

Are You Among Those Who Cause Things To Happen?

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

What did you do when the lights went out? Well, I closed my eyes. In case you are wondering why I'd do such a thing, the answer is complicatedly simple — I always insist on having something to do about everything which affects my life.

Someone once said that there are three kinds of people in the world: (1) those who do not know what is happening (2) those who observe things while, during and after they happen and (3) those

who cause things to happen. In a few days we will have the opportunity to discover which of those three categories we fall into. Hopefully, it will be the third.

One of the ingredients which sets the United States apart from other nations is its capacity to enable maximum participation on the part of its citizenry. It was not always that way. As we observed in the July 4th edition of the SENTINEL, initially only those who were free,

male, white, property owners and at least twenty-one years old could participate. The history of the United States over the past 180 years has been a chronicle of those groups, which were excluded, and their striving to make the American dream of democracy a reality for themselves. The elastic nature of our Republic enables it, by virtue of its amending capability, to constantly change. The change is brought about through the actions of the voters and the reactions of congressional bodies on

those demands. A large number of people, myself included — before I "wised up," have been inclined to believe that Las Vegas Blacks are several years behind Blacks in parts of the United States. That is not altogether true. There are some Black people here to whom that description is applicable. Fortunately, it does not apply to most Blacks in Las Vegas, even though their numbers, until recently have been decidedly small, have constantly undertaken the task of securing for themselves

and others, a greater share of the democratic ideal. Sadly, not every Black person has participated.

For the seventy-five years of its history, Las Vegas has constantly grown in size. For each ten year period (1905-15, 1915-25, 1925-35, 1935-45 and so on), changes have occurred with both the development and population of Las Vegas. It has only been in that last twenty years that the Black population has been of a size as to begin to become a viable force within the community. Just twenty years ago,

there were only 64,000 people in the entire country and Blacks comprised but a small fraction of that number.

Even though the number was small, the percentage of that number who actively participated in the affairs of the community was great. In 1960, more than half of the Black inhabitants had been here since the heyday of BMI. Most were originally from the South. Few had finished high school and hardly any were college graduates. Yet, they realized their obligations to future generations of Blacks who would live here.

There was not much which they could do, but they did what they could. They pulled together for a common cause and for the common good. Today, the number of high school graduates have increased tremendously. There are large numbers

and hired Black workers on the dam project. They joined together in affecting the mayoral race of 1935. They unified their toothpicks of balloting powers to determine the outcome of the Senatorial race of 1944 between McCarran and Pittman.

of the country. Las Vegas Blacks, of twenty years ago and before, were pioneers in more ways than one.

Once the segregation barriers of the hotel industry had been removed, the tasks of gaining more equity in the ordinary affairs of the community was initiated. A constant vigil was necessary in encouraging Blacks to register and to vote. Older Blacks recall, all too well, the payments exacted of them and others, in the South, in their effort to obtain the ballot.

There are some who, either out of laziness or apathy, do not truly ap-

preciate or comprehend the value of the ballot. Increases in the numbers of Black registered voters who vote, have influenced the perception of Blacks by local politicians and businesses. Whether or not the trend continues, will depend upon Black Las Vegas and the number who cast a vote on November 4, 1980. My parents, both lifetime Mississippians, never cast a vote for anyone or anything.

Theirs was a different situation. They, in their lifetime, were denied the right to vote. In Mississippi, during that time, less than 6 percent of the Black residents of the state were permitted to vote. Resultantly, the power structure was oblivious to their needs and their rights. Their condition was not unlike that of millions of others throughout, the South. They met, secretly, and studied the Constitution in order to be able to pass the "Literacy Test." I recall their taking the test at least two dozen times. They never passed it but they never

tables set up at convenient places. There were beings with police dogs, attacking us at every turn. All people — children, the elderly, teenagers, college students and everyone else — were involved. Those were trying times. Medgar Evers and hundreds of others were slain because they dared have the audacity to want to vote. Their adversaries, the enemies of America, recognized full well the importance of the ballot and they were determined to see to it that that right would not be universally accessible to all Americans. A generation ago, Black



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A FAMILIAR SCENE AT THE POLLING PLACES DURING THOSE EARLY DAYS, WAIT, WAIT, WAIT

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of college graduates. W.E.B. DuBois' belief in the "Talented Tenth" should realistically come into play. Those who are educated, helping and leading those who are not, is today's generations responsibility.

As we look back over the record of pre-1960 years, we find that they did make an impact. Blacks brought pressure, collectively, on the Six Companies until the latter relented

They brought pressure to bear on BMI and forced a termination of the segregationist practices at the job site. Finally, as 1960 dawned, under the leadership of the NAACP they forced the hotels to discontinue their policies of exclusion of Blacks.

While Black Las Vegas were busy doing those kinds of things, the "Civil Rights" movement was just beginning to get underway in the remainder

gave up. They both died before they were given an opportunity to vote. I place the blame of their not voting at the doorstep of racism. For those who now have the right to vote and who do not, I place the blame at the doorstep of stupidity.

In our town, Las Vegas, there are some of us who recall how dangerous it was to go out on voter registration drives in the South. There were no booths or

people were not frightened away from or conned out of their birthright with such trite statements as "it does not matter who wins," or "my vote does not count," or "I don't have the time," or "one is just as bad as the other," or "they don't care what Black people want" or any number of other such cop outs.

In just a few days, the polls will open. BE THERE — OR FOREVER HOLD YOUR PIECE. Aloha.

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