A DEMOGRAPHIC IMPACT OF BASIC MAGNESIUM ON SOUTHERN NEVADA

The Problem

In 1938 Almon E. Parkins wrote a very important economic-geographic hsitory of the South.[1] It was considered by some to be a most important treatment of that area. In looking through its index there is only one reference to black residents of the South. That one reference mirrored the extent of concern on the subject of black people found in so many other such books.

It is significant to the study of black people to note what that single reference had to say about the millions of Southern Blacks and their impact on the area:

> The tropical-bred Negroe, immune to the diseases of wet, hot climates, was a godsend to Southern rice growers on the low, swampy, outer margins of the coastal plain. The climate was so "deadly" there that all whites who could get away sought the mountains of the sea islands during the summer months.[2]

The date of publication is important to the study of such demographics of southern Nevada because, at that time, there were only a handful of blacks residing in the entire state of Nevada.[3] Obviously, even less attention was paid them.

Changes in the reporting of the black experience in the United States would not occur to any significant degree until mid-way through the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Even then, such studies would concentrate on the larger urban areas of the north and northeast. Only Los Angeles, St. Louis, San Francisco, Kansas City, and Houston would be considered to any noticeable extent as far as the trans-Mississippi west was concerned.[4]

Gilbert Osofsky produced a major scholarly treatment of blacks in the city in 1963.[5] It centered on Harlem, New York, and its evolution to a black

ghetto. Two years later Kenneth B. Clark produced a significant sociological treatment of the same area which greatly supplemented the Osofsky text.[6] That same year, in 1965, George E. Mowry's work gave us a last glimpse of the manner in which blacks in urban areas were generally treated by urbanologists.[7] For the most part, earlier texts had had to do with the causes of blacks migrating to the cities and not necessarily with what happened once they arrived there. Mowry gave us three partial pages on the subject of blacks in the cities. He tells us that "during the war years almost a million Negroes moved north to locate in the large industrial complexes where wages were high and opportunities for a better life appeared greater."[8] Beyond that, the only other reference had to do with the transition of Black people from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party.[9]

In a sense, beginning with Osofsky and Clark, a new area of research developed. As that area extended and as the ramifications of the Brown versus the Board of Education Supreme Court decision of 1954, coupled with civil rights legislation of the middle and late 1960s became more apparent, a newfound interest in urban history developed. They began to explore the black presence.[10]

Numerous scholarly articles and books were written by a new breed of researchers.[11] We began to consider the significance of black demographics of urban areas in the United States as a result of these. To this date, however, little has been done in that great expanse called the American West and even less in the Southwest.

This paper will explore a limited area and time span--southern Nevada: 1940-45. This place and time is important because the cities/towns of southern Nevada are all more than a score of years from being a century old and, unlike the older cities of the east and south wherein blacks were

expelled its black residents from the older parts and cast them into an area which was only sparsely inhabited and void of the basic necessities of life.

Historical Background

Southern Nevada was in the final area of Nevada to be seriously settled by anyone other than the original inhabitants. There had been at least two former attempts before permanent settled status was achieved. The first took place in the mid-1850s when Brigham Young dispatched thirty members of the Mormon Church to establish another link of the Mormon Corridor.[12] The settlement was short lived--less than two years.[13] For the next half century there was hardly any activity in that part of the state.

A few ranches were alternatively active. The most notable was the O.D. Gass Ranch which later became the Stewart Ranch. Also, during the 1870s there was another ranch in which two black men were part owners. However, except for the Gass/Stewart Ranch, there was little activity in southern Nevada until the turn of the century.

Las Vegas, as it stands today, was officially incorporated with the land auction of 1905.[14] A quarter of a century would pass before a major boom would occur. That boom manifested itself with the Boulder Dam Project of the 1930s.[15] The project brought with it a population explosion and also the second large town of southern Nevada--Boulder City, Nevada.[16] Once the Dam was completed, southern Nevada returned to its former provincial ways. It did not remain so very long. World War II would change all of that.

The thirty-five years between the land auction of 1905 and the beginning of the decade of the 1940s witnessed some developments in racial relations. Walter Bracken, local land manager of the Los Angeles Land and Water Company, initiated a process of restricting black residents, along with other colored

peoples, to block 17 of the Clark Townsite.[17] His attempt was somewhat hindered by the fact that there were only a few people of color residing in the new town. Additionally, no formal law was passed segregating the races or evicting those who already owned property so his was an exercise in futility.

A few years later, in 1916, a black home Mission was organized.[18] The first minister was the newly appointed white minister of the First Methodist Church of Las Vegas. It is apparent that black people were not very welcome as members of the predominantly white church. By the late 1920s, a chapter of the NAACP was started.[19] This organization became politically active.[20] For the most part, however, it was primarily involved in social activities.

During the first years of the 1930s, black people experienced extreme difficulty in obtaining employment opportunities on the Dam project.[21] While others were being hired and worked themselves out of the depression, management refused to hire prospective black workers.[22] Almost two years after the initial workers were hired, through the efforts of the NAACP and the CCLPA (Colored Citizens Labor and Protective Association), the first ten blacks were hired in mid July of 1932.[23] In the course of the project only a total of forty four (44) different blacks worked on the project even though it is estimated that close to twenty thousand men had worked on the project during the course of its construction.[24]

As the 1930s came to a close, the population of southern Nevada had doubled. In 1930 there were 8,532 residents in Clark County. 5,165 lived in Las Vegas while the remainder lived on the outskirts at ranches or at the several small mining camps of the area.[25] The 1940 census shows 16,384 in the county, with 8,422 in Las Vegas, 1,967 in North Las Vegas, and 2,903 in Boulder City while the outlying population had lost 245 persons from its

tally of 3,367 in 1930 to 3,122 in 1940.[26]

The black population, in the meantime, had tripled. There had only been 58 blacks residing in the entire county in 1930 and by 1940 that number had swelled to 178. With the exception of a few outlying ranches, the majority of the black population was huddled in a narrow area bordered on the west by First Street, on the east by Fifth Street, on the north by Ogden and on the south by Stewart Street. The bulk, however, resided between First and Second and Stewart and Ogden on Block 17.[27] No blacks were permitted to live in Boulder City and the same would be true of North Las Vegas during its first years of existence.

The second population explosion for southern Nevada occurred during the first years of the 1940s. There was a mass influx of black people from the southern portion of the United States.[28] This was particularly true for the states of Louisiana and Arkansas.

Implication of World War II

In 1939-40, Las Vegas like the remainder of the country, had not come to terms with the full implications of the war in Europe. The German war machine had done its homework well. Advanced weaponry was the result of those efforts. They were pioneers in the field of the use of magnesium. The United States had not been involved in the manufacture and use of that product.

The German army blitzed its way through Europe. In the process of doing so they utilized that magnesium weaponry in the form of incendiary bombs, lightweight aircrafts, and cannons which could be transported by plane and parachuted behind Allied lines.

Through intelligence work and because of information brought out of Germany by defectors and other scientists who had worked on the magnesium process, the Western powers were able to ascertain the formulas and technology

for producing the alloy. It is here that the relevancy of these events to southern Nevada lie.

Nationwide Discrimination In War Industries

During those first years of the war the United States remained neutral. This country did begin to furnish war materials to the Allies. Defense plants opened throughout the country to begin the task of being the armorer for the countries involved in the conflict with Germany. Those plants put a sizeable portion of the millions who had been unemployed during the course of the great depression back to work. Initially blacks were ignored as those jobs were being filled. As the revitalized economy made gains and white Americans were forging ahead economically, blacks were sliding further and further behind.

Blacks were losing ground because as those factories of the older parts of the country were reopening to manufacture war supplies, they re-hired, as much as possible, those men who had been employed in those factories prior to the depression. Additionally blacks had been historically excluded from the labor unions and as a result, they were not afforded an opportunity to seek gainful employment in those unionized industries.

Some employers were not hesitant in articulating their refusal to hire black workers in the skilled trades. This was particularly true in the South where the age-old belief of possible racial hostility and racial repercussions on job sites were easily fanned.

For the most part, those black workers who were fortunate enough to find employment in the war industries discovered that the jobs available to them were generally in the area of custodial services. Having no recourse either from organized labor or management, black people had to initially settle for whatever jobs they were offered.

Blacks protested their exclusion and, under the leadership of A. Phillip

Randolph, threatened a massive march on Washington, D.C.[29] The proposed march would have taken place on July 1, 1941. Because of the constant pressures brought to bear, the federal government relinquished. On June 25, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802. In part it stated "that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color or national origin."[30] It ordered that all government contracts with defense industries include anti-discrimination provision.

Realizing that the Order would not be sufficient, Randolph and others insisted that some kind of agency be created to serve as watchdog. President Roosevelt established the Federal Fair Employment Practices Commission (REPC) to achieve that end.[31]

Magnesium Production Comes to Southern Nevada

Those events in Europe and in other parts of the United States would eventually have an impact on Nevada. Long before Executive Order 8802 was issued, Congressman James Scrugham of Nevada had been interested in establishing a magnesium plant in Nevada.[32] That interest had been conveyed to Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes, who, in turn, having the ear of the President, made that interest known to him.[33]

Basic Refactories Company of Cleveland, Ohio had mining claims on large deposits of magnasite and burcite at Gabbs, Nevada. Once the technology had been determined, they were given the proper licensing and clearance to begin mining those raw materials. In order to process the minerals, two plants would be necessary. One would have to be located at the site of the minerals and a second would need to be situated near a large source of power and water. Those two resources were vital for processing the minerals.

Southern Nevada was ideally suited for the second plant. First, the

Boulder Dam generators could provide more than enough power. Second, there was an area nearby which was not encumbered by other individual claims as was so much of the remainder of the state. Third, Las Vegas provided a kind of transportation center via the railroad for the supplies which would be needed, a highway system connected it to the center of the mining activity in Gabbs, and it would also provide a portion of the needed housing for workers. This latter point was particularly true for those workers needed for the logistical development of the plant and additional housing for future workers. Fifth, there would be more than enough water provided by Lake Mead.

Less than a month following the issuance of Executive Order 8802, the Defense Plant Corporation authorized the construction of the Basic Magnesium plant in southern Nevada. The plant would be built half-way between Las Vegas and the Boulder Dam on 2800 acres of desert.

The nature and size of the project was not well received by residents of Las Vegas. At that time Las Vegas was the crown jewel of southern Nevada. It had a population of 8422 and was the largest town in the area. The town which would be created by the plant would house approximately 13,000 people--workers and their families. Las Vegans did not cherish the idea of giving up their number one position as the largest town of southern Nevada.

A local civic group, the Las Vegas Taxpayers Association, was formed to oppose the Basic Townsite.[34] They were supported by U.S. Senator Berkeley Bunker but even with his able assistance, they were unable to forstall the construction of the plant. The needs of the nation superceded theirs. However, as an appeasement, of sorts, the contract which was let to the McNeil Construction Co. to build the housing had a clause which required those dwellings to be designed as temporary and demountable.

As had been the case in 1905 when Las Vegas was founded and as had been repeated during the boom surrounding the Boulder Dam project of the 1930s,

there was not sufficient housing for newcomers.

Demographic Changes

The workers who flocked here before housing was constructed, found little or no shelter. Tents or whatever other makeshift shelter they could find had to suffice.

Within two years, the population of southern Nevada more than doubled. The significant element within that increase is that made by the black population. The census for 1940 shows only 1000 blacks for the entire state and, of that number, only 178 resided in the southern portion of the state.[35]

Basic Refractories built its plant and some housing was provided near the job site for workers. That housing was segregated. Black workers, who lived at the job site were restricted to Carver Park. White workers lived in Victory Village at the job site or in portions of the newly constructed Huntridge section of Las Vegas or wherever else they might find housing. Their chances of securing sufficient housing was much greater than that of black workers due to the numerous choices of sites they had. As the 1940s got underway, black people of southern Nevada were encountering housing restrictions of a magnitude never before present.

Basic Magnesium provided only 324 places of residence for black workers. Those accomodations consisted of sixty-four units with no bedrooms--dormitories, one hundred and four with one bedroom, one hundred and four with two bedrooms and fifty-two with three bedrooms. Those facilities were constructed by the Hammes-Euclemiler Company of Los Angeles.[36] Those black workers and family members who could not secure quarters at Carver Park were left to their own devices. More than 4000 blacks arrived to southern Nevada during those first two years. It is clear that the housing provided by Basic Magnesium at the job site was not sufficient or adequate.

Coinciding with the upheaval created by Basic Magnesium, Las Vegas was experiencing racial cosmetic changes. That handful of blacks who had lived here since 1905 had not been of sufficient numbers to cause anyone concern even during the 1920s when the Ku Klux Klan was fairly active. In the intervening years between the end of the construction of the dam and the beginning of the Basic project, Las Vegas had begun to develop a tourist trade. Hundreds of thousands of people were coming here yearly to gaze upon the dam.[37] The small cafes and hotels of yesteryear were proving to be inadequate. More space was needed. Black residents of downtown Las Vegas were being systematically ushered out of the downtown area. Those few who owned businesses were being denied renewal of business licenses if they refused to move.[38]

The businesses which they were engaged in were small. However, at that time, the majority of businesses of Las Vegas were likewise. White entrepreneurs, commissioners, realtors and others who were beginning to become involved in developing the downtown business community to accomodate the growing tourist trade, were of the opinion that those properties occupied by black business people, through expansion, could greatly capitalize on that growing trade. Black people not having access to capital were not in a position to upgrade and expand their businesses. Black business people of the early 1940s found themselves in similar conditions as did small businesses of recent years in relation to the giant supermarkets and department stores.

Those exiled blacks did not have very many choices in terms of where they would relocate. Boulder City was already off limits. There was only one other possibility--the McWilliams Townsite. That place had been surveyed in 1904, a year before the Clark Townsite was platted. Its founderer, J.T. McWilliams had hoped that it would become the railroad town. It did not. It did become a kind of whipping boy and by 1906 had earned for itself the title of "ragtown".[39] No improvements had been made since its founding and the

majority of southern Nevada residents had bought lots in Clark Townsite or Las Vegas as it came to be known.

There were a handful of people living in the McWilliams townsite. Most were either white or Hispanic. They did so, however, without the basic kinds of improvements (running water, sewage, power) which could be found in Las Vegas. It appears that the city fathers were of the opinion that their removal of black Las Vegans to the McWilliams Townsite would only affect that small portion of the black population who had businesses in downtown Las Vegas. Additionally, the small number of current residents in that area were of no immediate consequence.

The racial mood of the United States in the late 1930s and the early 1940s was such that those kinds of treatments were not unusual. They took place with alarming frequency, to one degree or another, around the country. Local authorities were able to behave in such a manner because they realized that the federal government, since the years immediatedly following Reconstruction, had chosen to shut its eyes to such behavior and, worse still, black people realized that they had no paths to legal redress.

Those who migrated to the "westside", as McWilliams Townsite became known, found no housing. Additionally, they found no financial institutions willing to make funds available to them to construct housing. Part of the cause had to do with the prevailing racial attitudes in mortgage and loan companies. That was compounded in this instance by the numerical shortfall of the black population of southern Nevada. Also, there was no reason to believe that sewage, water and power lines would ever be extended to that area.

Resultantly, blacks who were evicted from downtown Las Vegas were forced to resort to make-shift shelters. This was the condition which the throngs of blacks who arrived to work at Basic found. They slept wherever they could.

In some cases it was on the lawn in front of the Post Office and others lived in their automobiles or under lean-tos.[40] The authorities had been aware of the housing needs for workers but, partially due to the suddeness of the BMI enterprise, there had not been sufficient time to prevent the problems of housing shortages.

A decade earlier, during the construction of the Boulder Dam, housing had been made available by the construction of Boulder City. Major General Ralph Cousins of the Army Air Corp. had been involved in securing and/or erecting housing for workers. A similar effort was neccessary for Basic Magnesium. Because its construction was in the national interest it, along with housing, had been given priorities which were rapidly diminishing in the public sector because of the increasing demands on production and materials being made by the war in Europe.

Originally 2200 priorities had been issued for housing for project workers. By 1943, there were yet 700 priorities remaining unused. By that time, white workers had been provided ample housing. It is reported that local contractors had no interest in the remaining priorities.[41] That lack of interest existed in spite of the fact that there was yet a shortage of housing for black residents and workers.

Even while that housing was not being provided, white westsiders were waging their own private war against blacks who had moved into the westside. They did not want blacks in the area. In 1940 they sought passage of an ordinance designed to keep blacks out. The petition was submitted to Mayor Russell and the City Commissioners on February 1, 1940 by the Westside Improvement Association.[42] It is clear that the needs of black people were not being addressed and that that apathy continued on at least from 1940 through 1943.

R.L. Christensen, President of the Las Vegas Colored Progressive Club, responded to the petition of the WIA. He asked that the city not "segregate a

portion of westside for caucasians only."[43] The local chapter of the NAACP made a similar appeal. The city was faced with choosing between two options--permitting blacks to remain where they were and for newcomers to have access to that area or permitting them access to the westside.

Because the westside had been an independent townsite and not part of the city of Las Vegas, officially the city did not have jurisdiction over what transpired there. Blacks were therby able to move to that area in spite of the attitudes of white people residing there.

The transition of Las Vegas to a segregated town carried with it demographic changes of major proportions. For the first time in the history of southern Nevada, a major black community was developing. The westside, which had interchangeably been referred to as "ragtown" and "shantytown" was gradually becoming all black. Its new moniker would be most disparaging and racist. As blacks moved into the area those white residents who lived nearest to them were the first to "flee." Understandably resentments grew. They did not manifest themselves immediately but they did simmer. To a degree, those dispossessed white residents emigrated to the newly developing Huntridge area located directly to the east of Las Vegas. Huntridge was Las Vegas' first suburb. It became a "closed society" in much the same manner as Las Vegas was becoming. Years later, those simmering resentments of the 1940s would manifest themselves by Huntridge being among the last of the housing developments of Las Vegas to permit black access.

Those black businesses of downtown Las Vegas whose licenses were threatened with revocation relocated to the westside.[44] They were shortly joined by new black businesses. They became part of the visual and physical results of segregation. Because blacks could no longer patronize downtown hotels and casinos or those appearing along the newly developing "Strip," blacks were forced to, if they desired to frequent such establishments, open their own.

As a result two Las Vegases developed--one white and one black. It is apparent that had it not been for the large influx of black workers to the BMI project, such might not have occured.

The excess black population, with the accompanying lack of housing, was one of the primary factors which created the chaotic conditions of the westside. Black people erected their own housing and they were crude and without facilities. Frank Goheen, one of the numerous self-appointed spokesmen for white westsiders, contacted the city inspector, R.S. Norton, and demanded that he enforce the building codes. Goheen informed Norton that there were tents, shacks and sometimes nothing at all except beds placed on vacant property. Norton, through a technicality, was able to buy time by informing the complainant that his office could do nothing because he had "no jurisdiction until a permit was issued."[45] The city of Las Vegas was certain that, once BMI had done its job, the plant would close and there would be a repeat of the mass exodus of workers as had taken place following the completion of Boulder Dam.

Black people who arrived here to work on the project had come from the deep south. Many had been among those historic victims who were the first fired as the depression of the 1930s crept silently upwards toward white Americans. Large numbers of them had worked in the cotton fields of Louisiana and Arkansas. They had witnessed a drop in cotton prices from 35.3¢ per pound in 1919 to 16.7¢ in 1929 and to 6.5¢ in 1932.[46] They had been barely able to eke out a living in the south. Those who had made the best livings had worked in sawmills and even those were closing. The jobs they acquired at Basic Magnesium paid them higher wages than they had ever earned. That was due, in large part, to the earlier efforts of A. Philip Randolph.

The expectation by the city that they would return home once the plant project had terminated did not take those factors into consideration. Also, by the time the war materials produced by the plant were no longer in demand

and some of the white workers were returning to their homes to become involved in the post war boom, the hotel industry of Las Vegas was beginning to boom. Blacks were not following suit. Depression still awaited them in the south. As they left BMI they went to work in the hotel industry as maids, porters, groundskeepers, dishwashers, and in all other "back of the house" job categories within the entertainment industry. Even though the jobs they were able to acquire were menial, they paid yet higher wages than they expected they would receive upon returning to the south.

Additionally, the fledgling businesses which were developing on the westside needed workers. There were demands for black dealers, waiters, and waitresses, bartenders and custodians in those businesses.[48] There were grocery store operators, barbers and cosmeticians, soda shop operators and those others who made accommodations available for the surge of black entertainers who performed in Las Vegas' posh hotels but who were not permitted to obtain accommodations there.[49] The westside was truly becoming a city within a city.

In addition to local black people, there was an additional need which had to be met. World War II had brought with it the establishment of numerous military establishments in California, Arizona and Nevada. There were black servicemen stationed at those bases. Like other soldiers stationed in those areas, they came to Las Vegas during their weekend leaves and some even had their families living here. They spent their military dole in westside businesses and they came in such numbers that a black USO club was opened on the westside for them.[50]

Political Implications

The population of southern Nevada spiraled during the decade of the 1940s. The political scene experienced great changes. The more than 4,000 black people who began to reside in southern Nevada during that time, partial-

ly because of their being political novices, became a kind of political sleeping giant. The population of the area before the arrival of BMI had been only 16,384. Of that number approximately 6,203 were under voting age. BMI brought an additional 13,000 people to the area to make a total of 29,384 with 9,794 being under the voting age. Within the former group there were 4,100 black with only 874 under the voting age. By the end of the 1940s the population of southern Nevada would have swelled to 48,289 with 17,652 below the voting age with the black population remaining fairly constant.

It should be noted that the 48,289 figure includes the entire county. Of that figure 5,715 resided in Henderson, 3,903 in Boulder City and 3,875 in the new town of North Las Vegas. The population of Las Vegas was 24,624 with approximately 3600 being black. Once the number of those below voting age is subtracted from both groups, the black voting bloc of Las Vegas approached 20%. That statistic remained fairly constant until the early 1950s. An average of the voting records, during the 1940s, reveals that only a minority of those either registered or eligible to vote actively participated in either municipal, county or state elections. Because of housing restrictions imposed upon black residents, it is fairly easy to determine the percentage of those eligible who actually did cast votes during that decade. It usually hovered around 60%.

The majority of black newcomers had been denied the right to vote in those states from whence they came. Nevada had no such exclusionary laws. During its territorial and early statehood days, black people had been denied the ballot. Nevada, however, became one of the first of the states to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment and to extend the right to vote to black males.

At intervals during the 1940s, blacks comprised significant percentages of those eligible to register to vote in southern Nevada. In 1942 the number eligible to register, countywide, was approximately 19,000. Blacks accounted

for about 3,000 or approximately 16%. In 1944, during a major election year, when the former figure totalled approximately 20,000, there were 3,400 blacks or approximately 17%. Additionally, blacks were located primarily in two precincts--the westside and in Carver Park in Henderson. In both instances those precincts were close to 100% Democratic.

The elections of 1944 points out the impact of the presence of black voters in southern Nevada. The best example is the race for the U.S. Senate. Pat McCarran had been elected U.S. Senator in 1932 and re-elected in 1938. His bid for a third term in 1944 was strongly contested, in the primaries, by Vail Pittman.

For years that handful of blacks in southern Nevada had been softly courted by political hopefuls.[51] During municipal elections of 1936 black had given their support to the winner of the mayoral contest and he had won by a margin so narrow that had not blacks voted for him he would not have won. While it is clear that their numbers were not of such strength to elect a candidate, they were in a position to tilt the scales in one way or the other. Those were years when their numbers only ranged between 58 and 178.

By 1944, with such numbers as three thousand, they were openly and actively courted by all candidates. At black political rallies, the candidates all made appearances and promises. The local chapter of the NAACP and the Colored Citizens Labor Protective Association along with black churches, took leadership in those activities. Geographical, familiar and racial ties bonded them together for similar purposes. Long before the public rallies would have taken place, the leadership within the black community would have polled the populace to discern their needs and grievances. These would be prioritized and made ready for political candidates. It is due to the efforts of black leadership that black votes, in spite of allegations to the contrary, could not be had for a picnic offering cheap whiskey and sizzling barbeque.[52]

The contest between Vail Pittman and Pat McCarran has been described as the bitterest in Nevada history. Both counted heavily on the black vote of Clark County. Pittman was certain that it was in the bag. It was not. He lost by a total of 1,241 votes. He wrote a firend, Mortimer Moore, that "I was supposed to get the Negro vote--1,200 to 1,500, solidly--but it went to McCarran primarily, I am informed, because it was bought."[53]

Most blacks who voted in that election were voting for the first time in their lives. Most had been denied the right to vote in the South through the use of poll taxes, literacy tests and even the earlier grandfather clauses. Most had to make their political decisions on criteria not customarily incorporated into the majority of citizens' political rationales. Vail Pittman was a white man who had been born in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1883. His parents and himself had benefitted from excluding blacks from the polls. While a Nevada legislator, he had voted in favor of a poll tax. McCarran's record showed him to be opposed to poll taxes.[54] Earlier, while editor of the Ely Daily Times, he had written an editorial in which he downgraded the darker races and maintained "the Caucasian as the highest type."[55] McCarran's views on the subject of race, politically, had been in the direction of immigration restrictions. Additionally McCarran had voted in favor of an anti-lynch law which was very important to black people. All of those factors influenced the direction in which black Nevadans cast their votes during that primary.

Conclusions

Basic Magnesium changed the demographics of southern Nevada. Previously, little or no concern had been devoted to the area of race relations. That reality had been manifested during the difficult times for blacks during the

construction of the Boulder Dam. That atmosphere was reiterated at the close of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s as blacks were ushered out of Las Vegas proper. Even during the heyday of activity at the plant, there was no real sensitivity to the needs of black people. Las Vegas was in transition when the plant arrived and did not acknowledge any reason to halt that transition. After all, those blacks who came to work at the plant would only be here on a temporary basis. There were acts of discrimination at the plant. Segregation of the latrines, lack of relief help on the job, and pay differences caused more than one walk-out on the site.[56] Because Las Vegas had initiated a segregation process, it became easier for such to be activated in any and all new ventures in the area of southern Nevada.

Had it not been for BMI and its accompanying increase of black population, there would hardly have been sufficient accomodations for black troops who came here during the war years. Some of those soldiers, stationed at the Nellis gunnery range or at Camp Siebert in Boulder City, brought their families with them. Some of their wives worked in town as domestics. Beginning around 1941, the classified sections of both local newspapers ran, under the heading "Help Wanted," advertisements for "colored" maids.[57] Such advertisements had not been placed in local newspapers before the 1940s. Also, from time to time, there were notices of cabins for sale to colored people.[58] Some of those soldiers mustered out of the military in southern Nevada remained to make their homes and raise their families.

That initial rapid change which occurred between 1940 and 1941 would have been short lived were it not for the arrival of BMI. It would have been so because it would have affected only a few of the handful of 178 black locals who owned and operated businesses in downtown Las Vegas. It would have been as it proved to be, impossible to relocate black residents

who owned lots and homes in downtown Las Vegas because there were no licenses to be denied them.

As it was, and as the westside developed into a black community, schools appeared in that area to accommodate black children during their elementary years. Previously all children, whatever their races, had attended integrated schools and because of the absence of housing restrictions, all children attended essentailly neighborhood schools. Following the settlement of the westside, black children, with the exception of those few who resided downtown and those who attended secondary schools, attended segregated schools.

The supportive impact of Basic Magnesium on transforming southern Nevada into a segregated community in housing, jobs, politics, recreation and education would plague the area until the first chink would be made in 1960 with the ending of segregation in public accommodations of Las Vegas.[59] It would be another nine years before any serious attempt would be made to eliminate segregation in the elementary schools and an additional year, 1970, before efforts would be initiated to end housing restrictions. That effort proved successful with the passage of an open housing law in 1971.[60] In 1972 steps were finally taken to improve the employment characteristics of black Las Vegans with the Las Vegas Minority Hiring Plan.

For almost twenty years, Las Vegas' blacks suffered because of what had been perceived by the city's leaders in 1941 as a temporary inconvenience. The area settled by blacks in Las Vegas of the 1940s remains the one major area of town which receives the least return on tax dollars till this day because of constant increases in the area's population. The black population has not been increasing at the same rate as that of non-blacks and, therefore, the political potency of black Las Vegans is becoming more and more diluted.

There will probably never be another time in which black Las Vegans will comprise upwards of twenty percent of the population of Las Vegas nor will there probably ever be another time in which blacks will be as porportionately strong as they were during the first half of the 1940s.

Notes

1. Almon E. Parkins, The South, Its Economic-Geographic Development, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1938).

2. Ibid., p. 3.

3. Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, U.S. Department of Commerce, p. 31.

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Roosevelt Fitzgerald—

Please give me a call
733-9903. Would like to discuss
with you questions you feel are
important for the interviews
in the Black Migration Documentary—

Thanks.

Jean Norton

2:35 Tues. 3/22

P.S. Thanks for the use of this
material.



A DEMOGRAPHIC IMPACT OF BASIC MANGESIUM CORP. ON SOUTHERN NEVADA

BY

ROOSEVELT FITZGERALD

First Draft
10/14/87

In 1930, with the exception of the bordellos of block sixteen, the fifty-eight blacks who resided in Las Vegas could patronize any business establishment in town. Within five years, several saloons and roadhouses, which had opened on the new highway between Las Vegas and the Hoover Dam also were practicing racial discrimination. Those places were owned and operated by newcomers who brought their racial prejudices with them to southern Nevada. Further, during that period, the town of Boulder City was created and due in part to hiring restrictions on the dam project it was an all-white town. North Las Vegas, which had been originally called Vegas Verdes in 1918, continued its restriction against black residents (Lewis, 1979: 48).

The decade of the 1930s might well be considered pivotal as far as race relations in southern Nevada are concerned. It might also be considered the time when the seeds for urban growth were planted. In 1930 there were 8532 residents in all of Clark County. Las Vegas, the only settlement of any size was home for 5165 of those while the remainder lived on the outskirts at ranches or at the several small mining camps of the area (Clark County, 1981: 16). Ten years later, the county's population had grown to 16,384 with 8422 in Las Vegas, 1967 in North Las Vegas, 2903 in Boulder City and 3122 in outlying areas (Ibid.). The black population, during that decade, more than trippled. In 1930 there had been 58 blacks and by 1940 there were 178. With the exception of the few who owned small ranches, they lived almost exclusively in Las Vegas.

The completion of the dam accompanied by the legalization of gambling

and the repeal of prohibition did much to attract tourists to southern Nevada ("Tourist Mecca," 1939). As tourism grew, the cosmetic of downtown Las Vegas was affected. Many of the small hotels expanded in order to provide more accomodations and new businesses opened. During the interim, a few of those businesses became off-limits to blacks. There was no state law which dictated this transition. Simultaneously, black entrepreneurs were systematically squeezed out. Several who had operated small businesses in the downtown area, experienced great difficulty in getting business licenses renewed and those who made application for same were denied. Those of the former category were told, in effect, that their licenses would not be renewed if they insisted on remaining at their present location. They would, however, be renewed if they agreed to relocate ("Relocation," 1940). At that point it was not so much a question of if they would relocate but where they would relocate. Both Boulder City and North Las Vegas were segregated communities. The only area which remained was the old McWilliams Townsite which had been the original hoped for site for Las Vegas in 1905 (Paher, 1971: 70).

Prentiss Walker, who first came to Las Vegas in 1933, witnessed the changes in demographics as they occurred. He remembered Las Vegas when blacks could come and go in any of the business establishments and how that all began to change in the late 1930s and in the 1940s. He recalled: "It wasn't long before we had to have our own special places to eat; we had to have our own special places to gamble. So what you know now as West Las Vegas showed up in the picture (Patrick, "Walker", 1978: 7). By 1939, for all practical purposes, Las Vegas found itself in the position of not having a distinguishable racial definition. Certainly, more and more places were

becoming segregated but, in the matter of housing, the overwhelming majority of black Las Vegans lived in the downtown area. Further, according to one report, the majority of the old-timers--both blacks and whites--neither understood nor abided in the encroachments of segregation (Lewis, 1979: 137). The dichotomy of the situation is seen in two events which occurred during the first two months of 1939. In early January, the untimely death of a seventy-two year old fifteen year resident was reported in the obituary section of the Review Journal. It not only announced his death but it also provided an elaborate biography as well. Andrew Jackson Jennings, a black man, was not a city father, scion of a wealthy family or even a marginal entrepreneur. He held three part-time jobs. He worked at the hospital, for Dr. Mildren and at the Oasis Club. His only claim to fame was a quite elaborate handlebar mustache and a stately carriage. Yet, his was the most extensive obituary to appear in the newspaper all year ("Andrew Jackson Jennings," 1939). Approximately one month later, a "Race and Color Bill" which had been introduced in the State Legislature was dropped in the House due in part to the efforts of resort owners who lobbied against it ("Race and Color Bill," 1939). Las Vegas and Nevada had not reconciled within themselves which direction, racially, they would take.

Blacks attempted to influence that decision. On the local level, representatives of three black organizations filed a petition with city government condemning the practice of segregation and extolling its assistance in curbing its spread. It read:

> At the recent election we respectfully request this Hon. Council for an act to provide a law that all citizens or persons within the City of Las Vegas shall have full and equal enjoyment of accomodation advantages and privileges of all City property owned

> or leased by the City for public amusement, namely: City Parks, Golf Courses, Cemetary, Swimming Pool and Library (Christensen, 1939).

The petition was denied and racial conditions continued to deteriorate. Those 178 black Las Vegans did not have the numerical strength to prevent what was happening. They were forced, by that circumstance, to rely on the good will of those who did not have their best interests at heart. The temper of their resistance was defused by the economic hold which their oppressors held over them. In their state of numerical impotency, their Constitutional rights and privileges were abrogated.

One month before the NAACP filed its petition, on the first day of September of 1939, Germany invaded Poland and initiated World War II. Two days later, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared that the United States would remain neutral and his declaration was strongly supported by Congress. Under the Neutrality Act of 1937, the President reluctantly prohibited the export of arms and munitions to any of the belligerants. Following the proclamation of a limited national emergency on the eight of September, Roosevelt urged Congress to repeal the arms embargo. Less than two months later, on the fourth day of November, the passage of the Neutrality Act of 1939 repealed the arms embargo (Maddox, 1969: 243-246).

The repeal of the embargo had a tremendous effect on the economic well-being of the United States. Factories which had closed at the onset of the depression reopened to manufacture war materials needed by the Allies. America went back to work. However, it was those same Americans who had held decent jobs with decent salaries before the depression started who went to work. Black Americans, for whom the depression had started years earlier, continued on in the same condition. More than a year later, employment

conditions had not improved for them. Owing to that fact, A. Phillip Randolph threatened a massive march on Washington to demonstrate the extent of economic suffering of America's black population. Seventeen months following the repeal of the Embargo, that threatened march did finally induce the President to issue, on June 25, 1941, Executive Order 8802 which stated, in part "that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color or national origin" (Davis, 1972: 109).

That Executive Order had some small positive effects on the hiring of black workers at the majority of the factories which had reopened as part of the Defense Plant Corporation's effort to meet the munitions needs of the war. Due in large part to the traditional hiring practices which had existed in those places, attempts to employ blacks in jobs which had hiterfore been held exclusively by white men did generate a great deal of racial anxieties in those places. In those instances where new plants were built and where there was not a work force which had previously held jobs there, the act of employing blacks was less antagonistic because they were clearly not taking jobs which some white person might have previously held.

Less than a month following the issuance of Executive Order 8802, the Defense Plant Corporation authorized the construction of the Basic Magnesium plant in southern Nevada. The plant was built half-way between Las Vegas and the Hoover Dam on 2800 acres of desert.

Basic Refactories Company of Cleveland, Ohio had mining claims of large deposits of magnasite and burcite at Gabbs, Nevada. In order to process those materials, two plants were required. One, obviously, was located at the site of the minerals for extracting and the other, which needed great quantities of electrical power and water was located near Las Vegas. At

both locations, townsites were developed (Hulse, 1969: 230-232). That in southern Nevada met great resistance from Las Vegas residents once they realized that it would bring in excess of 13,000 workers and their families to the area and thereby surpass Las Vegas' population and render it only the second largest city of southern Nevada ("Opposition to Basic," 1940).

A local civic group, the Las Vegas Taxpayers Association, was formed to oppose the Basic Townsite as it was originally named (Ibid.). They were supported by U.S. Senator Berkeley Bunker but their efforts were to no avail. However, as an appeasement, the contract which was let to the McNeil Construction Company to build the housing for the workers had a clause which required those dwellings to be designed as temporary and demountable and local officials, at least in public, were certain that they would all return home once the war ended (Patrick, "Johnson", 1978).

Basic Refractories built the plant and some housing was provided near the plant for workers. That housing was segregated. Within a decade, three distinct entities had developed in southern Nevada which supported segregation in housing. Black workers, who lived at the job site in the new town of Henderson, Nevada were restricted to a section on the northeast side of the highway called Carver Park and named for the black scientist, George Washington Carver. White workers lived in Victory Village and in the newly constructed Huntridge section of Las Vegas. Later, a trailer park, east of Carver Park was also put in place. It was described as being one of the best in the United States. "Electricity, water, showers, laundries and toilets are within easy access of each trailer. Rates are $4 a week for a family with two persons and 25 cents for each additional person" ("Electricity, Water and Showers", 1942).

The addition of that trailer park provided white workers at Basic Magnesium with ample housing. Black workers and their families, in the meantime, were experiencing shortages. Originally 2200 priorities had been issued for housing for project workers. By late 1942, there were yet 700 priorities remaining unused. It is reported that local contractors had no interest in the remaining priorities ("Priorities of Little Interest Now", 1942). By the end of that year and the beginning of 1943, some of those priorities were being used in white developments either in Henderson or in Las Vegas. The Huntridge Development Company announced, in mid-December that "modern two bedroom dwellings and duplexes will soon be available to Basic employees and their families" for rent or sale with a thirty month option to buy (Two Bedroom Dwellings", 1942). A month later, the O. J. Scherer Company announced "300 apartment type dwellings units to go up east of the main highway and south of Anderson's camp. They will be one, two and three bedroom apartments with living room, kitchen and bath. There will be a spacious community house, assembly hall, play rooms" ("O. J. Scherer Co."1943). None of the 700 priorities were used to ease the housing crunch of black workers and their families.

Of the 13,000 new residents to southern Nevada during the first years of the 1940s, well in excess of 3000 were recruited from the southern states to come to work at the new plant. Several hundred others, from other parts of the country, also came. That 178 blacks who had lived in Las Vegas in 1940 were themselves experiencing the effects of the ever expanding realities of segregation and rising racial intolerance. Those newcomers only exacerbated the condition.

Basic Magnesium provided only 324 places which would serve as residences

for black workers. Those accomodations consisted of sixty-four with no bedrooms--dormitories for single men, one-hundred and four with one bedroom, one hundred and four with two bedrooms and fifty-two with three bedrooms. Those, even when utilized to their maximum potential, provided shelter for less than two-thirds of the new black population. Those shelters were constructed by the Hammes-Euclemiler Company of Los Angles ("Carver Park", 1940). Those blacks who could not secure quarters at Carver Park, well over one-thousand, were left to their own devices.

Similarly to long-time black residents who were being evicted from the downtown area, the excess of black newcomers were directed to the McWilliams Townsite or the Westside as it had become known. There was a small population of non-blacks already there. It was mostly white but with a small hispanic enclave. As early as 1939, those few blacks who were forced to that area met resistance. Many whites who lived there did not want blacks as neighbors. In 1939 they sought the adoption of an ordinance to keep blacks out. A petition was submitted to Mayor Russell and the City Commissioners by the Westside Improvement Association ("Improvement Petition", 1939). It implored city government to prevent blacks moving to that area. R.L. Christensen, President of the Las Vegas Colored Progressive Club, responded by asking that the city not "segregate a portion of Westside for caucasians only" ("Christensen Letter", 1939). Logistically, the city had eliminated any possible other options as to where blacks could be expatriated to. Other places were already off-limits for them and, of all the areas which might bear any sort of consideration for such a move, the Westside was the most sparsely populated. City government did not act on the petition as submitted by the Westside Improvement Association.

As blacks moved into the area, whites living there began to move out (Ray, 1973). Many of the hispanic families living there, such as the Riveros, Mendozas and Delgados remained during that crucial period of transition and thereby prevented the Westside from becoming an immediate all black area (Hopkins, 1987:3). The migration of blacks to Las Vegas and the exodus to and from the Westside, helped fuel the fires of racism in Las Vegas. The lack of housing on the Westside necessitated erecting make-shift shelters which were crude and without facilities. Frank Goheen, one of the several self-appointed spokesmen for white westsiders, contacted the city inspector, R.S. Norton, and demanded that he enforce the building codes. Goheen informed Norton that there were tents, shacks and sometimes nothing at all except beds placed on vacant property. Norton, through a technicality, was able to buy time by informing the complainant that his office could do nothing because he had "no jurisdiction until a permit was issued" ("Code Violations", 1940).

It was those conditions that new workers at the Basic Magnesium plant found upon their arrival. While the developing segregationist trends were indeed offensive to blacks who had been a part of the community dating back to the early days of settlement, they were not quite so for many of the newcomers. The overwhelming majority of those workers came to Nevada from the southern states. This was particularly true of black workers. Lubertha Johnson came to Las Vegas in 1943 and found employment at the Basic Townsite. In her job with the housing project she interviewed many of the black workers. When asked what she knew of the origins of most of those workers, she responded that they came "from Louisiana and Arkansas. I can say this without fear of contradiction because I came here originally to take a job in the war housing project that was established in Henderson. There I interviewed hundreds of

people who had migrated here and that's how I know they were most, at that time, from Louisiana and Arkansas" (Patrick, "Johnson", 1978: 2). More specifically, they came from two areas of those two states: Talullah, Louisiana and Fordyce, Arkansas. Many of those migrants or their descendants still reside in Las Vegas but generally think of those other places as really being their homes (Winston, 1978).

Blacks who had been born and raised and nurtured in the south were well accustomed to segregation of all sorts. From birth to death they lived in segregation. Additionally, their economic condition was the worse in the entire countre country. They had been among the first to lose jobs following the Stock Market crash of 1929. Many of them had worked in the cotton fields of Louisiana and Arkansas and other places and that crop had experienced tremendous drops in pride during that period (Current, 1964: 720). In the south, they had barely been able to eke out a living. Those who did not work in the cotton fields, especially in Louisiana and Arkansas, were involved in one way or another in the timber industry (Patrick, "Lisby", 1978). Even with those, many of those mills closed down completely and others moved their operations to places like Arizona (Wilson, 1977). Many of the workers from Louisiana and Arkansas were brought to Arizona to work in the sawmills which opened there and they would later, after learning of the opening of the Basic plant in Nevada, leave Arizona for the greener pastures of Nevada(Ibid.). There were recruiters who went to the south in search of workers and, owing to the extended family ties of many of the people from the two regions most heavily recruited, many of those blacks who eventually came to Nevada came not because of direct contact with recruiters but due to word of mouth efforts of those who had been to Las Vegas (Patrick, "Lisby", 1978). Many of those blacks who were among the first to come to Las Vegas had no intentions of remaining in Nevada for any length of time. Usually, men would leave their

families behind with the intent of earning money and then returning home. Those who did brought back stories of the amount of money to be made in the plant at Basic (Ibid.). Others, hoping to do the same, would make the trip. There were still others among the workers who did not like the working conditions at the plant. The heat of the plant, combined with that of nature made working conditions almost unbearable for some of the older men. Younger men, however, imagined that they would be better able to adjust (Patrick, "Wilson", 1978). Further, the wages played an important role. The jobs which blacks were able to acquire at Basic Magnesium paid them higher wages than they had ever earned.

Lee Henry Lisby, who first came to southern Nevada in 1942 to go to work at the new defense plant at Henderson, offers both the incentive for his migration and detailed recollections of what the job was like and what the quality of life was for blacks during that time. He first heard of the place from a "boss" at the sawmill where he worked in Tallulah, Louisiana. "This new boss told him that men at Henderson, Nevada, made ten dollard a day. Do you have any idea how much ten dollars was in those days? That's fifty a week. Why, compared to the mill, we thought nobody could make that (Patrick, "Lisby", 1978). He remembered that once he realized that he couldnit find employment in the state of Louisiana which paid that kind of money, that he and twelve others from the mill drove, in two 1936 Chevrolets, to Nevada (Ibid.).

In 1942, the Westside was still in its formative stage. Those few houses which were there were occupied. Lisby and his companions, like hundreds of other blacks arriving at that time, found an overwhelming shortage of housing. He remembers that when he first arrived he was among the more fortunate in securing some kind of shelter.

> Well, when I first live here, I got a room in a GI hospital tent. Suppose to be forty feet long and fourteen feet wide and they had little one-man cots lined up on both sides. No heater, no cooler, nothing, winter and summer. I stayed in a tent owned by Ray Lucas. He's from Pheonix, Arizona. He charged us $7.00 a man a week and that included board. He had a little cafe right by in a house trailer. They'd have a meal call and out we'd go. There were no medicine cabinets in there, just an orange crate aside your cot and a sack underneath. You could have your wallet and watch on there and nobody would steal (Ibid.).

Many of the men who lived in that tent came from the same town or smaller towns in the same area. They knew each other from back home and they were often family members. Further, they each knew of the struggle which the others were undergoing and the conditions which existed "back home" and they went out of their way to help each other. That knowledge and kinship was an enabling factor in their living in such close quarters with such trust and surviving throughout the ordeal (Wilson, 1977). Woodrow Wilson, who also came to Las Vegas in 1942, recalls the condition of some of those who were not as fortunate as Lisby. Even though he was able to get work the day after his arrival, finding housing was not quite as easy. There seems to have been little problem for blacks securing jobs at the plant but in the matter of housing, both at Carver Park and on the Westside, there was extreme difficulty. In the case of the former, whatever housing which had been initially provided by the company was the first to be occupied. In regards to the latter, it just was not there. Wilson remembers the availability of jobs and the scarcity of housing during those early years of the 1940s.

> Many of the people came here seeking jobs. They received them; they did have jobs. They got jobs at the plant site but many of them were unable to secure housing. I remember that on the lawn at the Post Office and on the lawn at the Court House men and their wives used to sleep in sleeping bags, or whatever, all night long. Hundreds of people were sleeping outside. They didn't have available housing at that time (Patrick, "Wilson, 1978).

For many blacks who came to Las Vegas seeking employment, those lawns provided their initial havens. Their sojourn at those places was short but as one would leave, another would appear and the lawns would be in constant use. Sarah Ann Knight who arrived in 1942 with her family, made similar observations of the housing shortages as did Woodrow Wilson. When asked if her family lived on the Westside, her response was:

> Yes, I lived on the Westside when I first came here, There were very few houses. Matter of fact, it would be less than maybe ten or twelve houses; it was mostly tents and shacks and this type of thing. Of course, the population of Las Vegas was less than ten thousand, so people was coming here from everywhere. They were just throwing up tents and a lot of people was sleeping on lawns. During that time, where the Union Plaza is now, there was a railroad station and people was sleeping there. A block from the Post Office down to the corner was just like a lawn and people were sleeping out there (Patrick, "Knight", 1978).

Knight's family was more fortunate in securing housing than either Lisby or Wilson. In addition to her, her mother, father, brother, husband and two children came to Las Vegas. In describing their circumstances, she recalls:

> When we came here, we had a small house; and then were here about six months, and my father built a house. We lived there about two or three years; and then we bought another place and built a house, and they still live in this same house. They have been living in this house about twenty-nine years (Ibid.).

Many blacks who came to southern Nevada during the early 1940s to work at the Basic Magnesium plant of Henderson and who wished some sort of permanent housing were required, as was the case with Knight's father, to construct it themselves and the only place where such efforts could be realized was on the Westside. Additionally, those migrants did not have meaningful cash reserves. Generally, they lived from check to check. Further, many of them, who had left their families in the south or other places, sent a good portion of their meager income back to help support those families (Patrick, "Lisby, 1978).

Workers were paid an hourly wage of approximately one dollar. Check stubs

representing a normal forty hour work week with eight hours of overtime which was paid at a rate of time-and-a half resulted in take-home pay of fifty-three dollars. Of that amount, if they lived as frugally as did Lisby, their housing and board, which consisted of two meals per day, cost seven dollars per week. Many of these men sent as much as one-half of their salary home while putting aside a few dollars each week with the hope of purchasing a small cabin and a lot. During the early 1940s, lots measuring fifty by one-hundred and forty feet could be bought on the Westside for as little as seventy-five dollars. Lisby, during his off hours from the plant and the several other subsequent jobs he held, constructed small cabins measuring twelve by twelve feet for fifty-five dollars plus materials (Ibid.). Those cabins were not usually on solid, permanent foundations and could be moved from one location to another. Newspapers of the day often ran ads announcing cabins for sale on the Westside ("Cabins For Sale", 1940). There were not many instances in which there were cabins and lots for sale. Seemingly, those blacks who purchased land intended to remain.

Purchasing land and homes in Las Vegas was more than normally difficult for blacks in the Las Vegas area during the early 1940s and subsequent years. Not only were most places off limits but local banks and mortgage companies did not provide financing for home building in the developing black ghetto of the Westside (Patrick, "Johnson", 1978). Consequently, what developed as a black ghetto could not have developed otherwise. No streets were paved, there was no sewage system, street lights or other developments with the exception of occasional water hydrants. The dust in the streets was six inches or more deep and maintained a constant haze over the area and when it rained it was impossible to drive in or out (Ibid.).

The city was not anxious to improve conditions there due to its conviction that once the war ended and the production of the plant was no longer necessary that the workers, both black and white, would leave and return to wherever they had originated (Ibid.).

Carver Park, in the meantime, developed into a microscopic community within the larger developing community of Henderson, Nevada. It provided all of the basic needs of its black population. It did not, however, provide for the social needs and those who lived there did so only out of necessity and even though living conditions on the Westside was much more harsh, they made every attempt to move there. By 1943, the Basic Townsite of Henderson was the third largest city in the state of Nevada. Carver Park had a special school for black children living there but their teachers were all white. While little was reported concerning the activities of the school at Carver Park, what there is does provide an example of the stereotypical manner in which those black children were viewed by their teachers who reported "all of the children have good voices, and all have an uncanny sense of rhythm... ("Carver Park School", 1943). White children of school age who lived at the townsite became part of an existing school district.

> The Railroad Pass School District has been officially expanded to include Basic Townsite, the new trailer camps and Pittman...McNeil crews are already at work on construction of the 12-grade school building and auditorium. The auditorium will be available for use by the community at night and for church services on Sundays...There will be approximately 1,000 pupils of school age in the district when school opens in the fall ("Railroad Pass School", 1942).

The segregated schools which those black children attended was different only in one respect from the schools they had previously attended in the south--the teachers were white. The parents of those children did not object to the segregation because they were well familiar with the realities of

of segregation in the schools. Many of those black parents had little education and they wanted more for their children (Wilson, 1977).

Black employees at the plant were exposed to a set of circumstances greatly different from those with which they were familiar. Even though the overwhelming majority of those workers came from the south and were well accustomed to living and working in segregation, upon their arrival to Las Vegas they became aware of their own worth and dignity in ways in which they had not previously done and part of that heightened awareness was due to the activities of Reverend Bill Stevens who was president of the local chapter of the NAACP at the time. Almost every black person who came to Las Vegas during the early 1940s and who still reside in Las Vegas tells the story of Rev. Stevens peaceful lunchcounter sit-in protest.

> As the story goes, every day of the week in the 1940s he would take a newspaper and a book and head for the downtown restaurants. Because he was black, white restaurant owners wouldn't serve him. He would sit, reading and wondering what made him so different. A white customer would come into the restaurant and sit next to Stevens, according to David Hoggard, executive director of the Economic Opportunity Board and a Las Vegas resident during this period. The customer would say to Stevens, "How are you today? It's a nice day, isn't it?" Stevens would reply: "Certainly is, if they'd serve me a cup of coffee or give me a cup of tea." ("Peaceful Sit-Ins In 1940s", 1979).

Black workers at the plant became less and less disposed to continue on on with "business as usual" in regards to segregation. Initially they had been hired as general laborers and part of the reasoning was that they could accomodate the extreme heat generated by the processing at the plant (Patrick, "Wilson", 1978). While they were not particularly concerned with that stereotypical view of them, they were greatly dismayed to learn of the extent of the segregation in the work place. Blacks and whites worked in segregated crews, used segregated water fountains and used differents areas of the cafeteria. Shortly after the actual work at the

plant got underway, black workers staged a walk-out to protest the segregation which existed at the plant ("Two Hundred Walk Off Jobs", 1943). The strike was investigated by a representative of the Fair Employment Practices Commission who recommended an end to the practice of segregation on the job site (Ibid.). The FEPC had come into existance shortly after the adoption of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802. A Phillip Randolph and others who had spearheaded the efforts, in 1941, which resulted in the Order insisted that a watchdog agency be created to insure that all government contracts with defense industries include anti-discrimination provisions (Davis, 1972). Following that investigation, those areas of the plant which had been segregated were no longer. However, a "gentlemens agreement" of sorts did continue.

As more and more blacks were either directed or drawn to the Westside, marginal businesses began to appear there. Barbers and beauty shops, bars and soda fountains, neighborhood stores and cafes sprang up. All were intended to serve the immediate needs of the growing black community but they accomplished much more than that. Some blacks, especially among the old-timers, saw the negative effects that such developments would have ("Westside Business District Opposed", 1940). Additionally, among those white residents who were still there, could be heard voices of opposition ("Property Owners Discuss Problems", 1942). Some blacks opposed such development because they knew that as the Westside became more developed, in a business way, the easier it would be to place even more of the larger community off-limits to them. They were of the opinion that so long as blacks were required, of necessity, to shop for goods and services in the downtown area, the less likely total segregation would take place (Wilson, 1977). White property owners, on the other

hand, seem to have been of the opinion that by resisting such development, they would be able to ward off the encroachment of blacks to the Westside and they would have to be absorbed into the larger community. Las Vegas, in the meantime, continued with its perception that the "problem" would solve itself at war's end when everyone would go back where they came from (Patrick, "Johnson", 1978).

The war did much to help solidify segregation. There were black soldiers stationed not only at Las Vegas and Boulder City but also at the several other nearby military bases in California and Arizona. Those soldiers, like white soldiers at those same bases, came to Las Vegas on weekend passes. Because most of the downtown saloons were off-limits, the need for having such places on the Westside was increased. It also became apparent that there was an additional need for temporary housing for those soldiers. Black residents provided some relief by opening their homes, inadequate as they were, to those black soldiers and continued to do so, as needed, even after the black USO Club opened ("Westside USO", 1942).

Conditions at the plant did improve somewhat. Even before the walkout occurred, Lester Allen Cruise was promoted from senior clerk in personnel to foreman in one of the plant's labor divisions ("Lester Allen Cruise, 1943). The in-house publication featured many photos of blacks on the job and in several categories. There were also photos and short articles having to do with activities involving blacks both in Las Vegas and at Carver Park. They ranged from Jack Johnson, the black boxer, to black children at the Carver Park school and birth of twins to Hazel Outland ("Jack Johnson", 1943; "School Children", 1944; "Twins", 1944). However, there does not appear to be any noticeable integration in any of those photos.

The men did the job they were brought there to do. Basic Magnesium in

Henderson, Nevada was the largest magnesium plant in the world and it worked three shifts and production far exceeded all expectations. That was not surprising considering that once the United States entered World War II, the entire country geared up for it full throttle. That was true of children who collected scrap metal, housewives who saved grease and went to work outside the home for the first time to the men who were at Basic.

> The Basic Magnesium plant did its work so well that it filled America's need for magnesium by 1943 and provided a surplus; only about 2,400 tons of the metas had been produced in the United States in 1938, but thanks largely to the Nevada operation, more than a hundred times this amount was available in 1943. In fact, output was so great that by 1944 the U.S. government did not need any more magnesium; in November it stopped production and the massive plant became idle. It seemed that the old Nevada story of boom-and-bust mining and milling had been repeated and that a multi-million dollar investment and a city of more than a thousand homes were destined to decay (Hulse, 232).

Not long thereafter, many of the workers and their families left the area. Some black works left also but nearly in as great a percentage as did white workers. While initially the great majority of those workers who migrated to Las Vegas left their families behind, once they were situated they sent for their families. Additionally, other relatives and friends joined that second wave of migrants. While the men notified other men of work in the plant, their wives went to work as domestics in private homes in Las Vegas (Owedia Winfrey, 1976). Black women were able to earn as much as six dollars a day in 1943 doing such work (Ibid.). Some of the older women would take care of the younger children of those women who held such jobs. Mrs. Beatrice Juniel, who came to Las Vegas in 1943 provided that service (Ibid.). The newspapers of the day were replete with help wanted ads in which "colored women" help was solicited. Black women not only worked as domestics in private homes but they found work in the developing hotel industry. Black men who were laid off following

the close of production at the plant also were able to find jobs at the hotels. The downtown hotels were joined by motor courts and the developing Strip which was then known simply as the L.A. Highway. The El Rancho opened in 1941, the Last Frontier in 1943 and there was talk of others.

The growth of a black population in Las Vegas had been slow growing from the beginning in 1905 and had only grown to 178 in thirty five years. The opening of the Basic Magnesium plant brought about the rapid influx of black migrants to the area and provided, at its closing, a labor pool for the developing hotel industry. White men and women were able to get jobs in "front-of-the-house" positions as dealers, waiters, waitresses, pit bosses and so on. They, in turn, needed domestic help. Black men worked as grounds keepers, porters and janitors and black women were also maids and kitchen helpers (Wilson, 1977).

No other event in the first half century of Las Vegas' history had as great an impact on the black population as did the opening of the Basic Magnesium plant of Henderson, Nevada.