

LOSING THE WAR ON THE HOME FRONT

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

The shrill whistle of the train broke through the stillness of the spring night. Some still remember its mournful sound. Throngs lined the tracks between Warm Springs, Georgia and the apple blossoms of Washington, D.C. hoping to get one final glimpse of F.D.R.

To most Americans, he had been a savior. He entered the White House in 1932, at a time when the country was in the depths of the Great Depression and on a note which would uplift the spirits of the nation — "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." During the following thirteen years, the country went through depression, recovery and war.

The haberdasher from Missouri took over the reigns of government upon the death of F.D.R. and the nation entered the era of Harry Truman. Within two months, the war in Europe ended and fourteen months later, the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan, ending the war in the Pacific.

While U.S. troops were still on the ships returning home, the Marshall Plan was being formulated. It stated that the policy of the U.S., in regard to former enemy countries and others, would be "not against any country and doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos." Those returning G.I.s, some of them, were probably desirous of a Marshall Plan being put into effect at home. Such was not to be the case. Around the country, they were greeted on the one hand and shunned on the other. Families, friends and neighbors were happy for their safe return but, their arrival also placed additional pressures on the economy, housing and unemployment.

Las Vegas, of course, was no exception. Housing and jobs were in great demand but there was little relief in sight. The restrictions on building, which had been initiated during the war, had created a problem for residents here and that was particularly true of the westside, which had experienced shortages

from the very beginning.

According to national figures, there was a need for 5,000,000 additional housing units nationwide. Wilson W. Wyatt, Jr. was appointed as Harry Truman's housing expediter. It was his decision that veterans would have preference in housing and that, because of limited funds on the part of vets, the majority of new construction would be rental units. Wyatt realized that there would be problems but he attempted to circumvent them by placing housing high on the list of priorities and by stating

were left to their own devices, for the most part, as far as securing shelter was concerned.

During the years immediately following the end of World War II, and the termination of the manufacture of war materials at BMI, Black Las Vegans found their lifestyles slowly changing. Because little or no new housing had been provided during the previous five years and because the extent of business activity was centered around small neighborhood businesses, the tax base for the area was quite low. The power structure did not seem to care that the condition was a result of their own inat-

streetlights, traffic lights or sanitation and limited electricity and natural gas outlets. Most people had used outhouses, kerosene stoves, washtubs, and galvanized buckets for drinking water. For almost five years, it had been ok with the authorities for those circumstances to exist. Suddenly, with the close of the war, things began to change.

Seventy-five cabins were razed and thereby increasing the number of homeless victims of segregation. Willie Smith, a resident of the westside, was taken to court for failure to remove a cabin from another man's property



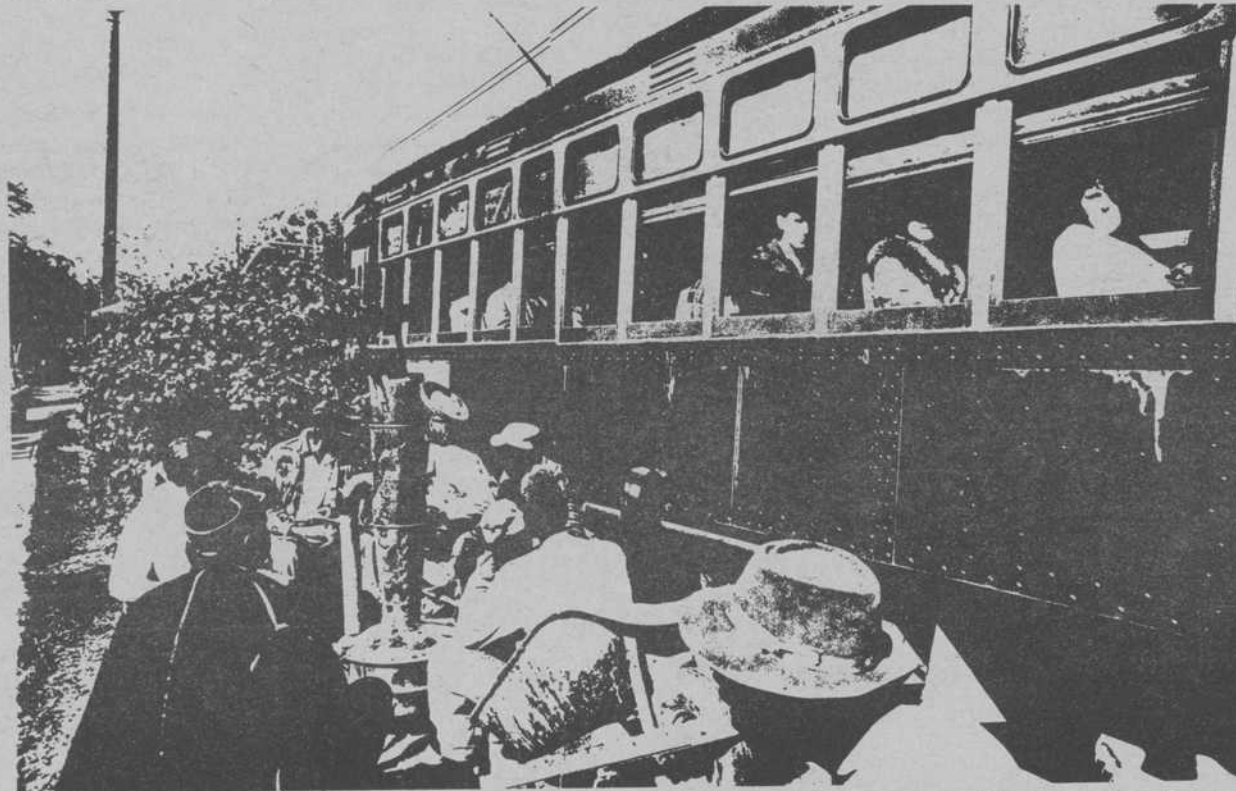
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who were organized and unified was greater than the percentage which was not. Today, it appears that the opposite is the case. The black person who hinders the efforts of other black people, is nothing more than a modern day

Methodist Church was re-activated with new officers. Mrs. Lola Branch was elected president while Mrs. Almida Moody was vice-president, Mrs. Helen Hall was Secretary, and Mrs. C. Allen was treasurer. One of their first activities was that of sponsoring a canned goods drive. The destination of those goods was "overseas relief." In spite of the deprivations Black people were experiencing here at home, they did not all lose sight of the aged old parable of the person who was upset because they had no shoes until they "saw someone who had no feet."

The men were not left out either. The Methodist Men Brotherhood of Zion reorganized under the leadership of Marshall Branch. The vice-president was Gerlesha McCullum, H.H. Struther was secretary, Henry Moody was corresponding secretary, Marshall Allen was treasurer and Leroy Washington was chaplain. Their first project was to organize a Boy Scout Troop for Black children. Segregation even in such a clean-cut outfit as the Scouts, was the order of the day.

There were other organizations which were active, and the objectives of all were to enhance the quality of life for Black people in the community. Because of their combined efforts, Assembly Bill 5 was introduced, in 1947. It was introduced by representatives from Reno, Hawthorne and Las Vegas. It did not carry, but it did indicate that the concerns, which had existed in 1939, when a "Race and Color Bill" had been introduced, were not dead.



that "where there are bottlenecks, they will be broken. Where there is red tape, it will be cut." The bureaucracy, however, would not be so easily handled.

In Las Vegas, it was possible to rent a room in a flop house for as little as 50 cent per night. Those rooms were downtown and not available to Black people. The substandard cabins and tents which they had resided in since 1939, became a center of contention with the city fathers. In 1941, with the opening of BMI, it was felt that those Blacks who arrived here would be temporary residents. Because they were viewed in such a manner, no one was concerned with providing ample or permanent housing for them. They

tentiveness and that had they been as conscientious in regard to the development of the westside as they were with other parts of town, the area would not have become a blighted area. They were obviously only interested in what appeared on paper. The ledgers showed that revenue generated from the westside, through taxation, was the lowest of any area of the community. The westside, therefore, was on the very bottom of the priority totem-pole.

Now that the work at BMI was all but over, the city sought to foreclose on what they viewed as, the "nesters" on the westside. Building codes, which had previously existed but not enforced, were carried out. The westside had no sidewalks.

at 504 Jackson Street. Blacks were not being chased out of town but life was being made a bit more costly for them. Black people were being required to erect structures which came up to code and, simultaneously, they were being denied access to loans in order to purchase homes. During those early years, those Blacks who were fortunate enough to build a house had to do so on their own. Even FHA would not make loans available.

Black people learned, quite some time ago, that throughout life they would have to be willing to get up one more time than they are knocked down. They organized and they helped each other — not 100 percent — but in the 1940s, at least the percentage

"house slave..." Black people had shown their unity in 1944, when they became politically active. At the close of the war, they showed their spiritual, community and civic strength.

A feeling of community pride began to take shape. The little which Black people had was cared for and maintained. In spite of the fact that they received no help from the city, they persisted. The home of Mrs. Jenny Pinkston was considered a showplace of the community. Even a local newspaper reported on the time and effort which she spent with her plants and in putting up "a beautiful white picket fence."

On the church scene, there was also activity. The Women Society of Christian Service of Zion