

BLACKS IN THE WESTWARD EXPANSION NAACP

from page 5

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

Nevada is called the "Battle Born" state. It gained that motto because it entered the Union mid-way through the American Civil War. What about all of the events which occurred before? What was this place and how did it get that way? Were there any Black people here and if so, who were they and what did they do?

For the next several weeks, I will attempt to offer you a history of our state in which we will consider more than the presence and involvements of those inhabitants of European ancestry. We will pay particular attention to the presence of Black people in Nevada history.

Nevada is located in a place generally known as the Great Basin. A

hundred and fifty years ago it was designated on maps as simply being a part of the "Great American Desert". Before the 1820s, no trails except those of the Paiutes, Shoshones and Washoes crossed the area. It almost carried the same epitaph as did maps used by ancient sailors and travellers—"Tierra Incognita" or unknown land.

The early Spanish conquistadores were directed away from the great desert. Even though they explored throughout the surrounding areas, their flags never unfurled over the sands and creosote bushes of Nevada as destined to become the last place, which was to become a part of the United States, to be gazed upon by the eyes

of any other than native Americans.

While the Spanish were in the southwest and the French were in Canada and the valley of the Mississippi, the English were hugging the Atlantic seaboard. The latter had come to establish colonies. The former two, while establishing some settlements, had come primarily for either gold for the king and converts for the Church or simply for adventure. Those two were Catholic countries while the English were Protestant.

The North American continent became that one place on Earth where people of different races, religions, cultures and lifestyles would meet face to face and thereafter become locked in mortal combat for the control of the continent. Paiutes,

Spanish, Ibo, French, Shawnee, Ashanti, English, Iriquois, Fulani, Shoshone, Ute, Washo and others—all vying for the same property in one form or another. Few realized that it could be shared.

The results of French and Indian Wars, which ended in the 1760s, set the boundaries in that part of North America which is east of the Mississippi River. The English were restricted to the tidewater areas of the Atlantic seaboard and the French were in Canada. The territory between the western slopes of the Allegheny mountains was Indian territory. There were intrusions in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys but there were no attempts at establishing permanent settlements. Most of those were the

results of the efforts of a few individual adventurers and trappers. That geography remained in effect, with minor changes, until 1803. During the interim, the American Revolution was waged and the new country, by 1785, had acquired what was then called the Northwest Territory. That area ultimately became Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin. The years following the close of the war witnessed Americans going off into the western lands. Leading the way were the frontiersmen.

Frederick Jackson Turner, the historian of the West, wrote that one could stand at the mouth of the Cumberland Gap and watch civilization pass right before one's eyes. Bernard DeVoto, another historian of the West, wrote that the new nation, by virtue of "manifest destiny" would ultimately extend from ocean to ocean. The movement of the new Americans was underway and, while it might have been a slow, drawn-out process, there would be no turning back.

Those Africans who had arrived here in 1619, had come, as did most other immigrants from Europe, as "indentured servants". They were not slaves. They worked for their "benefactors" for a period of five to seven years and they were then set free. They, upon release, established farms and they were to become integral parts of their small communities.

By the time slavery began, nearly sixty years later, there was a sizeable free Black population in the United States. Natural reproduction continued to increase that number. Most of these had been men and most of them established families with

Indian women. They were obviously required to be multi-lingual. They spoke their native African languages, the English which had been required in order to function in an English-speaking society and, for course, they learned to speak whatever Indian languages their wives spoke.

Even after slavery was begun, more Africans became free. They managed that by either being manumitted (set free), buying their own freedom or simply running away. The latter group had to, of necessity, run far, far away. Since they had to remove themselves from the possibility of being recaptured, they ventured far into Indian territory.

The face of North America continued to experience cosmetic changes. The English-Americans were moving into the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys, the Spanish were in and out of the Florida peninsula and the southern parts of what eventually became Alabama and Mississippi and they were also in the southwest. The French were yet in Canada and some of the Acadians (Cajuns) had gone into the lower Mississippi valley around the area of Louisiana.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, in 1803, the United States acquired a large piece of property which almost doubled its size. The Louisiana Territory was purchased from France even though it was not their's to sell. That land, as did the land inhabited by the new Americans, perhaps with the exception of Manhattan, belonged to the Native Americans. Few were concerned about legalities or a sense of right and wrong. They functioned in ac-

cord with a principle of Napoleon Bonaparte: "morality is on the side of the heaviest artillery". We all know what ultimately happened to Napoleon.

President Thomas Jefferson sent an exploratory expedition into the newly acquired territory. That venture is commonly called the Lewis and Clark Expedition. They were to make maps, collect data on flora and fauna (plants and animals), determine what Indian tribes resided there and determine suitability for the future establishment of settlements. The party of men who participated in that adventure was small. It would be a rugged mission and each had to pull his share. It was a "no frills" package and it was anything but a vacation.

One of the men who made the journey was named York. He was Black. Like the others, he was called upon to perform numerous different tasks—hunting, cooking, collecting, gathering firewood and



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water, hewing out canoes and warding off those Indians who sought to protect their homelands from the onslaught of the invaders. York also sometimes functioned as an interpreter. He was the first Black person that most of the Indians had seen. Some others were familiar with Black people due to the numbers of runaway slaves who had gone west in order to escape the long tentacles of slavery. The presence of those "runaways", along with Frenchmen, were the only non-Indians to have been in the area of the west.

The presence of York, with the Lewis and Clark expedition, brought a unique quality to the expedition. Rarely had the Indians seen Blacks and whites together. That was particularly important because they knew about the enslavement of Black people and some were also aware of the enslavement of Indians by the Spanish. On numerous instances, York served as a kind of middleman. He was the first, but he would not be the last Black man to be such.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Davis followed Burke's talk by telling the audience, "I have had the privilege of seeing great progress made in this city. That doesn't mean we don't need the NAACP. We need it desperately. I say this to those on both sides of the color spectrum. We can't allow ourselves to be lulled into a false sense of security." He continued, "If there's anybody here who doesn't understand those words, then I'll say them another way: 'Dey out dere.' Nobody, but NOBODY can escape it. No one can live in a vacuum. As my brother goes, so shall I. If he is without food, somehow my dinner won't taste right."

Wayne Newton, "The Midnight Idol", was the Honorary Chairman of the Banquet. During the program he left for an engagement at his Aladdin Hotel, but returned later to the dais. He did not speak to the crowd.

National NAACP Executive Director Benjamin Hooks was not

present due to the confrontation with the KKK in Anderson, Indiana, which had burned a cross in front of the building where Hooks was to meet the local chapter.

Proclamations were received from the State of Nevada, the Clark County Commissioners, the city of Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., New Orleans, Tuskegee, Alabama, Gary, Indiana and the State of Israel.

Rev. Jesse D. Scott handled the preliminary introductions and the black national anthem "Lift Every Voice and Sing" was led by Mrs. Mary Aderholt, accompanied on the piano by Ms. Grace

McGlothen. Lovell Gaines, Las Vegas Chapter President, saw the program as a complete success.

"I see this as a move from our previous complacency and a great desire to determine the direction of our destiny by not depending on others to support our cause in the form of giving us handouts," said Gaines. "We will raise most of our monies ourselves in the future."

Entertainment for the evening included selections by the Love All People Youth Group, directed by Rev. Prentiss Minter; 9 year old Princess Kirkland; and the cast of the Tropicana Hotel's Cabaret Revue "Let Me Off Uptown."

Fire Safety Tips from Senior Fire Aide Martha Hogan



Lack of ordinary care in the use of flammable liquids such as gasoline, kerosene, and alcohol is a major cause of home fire and deaths. Proper handling and storage of flammable liquids can not be overemphasized. Knowing the hazard and understanding the precautions that should be followed will minimize the dangers.

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