

How the 'West Side' Came Into Existence

PART IV

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

"I'm an overseas soldier." For World War II, there were 34 million selective service registrants. In 1939, there were 10 million Americans who were unemployed. The outbreak of war in Europe made quite a dent in that number. The later involvement of the United States in the war effort, on a military basis, did even more to raise the country out of the depths of the great depression.

By the end of the war there were 8,300,000 serving in the army and another 3,400,000 in the navy. Combined, they totalled 11,700,000 — almost two million more than the unemployment figure of 1939 had been and just a tad more than a third of the total number of registrants.

The impact of the war on unemployment is apparent. Although the country had slowly begun to recover from the depression, the events in Europe speeded it along. President Roosevelt challenged the country to become the "Arsenal of Democracy." The country responded. Henry Stimson, Secretary of War, said "you have got to let business make money out of the process or business won't work." Mass production was introduced on a grand scale. Thousands of Americans went to work. Unemployment plummeted. A lot was learned about America's manpower. The revelations were not encouraging — only half of the human resources of this country had ever been actively utilized.

In 1940, the population of the United States was 132,000,000. One in five was illiterate and only one in four had finished high school. No one had fully realized the impact of that reality.

Large numbers were not qualified to serve in the military because of the inability to read and write.

The rapid revitalization of industry had enormous effects on population patterns and shifts within the United States. Beginning in the 1930s with the era of the "hobo," people had



been on the move — seeking a better life. Few had remained anywhere for long periods of time during that decade. Large numbers had come to Las Vegas because of the Boulder Dam Project. The introduction of the 1940s brought about similar activities. The 1930s had been a time when the shifts made had been intended to be temporary. Most of the hobo element had left their families behind and they planned to return home once things had returned to normal economically. The war years of the early 1940s was profoundly different. With the development and changes and need for manpower in the industrial complexes around the country, whole families moved — lock, stock and barrel — to those job centers. People who had formerly not travelled more than a hundred miles from their places of birth, now bade adieu to lifelong

friends. That major disruption of the lives of masses of people was the equivalent of the kinds of migrations of refugees — all they could carry and off they went.

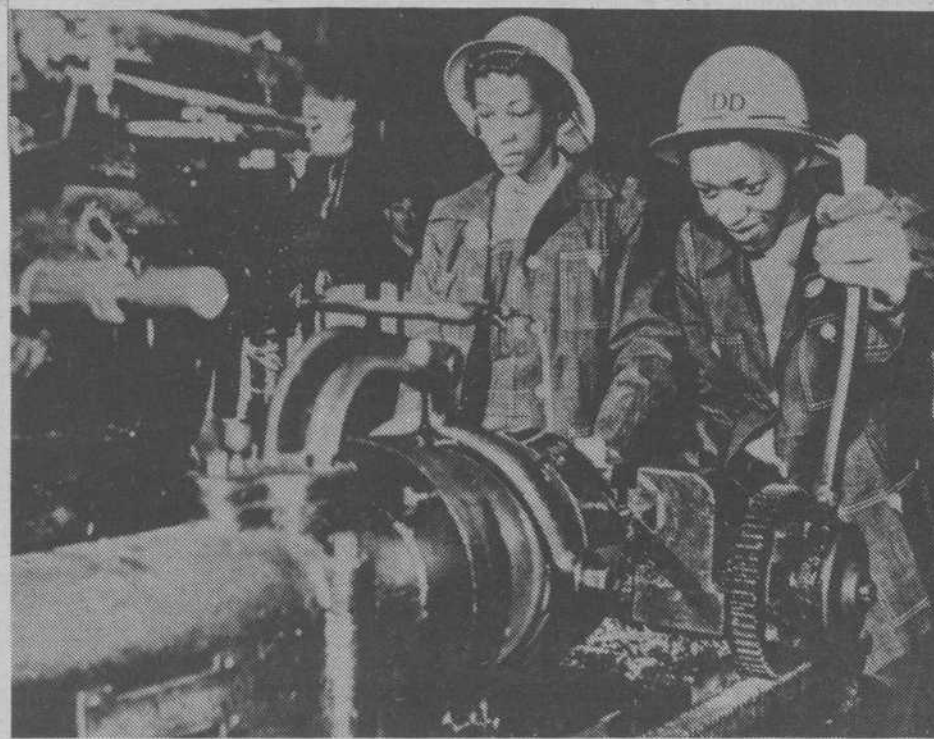
Men needed jobs and women wanted to keep families together. Prior to the '40s, women — white women — had been kept in their places — in the home — cooking, cleaning and raising families. For black women it had been a horse of a different color.

Even from pre-Civil War days, black women had been workers. Slave owners were active proponents of a kind of ERA. They firmly believed that a black woman had, not only as much right but, the duty to work as did Black men. After slavery ended, black women comprised an integral part of the work force of tenant farmers and sharecrop-

pers. It did help matters. It took much more time for relief to filter down to blacks, however. Once again, we came in on the tail-end of the cash flow.

There were more than men who came to Las Vegas due to the opening of the BMI Project. Women and children also came — of the former, some with their husbands and others alone. Unlike in industrial development in other cities, women did not comprise a noticeable part of the BMI workforce. Around the country, because of the shortage of manpower, women were utilized in the factories. They helped make tanks, parachutes, jeeps and trucks, airplanes, ships and all of the other instruments of war. In Las Vegas, such was not the case. Women who came here worked, primarily, at other jobs.

Those positions of maids which had been



historically the domain of black women, were being gobbled up by white women. Local hotels and motor courts ran help wanted ads which specified the desired color of the prospective "hired help." The El Cortez, the Nevada Motel, The Lido Auto Court and most others advertised for "white maids." Rarely were there ads where color did not mat-

ter. Black women were able to find work as domestics. They worked in the homes of women who themselves worked as maids or waitresses or cashiers or the sort. The only difference, regrettably a major one, was in the salaries. Black women earned only a fraction of the salaries being earned by white women.

Black women of Las Vegas worked because the salaries being earned by their spouses was not quite enough to make ends meet. Also, there were relatives back home who were not earning anything. Las Vegas' blacks generally helped support those who remained behind in the South. Because they were working in the homes of white Las Vegans, the latter's children were usually under some kind of supervision. Black



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black children. Parents would warn them to remain away from the underpass. The kinds of things left for black children to do were limited. While whites were cooling off in the swimming pools, blacks were sweltering in the dust of the westside.

BMI did bring a degree of respectability to the income of Black people. Across the country, a new kind of power was taking place which had not ever existed before — womanpower and blackpower. Both were called such because, even then, it was recognized that power in capitalism is in capital. The Federal Government did not permit blatant acts of discrimination to take place on federal projects. Workers, blacks and whites, generally made the same hourly wage. Those who were permitted to work overtime and in positions where some kinds of promotions were available, was a different matter entirely. Other means of attacking the elevating self concepts of blacks were explored.

To Be Continued

Dental Tests

Application deadline for the Dental Hygiene Aptitude Test to be given at Clark County Community College in November, is October 24.

Applications may be picked up at the Office of Admissions at CCC or apply by writing to Testing, American Dental Hygienists Association, Suite 3400, 44 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611.

All applications must reach Chicago by October 24.

Students wishing to apply for the Dental Hygiene Program at CCC are required to take the aptitude test.

For further information call 643-6060 ext. 349.

children, on the other hand, had to take care of each other. The malicious minded made more of the malady than what was there. Charges of black children not being supervised was rampant. Once again, the victim was given the burden of the victimness.

More and more, the westside was becoming an area of control of blacks and especially of