

Roosevelt Fitzgerald

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the city inspector, R.S. Norton, and demanded that he enforce the building codes. He informed Norton that "there were tents, shacks and sometimes nothing at all except beds placed on vacant property." Norton, through a technicality, was able to buy time for the city. He informed Goheen that his office could do nothing because he had "no jurisdiction until a permit was issued." Since the need for a permit only was necessary in the case of the construction of permanent buildings, Blacks were not required to have them. After all, by their own admission, theirs were merely temporary structures. Also, the city was yet certain that once BMI would have done its job, the plant would close and there would be a repeat, a la Boulder Dam project, of the mass exodus of workers.

BMI had provided only 324 places of habitat for Black workers. It consisted of 64 units with no bedrooms, 104 with one bedroom, 104 with two

bedrooms and 52 with three bedrooms. They were constructed by the Hommes-Eudemiler Company of Los Angeles. The housing for white workers were under the direction of O.J. Scherer and they accommodated a much larger number of people. The excess black population is what helped create the chaotic condition of the westside.

"Don't forget to blow out the lamp before you leave." That was a common utterance on the westside. The new inhabitants did not always have electricity. Those who were fortunate enough to buy an already existing house did have a few of the basic amenities. Kerosene lamps and stoves were used by most. They presented a safety problem for the users. Small fires were a common occurrence. Gas explosions were frequent. A dozen or more fires per month were not unusual. The absence of fire plugs only worsened the condition. Firefighters had to travel a great distance. Their equipment had to be the "Pump" truck variety. If a blaze had not

been extinguished before it ran out of water, then it became necessary to leave, refill the tank, return and hope that there was yet something there to save. Of course, few could afford to purchase insurance under those conditions — the rates were astronomical.

Even storing perishable food presented a problem for those without electricity. Sometimes a friend would allow them to leave such items in their refrigerators. When such was not possible, a hole would be dug in the ground and filled with ice. Food would be placed inside and covered with burlap.

On most college campuses, one must take care of the three "S's" before a big date. Such was not always possible on the westside. Sanitary facilities were limited. Number three tubs, for baths, white with red or blue trim "slop" jars or, more politely, night pots, and wash basins were the order of the day. Toughing it out. That's what urban cowboys call it today. Contemporarily, it is indicative of what is called Macho. Forty years ago,

it carried no such self satisfying connotations. The transplanted travelers were like thorns in the tails of the in-

tandem tyros of tyranny of the townsites as they trotted toward the Huntridge area. As they left, what little attention

which had been paid the westside came to an abrupt halt. Black families were there. TO BE CONTINUED

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