

WAR MEANS CHANGE FOR LV

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

War, by its very nature, means change. Sometimes it is good and sometimes it is not. It is always one of the two for everyone. Winners expect, and rightly so, that the changes will be for the better. They should not bet on it being so. Quite often, exhilaration is smashed by the brutal and blatant glare of reality. Such is what happened with Blacksoldiers upon their return from the edge of eternity. "When Johnny comes marching home again, hoorah, hoorah..." But what about Leroy?

The war changed a number of things in Las Vegas. What had been a little dusty hamlet, stashed away in the middle of nowhere, began to grow up into an up and coming town. The young men who had left, still green behind the ears, came back full grown. They had gone away with a provincial attitude and they returned as world travellers. They had taken their lives to the edge and had managed to retrieve them.

As they returned to Las Vegas, they were no longer able to accept the quiet solitude of years gone by. A lot of them surprised the living daylights out of their families by bringing home "war brides." There were some who were Egyptian, Greek, German and Japanese and many other nationalities. Nevada had long had on its books, laws against interracial marriage. That had been one of the more strictly enforced laws. Previously, it had related primarily to black males and white females. Later it came to include Mexican women, Indian women and all

other women, as far as black men were concerned. The animosities which had generated against the enemy — Germany, Japan and Italy — transferred those feelings against interracial marriages to white men. Previously, they could marry anyone who would have them, but now — how could anyone refer to a person as a daughter in law who, just months before, had been a "jap" or a "kraut?" They had to get used to the idea and, more than that, they had to realize, as Billy Holiday used to sing: "It ain't nobody's business but my own."

The returning veterans were also of different races. Those men who had risked their lives for the country could not, with the ease with which it had been previously accomplished, be put in their place. N.G. Wing, technician fifth grade, who formerly was employed as a cook at the Silver Cafe, was one of those of Asian ancestry who had fought for democracy. He served 36 months in China and Burma with the 212th Quartermaster Trucking Co. He was authorized to wear the Asiatic-Pacific Theatre Ribbon with two battle stars, good conduct medal, American Theatre Ribbon and the Victory Ribbon.

Alonzo Valdez, who had seen action at Bataan and who had been awarded the Purple Heart, returned to Las Vegas. He had been a miner in Nye County and had worked on the dam project and he went on down to be involved in the construction of Davis

Dam.

Carey Richardson, Jr. of 310 Harrison Ave. entered the Merchant Marine and was off to see the world. His mother, Mrs. Louise Hayden, was among the many who saw him off.

Color and race was a most popular topic of conversation in those

"Iron Curtain" extended right through the heart of Europe, separating the free world from the enslaved world of communism. The phrase caught on rapidly, within months, the term was being used to describe the impact of the Bonanza underpass on Las Vegas. Black residents

Their restriction to that one area meant much more than what is immediately apparent. Not only could they be kept track of quite easily but also, it placed Blacks in a position where they could very easily be economically overlooked without it adversely affecting any of the white population except those who voluntarily chose to have it affect them by remaining residents of the westside. Through simple avoidance, the city fathers were able to continue to collect taxes from westside residents without having to return, through services and improvements, anything to the community.

By 1946, the Black population had grown in excess of 4000 in Clark County and most lived on the westside. The cabins and shacks still remained and the streets were still unpaved and without sidewalks. Residents were forced to walk "in the road" and that is always dangerous and especially for

children. At the very edge of the yards, the streets began and many parents have mourned its deadly results. Perhaps the incident which magnified the problem, more than any other, was the death of little Jean Scott. She was run over by an automobile. She was only two years old and had been playing in the front yard of her house at 1011 "H" St. and, somehow, crawled into the street during a momentary distraction of her guardian.

Black citizens were incensed. They asked for sidewalks, stop signs, paved streets and other deterrents but no one listened. Had they listened in 1948, those improvements could have been made quite cheaply. The city elected to put it off until the costs were so astronomical as to create the illusion, in the minds of many, that

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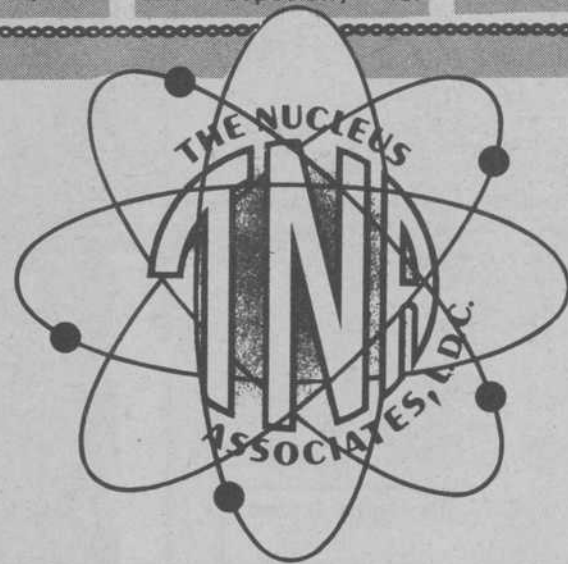
years immediately after the war. The world had been made conscious of the far reaching tentacles of racism through the activities of Hitler and his henchmen. The free world had united to thwart his efforts and was now concerned with not projecting similar images.

The U.S. was especially concerned. Jesse Owens had been the recipient of racial humiliation at the Berlin Olympics but Joe Louis had made the German-champion an offer he could not refuse. The "Brown Bomber," the single toughest human being on the face of the Earth, represented the American male as a formidable adversary. Psychologically, that had quite an impact on the war effort.

In 1946, Winston Churchill, in a speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, coined a new phrase in describing post war Europe. He said that an

referred to it as the "iron curtain," separating the westside from the remainder of the community.

The underpass was the way in and the way out. Blacks were almost living in a kind of Indian reservation atmosphere.



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