

# 'GENTLEMEN MAY CRY PEACE, BUT THERE'S NO PEACE'

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

"I don't mind a reasonable amount of trouble." That's what Sam Spade said in the film titled "The Maltese Falcon". I suppose that that is true of everybody. Ordinarily, few people go out looking for trouble but, from time to time, it becomes necessary. If it is for the right reason, it shouldn't be any trouble at all.

time spent trying to talk about and solve their differences, a small group of people made the decision to go to war for their freedom. Patrick Henry best articulated the feelings of those few when he said: "Gentlemen may cry peace, peace. But there is no peace. The war is actually begun. The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms. What

is it the gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it Almighty God. I know not what course others may take but, as for me, give me liberty or give me death."

A shot was fired that was heard around the world. The American Revolution was on. Perhaps that was necessary to end the terrible treatments which the colonists felt

they were receiving from an unsympathetic English government. They knew that there would be trouble but, like Sam Spade, they didn't "mind" a reasonable amount of trouble".

Almost two hundred years later, conditions for another group of Americans had grown so intolerable that they found themselves in pretty much the same boat as had the "founding fathers".

Black Americans, for almost a century, had attempted to bring the powers that be together with them to exchange ideas. At each and every turn, they were unwilling to discuss the matter. They obviously felt that the rights of Black people was something which they had to negotiate for. They did not realize, as was articulated by newly elected President Ronald Reagan in regards to the former hostage situation in Iran, "that the safety and rights of American citizens are not to be bargained or negotiated for."

Fortunately for all of us, the steps which were being decided upon during the 1950s were unlike those made during the 1770s. Black

Those who had been here for two, three or more decades had witnessed the transformation of Las Vegas from a little country hick town to one of the most glamorous citadels of the world. They had watched as penny ante gamblers had come here from Texas with Rio Bravo dirt in the cuffs of their "Levi's" and walk right into the Desert Inn, Sands, Sahara and all the rest with no questions asked. Some of those were just two steps and a cloud of dust ahead of the law.

Black Las Vegans were made to feel like so many cow chips in a wide open pasture. Onlookers. Window shoppers. They were aliens in their own land.

1940s, Black people found themselves earning more money than they had ever earned. Their condition, in at least that respect, improved 1000%. Not being accustomed to the better things in life, they did not initially protest the conditions they were forced to live under. They were indeed familiar with segregation.

The conditions existing in Las Vegas, as they applied to Black people, were brought to the nation's attention by an article written by James Goodrich which appeared in Ebony Magazine. He wrote: "Negroes themselves could be a great deal to blame for the lowly position in the town. The record shows that Negroes in Las Vegas

Those were the adjectives used to describe Black Las Vegans by Mr. Goodrich and that was the good news. The bad news is that Black Las Vegans were yet being intimidated and any signs of their becoming "uppity" was met with acts of terrorism. Fortunately or unfortunately, the occasions for such behavior were not presented enough for them to make any real long term detrimental effect on the Black population of Las Vegas.

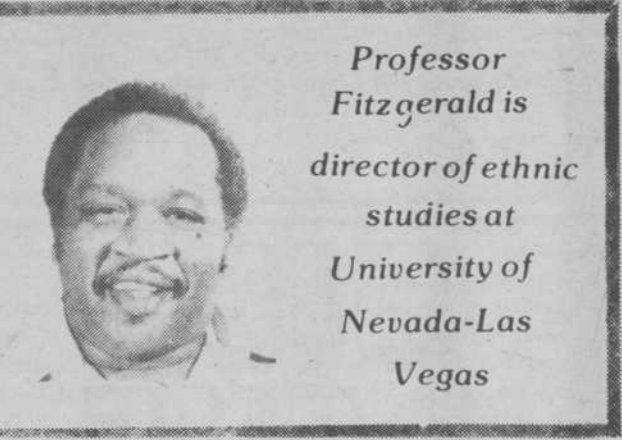
The mid 1950s witnessed "cross burnings" in Moapa Valley. The objective was to intimidate Black migrant workers in the Moapa/Overton area. During those years a large percentage of the

expect protection from law enforcement—after all they had stated that the crosses had been lit "by three unidentified men". The record, however, reports that no one saw the terrorists. Therefore, how could the police on the scene report that there were three 'men'? Another of those wonders of wonders.

Even though the cross burnings were a negative sign of the times, they did do some good—even though for the wrong reasons. Ranchers in the area of Overton began to patrol their ranches because those events were frightening their workers off. Their initial concern was to get their crops in and not so much to protect the workers. A by-product, nonetheless, was the fact that both ranchers and workers were shown that they needed each other. The countdown was on. Slowly, Las Vegas and the surrounding communities were being shown that even though a great amount of isolation existed, it was still literally impossible for

southern Nevadans to hide their heads in the sand. They would have to acknowledge that a civil rights movement was underway.

Black leadership, in Las Vegas, began to take more definite steps towards full citizenship. No one cherishes being referred to as in effect, losers. The Ebony Magazine article had done just that and something had to be done to change that perception. Membership, involvement and action seems to have been the key words for the local NAACP. Church leadership began to encourage more civic involvement of their memberships. Black Las Vegans were convinced that they were no better off than Black people in the South. Las Vegas earned for itself the nickname of "The Mississippi of the West". That was a terrible description for anyplace, during the 1950s but not during the 1960s and 1970s, and especially for a place which touted itself as being "The Best City of Them All".



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Sometimes, some of us turn our backs  
On those who do the work  
Has it not been for what they did  
While alive, we'd be under six feet of dirt  
They did not sit in bars and wolf  
Instead, they formulated a plan  
It did not require any great numbers  
Just a small dedicated band  
The men and women of our town  
Who did not succumb to terror  
By contesting the principles of this great land  
To their tormentors they held up a mirror  
Those things need not have happened  
At least not in Las Vegas  
For we were born under a large constellation  
Not too far from that of Pegasus  
The winged horse of mythical times  
Had surely stomped on the ground  
And brought forth the waters from the meadows  
Which created Las Vegas town  
Black merely wished to drink of the fount  
And not to drain it dry  
But a hot cup of coffee or a cool glass of water  
Was not there for them to buy  
Like pearls on a black velvet sea  
Its glamour is something to behold  
Whenever Blacks would approach the portals  
You cannot enter—or so, they were told

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Americans decided to not only verbalize their conditions but to also visualize them. "Non-violence" became the order of the day. While the conditions, in which Black Americans found themselves, were horrendous the time had not come for a "call to arms".

After all of the years of slavery and all of the brutality heaped upon them, Black people did not seek revenge. Their oppressors could not comprehend that. They could not understand because they functioned with the "eye for an eye" frame of reference while Black people were functioning with that of "turn the other cheek".

Black Las Vegans went daily pass the temples of the gamblers. They saw all of the fun others were having and they gazed upon the lavishness which was out there for the taking.

Whether they realized it or not, their self-concepts were taking a battering. What could they do? Would it ever end?

The 1950s was one of the most prosperous times in the history of the country. The face of the nation changed. That was multiplied in Las Vegas. The social/economic situation of the country was beginning to change also. More and more, roads were leading to Las Vegas. In more ways than not, Las Vegas would play a decisive role in the developing civil rights movement.

The bulk of the Black population in Las Vegas during the 1950s had come here from the South—a place where they had been programmed to live with second class citizenship and no money to boot. After their mass migration to Las Vegas in the early

have never been very active in civic matters. While representing as much as 10 percent of the town's population, they still exert no pressure on the city government. They are politically impotent because they have yet to show a concerted vote in election. They have never demonstrated that they can band together in civil rights matter and generally seem to be 'don't carish' about issues directly concerning them. Close observers think their complacency can be explained by the fact that many of them are illiterate who only recently migrated west from the rural south."

Insulting. Yes—that's what it was—the grandest kind of insult. Not active, politically impotent, lack of togetherness, apathetic, complacent, and illiterate.

migrant workers who worked the farms and ranches of Moapa were Black people. A goodly portion of the work was done by Mexican migrant laborers and some was done by local Indian groups. However, as the numbers of Blacks increased in that area, some of the less secure white people of the area took it upon themselves to intimidate Black workers whenever they got an opportunity. The growing involvement of the civil rights movement which was taking place nationwide was not going unnoticed here.

With each act of hostility, Black migrant workers became more fearful of what might follow. The extent of their concern was such that approximately 150 fled to the hills surrounding the valley, for protection. They did not

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