

the BLACK TOURIST ... Who is he, what is he, what is he looking for?

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

An eminent scholar has written that there is a hierarchy of basic human needs. Among those are such things as food, shelter, self-esteem, companionship and self-actualization. Practically everyone would agree that there is a definite need for food. I say practically because, from time to time, there are some who see fit to fast and abstain from food. In those rare instances, for that period of time, there is no need for food. By the same token, there is a need for shelter — from the elements. In some places shelter is required to a greater degree than others but, it is shelter nonetheless. No matter what the culture or civilization, there are standards. Among those is the need to feel positive about oneself. Colloquially, it is stated that "if people want to think well or respect themselves, then they must think well of and respect themselves." The small fortunes which most of us spend in order

to bring about cosmetic changes is done to make ourselves more attractive to others. We need to have people, in general, like us. There is a greater need for that small intimate inner circle, whom we call our loved ones, to be ever in our collective corners. Last on the list is self-actualization.

Self-actualization comes in many forms. Whatever shape it is in it cannot be realistically attained until those others would have been met. It comes during and as a result of leisure time. It might result in a painting, a poem, a piece of prose or musical, jogging, playing tennis or simply meditating. These vary dependent upon whether those activities are being done as a means of support or simply enjoyment. A generally thought of leisure activity which is done for some kind of remuneration becomes merely a job. Whenever there is pressure to be successful, leisure is diminished. There is a

need for simply enjoyment oriented activities — things which are done for no purpose other than entertainment or creativity. Enjoyment can be had anywhere. The ultimate can only be had in Las Vegas. No place in the world can rival Las Vegas for purely uninterrupted entertainment. It can be had on both spectator and participant levels by anyone who has the time, disposition, inclination and wherewithal to do so. It was not always that way. A hundred years ago, where Las Vegas sits today, there could be found sand and sagebrush. The people who lived here were derogatorily referred to as "digger Indians" because food was so scarce that they were forced to dig for roots and whatever else they could find. In 1905, when the town was started, auctioneers and others predicted that one day "Las Vegas would be a prominent and prosperous city." Such optimism was hard to swallow in light of the fact

that the only things which could be discerned from where they stood were a few tents — one with hot beer, meandering burros and shimmering heat waves on the horizon.

Between 1905 and 1930, the town did grow though not at the rate in which it had been predicted. It started out as a frontier boom town where one might find prospectors, miners, land speculators and railroaders, loggers and builders. There were Blacks among them — not

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many but, they were there. The early residents considered themselves pioneers and the pioneer spirit has persisted.

The first quarter century was fairly free of racial incidents. The smallest of numbers of racial minorities might have been the cause. Perhaps there were not enough of them to be a threat. It might have been more than that because during that same period of time, an early attempt to organize a chapter of the KKK met with rebuff from the "mayor, the constable, the fire chief and several other local citizens." The per-

petrators were chased out of town. Later, however, during the early 1920s, there were Klan parades on Fremont Street but the activity never amounted to too much. Around the country bigots were paying \$10.00 in order that they might hate someone. In Las Vegas, there were not enough minorities, including Jews, Catholics, Italians and Greeks, to insure one day that they would get their money's worth. There were a number of saloons in early Las

Vegas. All were located in the infamous "Block 16." These saloons were open to everyone. Segregation in public accommodations was not practiced in early Las Vegas. In 1933, during the construction of the Boulder Dam, gambling was legalized in Nevada. The erection of the Eighth Wonder of the World was already attracting visitors to the city. By the time the dam was completed, during the middle of the "Depression" years, a quarter million tourists, per year, were visiting southern Nevada. The climate, the beauty of the

desert and the excitement of gambling in saloons with true western motifs, immediately caused Las Vegas to take on an air of distinction. It maintained its wild west atmosphere. Honky tonk music, five card stud, ladies of the evening, roulette, on occasion a faro game, outlaws (the mob), and speeding 1937 chevys turning corners on two wheels were not unusual.

By 1940, the racial climate had begun to change for the worse. Before, Blacks could enter any establishment in Las Vegas as patrons. They could order whatever they wanted and they paid for what they got just as everyone else. It was "a pig in a poke" and one just hoped for the best. The outcome had nothing to do with race. Pearl Bailey recalls arriving in Las Vegas in 1941 and that she "played the machines" in some of the establishments. She also recalls that "a few years later 'people of race' were barred" from those same places. For a decade and a half, Blacks could not be found in entertainment establishments as patrons, only as maids and janitors or porters. Josephine Baker, during the early 1950s, insisted that there be Blacks in the audience while she did her performances. Some of those "domestics" were hustled off, properly garbed and seated at a nice table right up front, dead center. Racial policies in Las Vegas were obviously different from those found in other parts of the country. It almost seems that proprietors sought to anticipate the attitudes of their customers. It is possible that an error was made.

By 1955, Sammy Davis and the Will Mastin Trio were given accommodations at the New Frontier. Prior to that time, even Black entertainers could not secure lodgings in any of the hotels of Las Vegas during that fifteen year period. They were expected to secure quarters in "private Negro homes on the Westside." In 1955, also, the Moulin Rouge, the first "integrated" hotel opened. That event was well received by the public and favorably reported on by the local press. Five years later, in 1960, segregation in the entertainment industry, following a threat

of demonstration by the local NAACP, ended. There was no violence in its wake. The power structure simply agreed to end it. Room bookings did not diminish. Tourists arriving in April of that year would not have believed that just a month before, a black person could not purchase a cup of coffee in downtown Las Vegas or on the Strip.

The history of segregation in Las Vegas' hotel industry was very brief. The founders of the industry, through short sightedness, sought to develop a resort which would cater to the wealthy and the wealthy were all white. They realized also that Black people were on the very bottom of the economic totem pole because they, and others like them, had deprived Blacks of educational and employment opportunities. How much could a person who only earned \$35.00 a week afford to spend for entertainment? Very little. Blacks were forced to be window shoppers even though they were spending 100 percent of their earnings. Their spending, however, was simply to survive. They could not afford to have expensive fun.

Approximately twenty major hotels opened in Las Vegas during the two decades following completion of the dam. All had, however limited, some involvement in segregation. Those which have opened since March of 1960 have no such involvement. This is not to say that such behavior on the part of individual employees does not occur. There have been in-

stances in which employees' racial attitudes have manifested themselves. A waiter or waitress might be slow in attending to the needs of customers purely on a racial basis. There are times, during the shift changes, when such delays are to be expected and one needs to recognize when such is indeed the case.

In most instances the Maitre d' & Captains are top flight people. Seating is generally done on a first come first served basis. However, there are quite often the matter of "tokens" generating better seating. Usually, there are select seats reserved for "high rollers" or other expected "VIPs." Most people can accept those differences. Blacks, especially, become concerned upon observing that they and other Blacks are all seated in either the same area or in congruent areas in a showroom — in the wings, near the back or so near the stage that all which can be seen are the knees of the entertainers.

On the gaming floor there is also concern. Most tourists know little of the procedures of the numerous games being played. Blacks are very much aware of subtle and blatant reproaches they might receive. A white patron's inquiries of the machinations of craps, baccarat or roulette are generally cordially addressed by dealers. The thinking being, "the more they know about the games, the more they will want to gamble, and the more cash flow the casino can hope to generate.

Some dealers are very curt in their responses to similar inquiries made by Black patrons.

The fault is not totally that of those few bigoted "front of the house" employees. Personnel directors should make periodic statements in "in house" publications on the need for universal courtesies to all patrons which is not only expected of all employees but, also, that anything contrary to such policies will not be tolerated and failure to comply will warrant dismissal. Sometimes, such behavior is encouraged by Black by their creating an atmosphere of being grateful for simply being allowed the privilege of being there. Blacks must consciously realize that no one is doing them a favor by taking their money.

Increasingly, hotel/casino owners are becoming cognizant of the negative impact some employees are having on their operations. Those who recognize their responsibilities to their patrons, the hotels and the shareholders are either demanding changes in attitudes, at least on the job, or they are dismissing those recalcitrant racists whom they do not wish representing the hotels. It is the person who comes into direct contact with the tourist who creates the problems and it is management, on its highest levels, which must face the flak. During the mid 1960s, Governor Grant Sawyer told us that "racism will hurt

tourism" and, unattended, it will.

Some few of the smaller operations in Las Vegas have posed problems which negatively affect the entire industry. Complaints are often registered with the Nevada Equal Rights Commission concerning some few discos who persist in excluding Blacks. They, by no means, are representative of Las Vegas entertainment as a whole. Most businesses have recognized that while a person's skin color might be different, the cash is all the same — green. They are primarily in business to make money, not friends.

In July of 1977, a report was filed with the Las Vegas Convention/Visitors Authority on Attitudes towards Las Vegas among Black Men and Women. The study involved several divergent urban areas around the U.S. As a result of that study, some advertisements were placed in magazines generally read by Black people. There is a large per-

centage of Blacks who do not read those but, rather, the illusion, by such as Newsweek, segregation in People, Playboy and advertisements, that there is Time. There is also the segregation in Las Vegas.

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Nevadans to vote on these questions

Here is a list of the other measures on the Nov. 2 statewide ballot:

- Question 1 — Constitutional amendment to give property tax breaks for conservation of energy.
- Question 2 — Constitutional amendment to guarantee the right to keep and bear guns.
- Question 3 — Constitutional amendment to allow the state Legislature to authorize courts below the District Court level to defer and suspend criminal sentences.
- Question 4 — Constitutional amendment to prohibit reduction of a life sentence without parole or death sentence to a sentence that would allow parole.
- Question 5 — Constitutional amendment to adjust the boundary of the state so that parts of Nye and Lincoln and all of Clark counties would be included.
- Question 6 — Constitutional amendment authorizing imposition of an estate tax no greater than the credit allowable under the federal tax.
- Question 7 — Amends the Sales and Use Tax Act to allow a tax on materials used to manufacture a mobile home.
- Question 8 — Constitutional amendment to exclude household goods and furniture from taxation.
- Question 9 — Constitutional amendment to exempt all food, including food served in restaurants, from taxation.
- Question 10 — Allows issuance of bonds for libraries.
- Question 11 — Creates an office of consumer advocate for public utilities within the attorney general's office.
- Question 12 — Initiative petition for a public utilities consumer advocate.

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