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THE CRISIS OF THE OLD ORDER

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

If you've ever lived in any of the states bordering the Gulf of New Mexico, you are probably aware of the weather patterns there. Summer months are hot

and mucky and, as fall arrives, the last phase of the hurricane season gets underway. Indian summers are quite common and they are long lasting. The

weather does not begin to become seriously cold until late December or early January. The warm currents of the gulf stream do indeed affect the weather. It seems that it has always been that way and it was that way in 1955.

Las Vegas experiences similar weather patterns—with the exception that there is much less humidity. Hot summers, extended warm weather into the fall and the cold weather not appearing until late December or early January. The weather patterns of the Gulf of California plays an important role in the kinds of weather experienced here.

The Brown decision of 1954 did not affect the weather in either place, but it did affect the manner and the quality of life of the residents of, not only both of those areas, the entire country. Once the educational system was integrated it became less possible to maintain segregation in other areas. Each of these were to aid in bringing about more volatile circumstances within the country.

Communities around the country reacted. They sought to buy time and thereby "put off" the time in which they would have to comply fully. Las Vegas, once again, was no exception. Its response was not one in which an end to segregation was

initiated. It is nowhere stated, but the occurrence appears to be more than a coincidence. Previously the schools had been k-8 and 9-12. All of that changed with the introduction of the intermediate system. The extent of the

segregated throughout. Not only were black students denied access to the schools but to everything else, including the professional schools. At each and every turn, they were denied. Even though Las Vegas was greatly removed from the south, geographically, similar racial attitudes were prevalent. Black people could not frequent most public places of recreation and entertainment and they were constantly harassed by the psychological degradation of their oppressors.

made them more and more the targets of retaliation. Although the laws were being passed, local authorities did not feel obligated to ensure them and there were no federal authorities present to protect those Black citizens, in those dens of bigotry, who dared chance "teeing off at the country club", "rolling a strike at the lanes" or "doing a little two-step at the Magnolia Hotel's ballroom." Black people were rediscovering that when the individual states were given the opportunity to guarantee

and his relationship with others. He had not joined any of the local organizations and was therefore free to associate with everyone without being defined as a member of this, that or the other. His lack of membership would stand him in good stead later on when a leader would be needed and the petty jealousies of the different churches and other organizations would prevent a unified effort being made. Martin was an outsider—thank goodness. Had he not been, the civil rights movement would not have gotten underway. People would still be arguing over who would appear on television. Does that remind you of anywhere you've been lately? No kidding?

Around the country, Black people—men, women and children—were beginning to come of age. The steps which were being taken were small and, in the minds

formerly the location of the Shamrock Motel. That was the site of the first attempt at re-integrating Las Vegas. The owners of the establishment, along with delegates of the local chapter of the NAACP, attempted to convince the "city fathers" to grant a license to permit people of all races to frequent and patronize the establishment. It was realized, even then, that some changes were necessary in the status quo of the racial climate in Las Vegas. The bid was turned down cold. It would not be long, however, before Black people would have a nice place to go for social intercourse.

There were in excess of 8000 Black people living in Las Vegas in 1955. They were isolated and their livelihood was

courts for some time. The change of attitude in the Supreme Court had become quite apparent over the preceding decade. The Las Vegas City Commission hoped that by granting the license for the Moulin Rouge, that they would avert any future need to have to permit Black patrons entrance to the other hotels and casinos.

A stop-gap—sure—and a lot more. Even though it was short lived, it broke the ice. Few recognized the impact of that venture.

The mid-fifties was the beginning of a turning point in race relations. The efforts of those involved in the Moulin Rouge venture was to point out glaringly well that integration could indeed work—given the chance. There were large numbers of people who were reluctant to permit the United States to carry out its charge of bringing democracy to the world. It became the task of Black people to force those in authority to come face to face with their principals.

Black people began to no longer ask or entreat but to demand. It was good for them and it was good for the country.

We wanted nothing special

We only wanted our share if that antagonizes you Well, tough. We do not care

We're simply demanding what is ours As citizens of the U.S.A.

It would be wise if you realize

That about this, we do not play In the past, others have asked

You always turned a deaf ear

Well, we're cut of a different bolt

And retaliation, we do not fear

We're not concerned about the length of life

But how whatever length we have is used

Unlike those who have come before us

Our lives will not be abused



brought about but, rather, one in which the limits of it would be contained and that it would be limited to elementary schools. A junior high system was

number of grades in which segregation existed diminished but only removing part of a cancer is merely an exercise in futility. Until the entire system was integrated, the system would not be integrated.

Las Vegas' attempt at school integration was peripheral. The public school system was straining at the seams. There had been quite a shortage of space and some of the old barracks which had been used to house the workers in Boulder City, during the construction of the dam, had to be thrust into use as classrooms.

Rancho High was already under construction and there were already efforts to secure an additional high school. Bishop Gorman High would soon be opening its doors, and once again, had positive steps been taken in ending segregation in housing, the impending crisis of school integration could have been thwarted. It was not.

Nearly 2000 miles away in Montgomery, Alabama, similar problems were being experienced. There, the school system was



the rights of all of its citizens, they failed miserably. "States Rights" is the ideal way that things should be but, invariably, the states refuse to recognize the rights of all its citizens. The several states interpret "state rights" as meaning they have the right to violate the rights of some of the citizens whenever it is convenient to do so. More and more citizens are permitting that to happen less and less.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was delivering a new kind of sermon for his congregation at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery. He was not preaching "hellfire damnation" or sermons about God seeking revenge on anyone who failed to follow each and every one of His Commandments. Rather, he spoke of "Man's relationship with God




of some people, insignificant. They were, nonetheless, the beginning of change.

Las Vegas' short history of segregation was to be tested. Once again, a civil rights bill was in the offering in the Nevada legislature. Approximately 26 years ago, on February 21, that bill was important to only a few of the state's legislators. There was not nearly enough support and it eventually was defeated.

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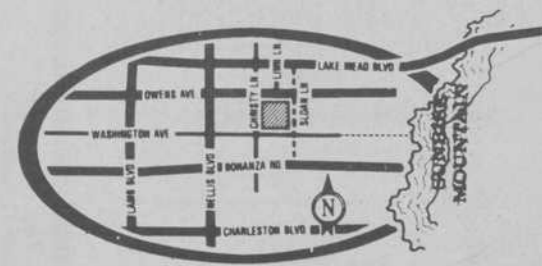
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