

Somewhere in Virginia, an underground coal mine has been burning for well over a decade. It is no secret. There is apprehension but, life goes on in the mining communities which are housed above ground throughout the countryside. You might say that the people of those hamlets are sitting on top of a "powder keg". Scientists have warned that the constant burning is slowly building up the carbon dioxide levels. Only so much pressure can be withstood. Soon the level of gases will cause a powerful explosion. The people of those communities are confronted with a challenge. So far they have not generated the proper response.

I suppose that if there is any moral at all to this story, it would have to be that "if there is no way for pressure to be vented, it will blow the top right off—a la Mount St. Helens."

For a much longer

time than ten years, a different kind of pressure was building up in race relations in the United States. For all of those years since 1865, and before, there had been few instances in which that pressure was permitted to vent itself. On those rare times when it did, only a handful of Black people experienced relief. The masses were "kept in their places." The rumblings of the devastating effects of that pent-up pressure was beginning to be heard during the 1950s. The "valve keepers" of America ignored what they heard and blamed it, as others had done for the thirty preceding years, on the Communists. Can you imagine communists encouraging people to fight for democracy? I cannot.

I don't know why anyone was surprised. Maybe I should rephrase that and say that I was surprised that so many were surprised. I am certain that if others had been forced to live

under the kinds of conditions which Black people had been relegated to, they would have revolted much sooner.

Unlike other places in the nation where the pressures had been building up for more than a century, Las Vegas' pressure cooker condition had been in existence for a mere 2 decades. Remember, prior to 1940, the condition of Black people in Las Vegas had been relatively acceptable. Their numbers had been small and, even though housing had been restricted to a small area between Stewart and Ogden Streets, they had had the run of the town. They were able to frequent any and all business establishments. Once the dam was completed and Basic Magnesium opened for operations, the racial climate took a turn for the worse.

Almost overnight, Black Las Vegas were ushered from the downtown area and they were

END OF

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

forbidden, though not by law, to enter any of the restaurants, hotels or other social/entertainment businesses in the town. Jim Crowism was born and there was not a thing that they could do about it.

Black newcomers from Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and other points South, did not notice any difference between here or where they had migrated from. It was fairly easy to segregate them. During the two decades between 1940 and 1960, the Black population of Las Vegas increased from less than one hundred to close to ten thousand. The total population of

Clark County, in 1960, was less than seventy thousand. We can see that a sizeable percentage of the resident population was segregated and that they were also Black.

The turmoil of the 1950s finally seriously arrived in Las Vegas in late 1959 and early 1960. The local chapter of the NAACP began to move toward confrontation politics.

All was not bleak. Swifts bacon was selling for 45 $\frac{2}{3}$ per pound and flour was 39 $\frac{2}{3}$ per five pound bag. A pound of Maxwell House only cost 55 $\frac{2}{3}$. A large number of Black entertainers were appearing in Las Vegas. Nat King Cole, Duke Ellington, Billy Eckstein, Sammy Davis, Jr., Dakota Staton and the Treniers were but a few.

In the movie theaters, audiences were watching "Odds Against

Tomorrow", "Porgy and Bess", "Island in the Sun" and TV audiences were enjoying Tightrope, Perry Mason, The Real McCoys and on Saturday nights they felt a little melancholy when Red Skelton would sign off with a gentle "...and may God bless ..." "Colored" people were probably given an omen of things to come when the state Budget Director, in seeking to cut down costs, ordered all colored phones to be replaced by the more economical black phones. A "Black" mentality was also replacing the "colored" mentality of the past for "Negroes"

Meanwhile, back in the jungle, a Jewish Synagogue in the Noting Hill Section of London was smeared with swastikas and Jewish men removed their

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John brings to the real estate industry, a background of mathematics, having been a mathematics teacher for over 20 years. At present, John is a teacher with Clark County School District. He doubles as a residential sales person with Toler Realty. John, his wife and daughter arrived in Las Vegas from Gary, Indiana.

Warmest Greetings

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