

Blacks Finally Organized

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of segregation and discrimination in all local organizations, Black veterans organized VFW Post 2668. The local white VFW Post 1753 did not admit Black veterans to membership. This, along with the NAACP and the CCLPA, continued to carry on the fight for additional jobs for Blacks. As of September, the local labor office reported that "at the present time twenty-five" Blacks were working on the project.

Just as was the case with everything else, Blacks worked in segregated crews. Charlie Rose was in charge of the Black crew working at the dam. They not only worked by themselves but they also lived by themselves and they ate by themselves. The supervisor of the cafeteria at Boulder City did not recall ever seeing Blacks eat on the premises. Since there had been no provisions made for their living at Boulder City they lived away from Boulder City. It was an ongoing battle for Black workers. Turnovers continued but replacements were usually white unless one of those tiring of the canyon's heat happened to be a member of the Black gang of workers.

Conditions still had not really improved nationwide as far as jobs go. Prospective workers continued to flood Las Vegas. The rate of increase of Black workers was very slow even though the local Labor Office supposedly worked in harmony with the CCLPA. In later mon-

ths the number of Blacks allowed to work on the project fluctuated. At its technical peak in 1932, there were but 116 involved in engineering, warehouse and office operations. There were 49 doing electrical work and 309 in the mechanical division. It is clear, from those figures, that the need for technical training was not a requirement for the majority of workers on the project. Most were common laborers.

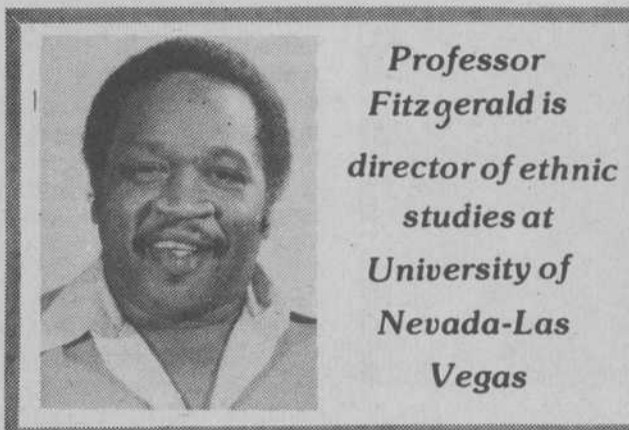
When the diversion tunnels were completed, the task of preparing the river bed for the pouring of concrete was the next order of the day. The centuries of silt which had accumulated had to be removed. No particular skill was required to "get the muck" out. In spite of that reality, the number of Blacks working on the project had increased to only 11 by 1934.

Progress on the Boulder Dam was ahead of schedule. It had been estimated that the work would be completed in December of 1937. By 1934, it was more than half finished. It was becoming more and more apparent that soon the work on the dam would be completed and the number of jobs would decrease. In June of 1934, bids were opened for the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam in Spokane, Washington. Large numbers of Boulder Dam workers left this project, since it was drawing near completion, and rushed to Washington with the hopes of getting in on the ground floor with the new project. The fact that that occurred at a time when

the project had in its employ the peak number of workers would suggest that there would be even more possible openings for Blacks. Contrarily, as the number of workers increased and the number of job opportunities expanded with the accompanying exodus of workers to the state of Washington, the number of Blacks hired on this project decreased.

So far as is known, only a total of 44 different Blacks worked on the Boulder Dam project. For the duration of the project, including turnovers, there had been an excess of 20,000 different workers. Those figures compute out to one Black worker for every 500 who worked on the project.

Because of the establishment of the CCLPA, the NAACP and a VFW Post, Blacks in Las Vegas became organized. Their numbers were small but they functioned as a unit and they had support from the National office of the NAACP. The change in the manner in which they were perceived by local whites can be seen in the fact that during the campaign for Mayor of the City of Las Vegas in 1935, the winning candidate, Leonard Arnett, appealed to those organizations for support. The LAS VEGAS AGE reports that his request for support was answered. Blacks were actively involved in the fight for jobs, political recognition and other Constitutional rights. Ray Lyman Wilber had predicted, in 1932, that "Hoover Dam will create a unique tourists' mecca." His prediction had come true even before the dam was completed. The reports of visitors for



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were convinced that they had done enough — the token gestures had been made — blacks were once again forgotten. In this respect, then, even the New Deal itself, as it operated in Nevada on the Boulder Dam Project, proved to be the same "old deal" for Blacks. It is ironic that even on a project located in the Black Canyon, Blacks were not welcome.

The 1930s closed out, as far as employment opportunities were concerned, with the termination of the dam project. Things returned to normal but not for long. As the new decade approached, so too did the winds of war. The war which would ultimately be fought in Europe and the South Pacific, was to have profound effects on the employment picture of Las Vegas. The dust of Basic Magnesium would be stirred up and, when it settled, a new and profoundly different Las Vegas Valley would appear.

1934 range between 250,000 and 365,000. Those tourists needed accommodations. Those accommodations came about in the form of hotels, restaurants and other services. All of these brought about new jobs — for which Blacks would once again have to wage a running war to get.

The chances, few though they might have been, which took place on the Boulder Dam project, were the results of the efforts of the NAACP. The organization was right in

the thick of things at a time when no other organizations were there to help. The membership was limited but, the heart was great. The efforts put forth by them helped to create an environment more conducive to an enhanced quality of life for Black people in Las Vegas. No one should ever forget the fact.

Blacks continued their fight for jobs on the Project throughout the duration of the construction of the dam. Once the dust had settled and all concerned

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