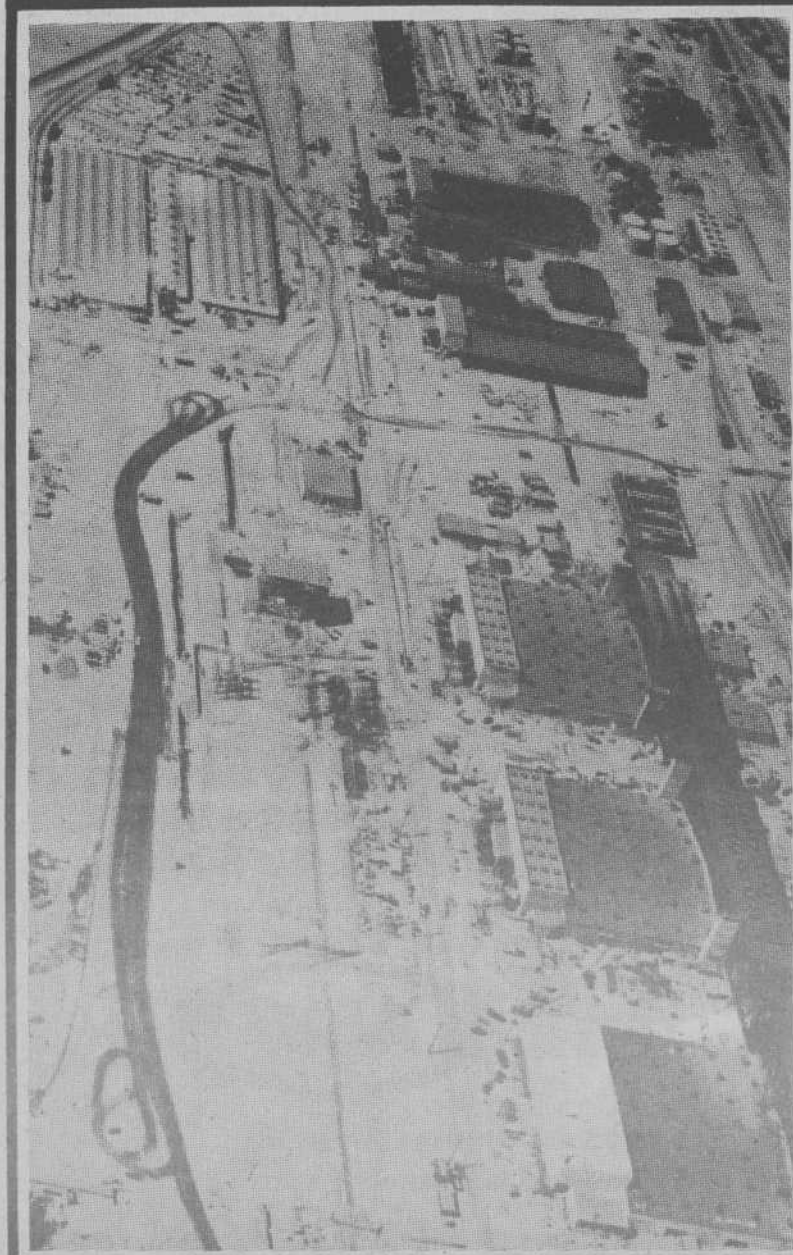
For a period of time, the penniless who pounded the pavement pursuing paychecks were pathetic in their pathos and their positions became increasingly perjorative even while their paladins, the NAACP and the CCLPA, pushed for parity. It would not be until July of 1932, that their exclusion would finally be ended with the hiring of ten of their numbers to work force at the dam.

By the time those first ten Blacks were hired on the project, their numbers who met the basic requirements for employment greatly exceeded the initial figure of thirty-seven. The hiring of ten Blacks out of a 4000 plus work force was anything but fair. Those first ten were not received with open arms. It is said that "NIG," the dog mascot, was born about March of 1932 and that he wandered onto the dam site as a small pup. His arrival would have approximated that of the first Black workers. Phil Lawson, who arrived at the dam site in 1931, recalls that the dog was initially called "nigger" because it was so black. That name was later shortened to "nig." The perception of Blacks had been bad prior to their being hired on the project. Once they reported for work that perception deteriorated.

Part of the cause of the problems Blacks encountered in seeking employment goes back to the historical perception of slavery and slaves. When whites are doing the same kinds of jobs as are blacks then their perception of themselves becomes that which they have of blacks. It was commonly believed that Blacks were incapable of doing anything which required any degree of intelligence. For blacks and whites to be doing the same jobs could only mean one of two things — "either blacks were not as 'dumb' as whites thought them to be, or whites were not as intelligent as they had believed."

As a continuing effort to protect the interest of local Blacks and because of the seemingly universality

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