

MANNA *in the wilderness*

March 2019

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

Volume 33, Number 3

Opening Our Eyes to the Tragic Legacy of Segregation

by Julia Occhiogrosso

Thirty years ago I moved into a neighborhood just west of downtown Las Vegas known to locals as the Westside. New to town, and wishing to found a Catholic Worker Hospitality House, I chose an area nearby the the only folks we knew in Las Vegas, the Franciscan Friars. Like the Franciscans, the Catholic Worker often founded communities in poorer neighborhoods to live among the people they aim to serve.

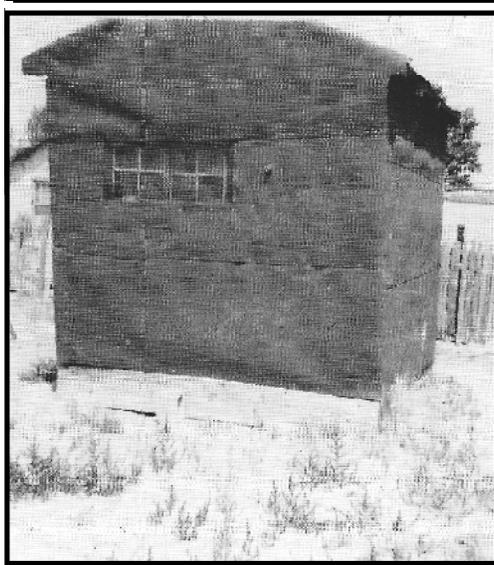
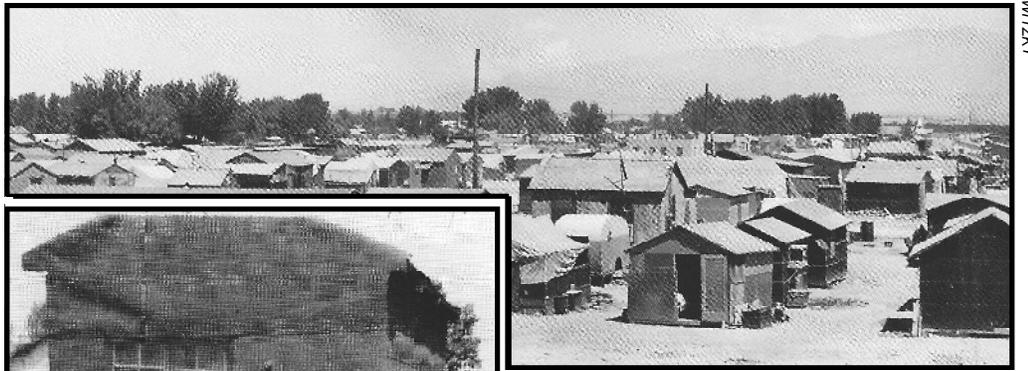
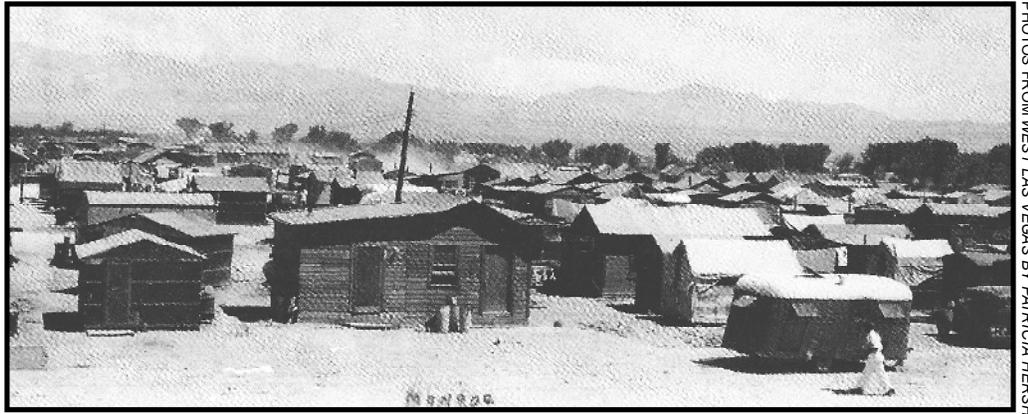
At twenty five years old, my intentions were idealistic, but admittedly ignorant of the history of the neighborhood, and the story of segregation in this city.

In hindsight, I regret that I did not spend more time familiarizing myself with the people and stories of this neighborhood before assuming an entitled welcome. Like the flawed thinking of missionaries, there was an underlying assumption that somehow we as the “do gooders” could enter without invitation or understanding, a right of mobility that was denied African Americans for centuries.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to forge relationships with some of the elders of this community. Many migrated from the South during the early forties to find work. They had hopes of finding a better life, but much of their hopes were blocked by government policies that implicitly fostered segregation all across the country.

I had heard the stories of how Black entertainers like Sammy Davis Jr., Pearl Bailey, Lena Horne, Nat King Cole and others were not permitted to stay in the strip hotels that benefited from their talent and how early residents lived in tents or homes built out of scrap materials. Our friend Ina Bell told how her husband built their home from piecing together discarded two-by-four scraps.

Recently, I was invited by Nevadans for the Common Good (NCG) to attend a Conference with Richard Rothstein, author of *The Color of Law: The Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. NCG is a nonpartisan organization of faith-based institutions and non-profits who advocate around social justice issues. We gathered in Oakland with other similar organizations from western states who, in many cases, are concerned with housing issues.



Photos of the Westside in Las Vegas in the 40's. Top photo is Monroe Ave., above photo is Jefferson Ave. In severe heat, tar-patched roofs would drip the black sludge inside. The area lacked paved roads, electricity and sewer.

A free monthly prayer devotional by Bread for the World focuses on our history of segregated housing policy: bread.org/devotional

Rothstein's book and presentation gave us information about the history of housing in this country that is relevant for groups looking to remedy the current housing crisis.

Rothstein describes in extensive detail the historic facts that demonstrate how policies of discrimination impacted the creation of poor, underserved, segregated neighborhoods across the country. “Policies that excluded African Americans from housing opportunities created economic, social and political fallout that perpetuates today and will continue for the foreseeable future.”

After the depression, acute housing shortages plagued the nation. The U.S. government's Public Works Administration constructed housing developments all over the country for working and lower-middle income families. These developments were mostly intended for white families and were guided by policies which fostered segregation and excluded African Americans. Working people of the segregated West Las Vegas neighborhood

were among those left out, living in tents and salvaging material to build makeshift homes.

Even with court decisions that incrementally challenged the constitutionality of these policies, other tactics emerged to counter these decisions and prolonged the momentum of segregation.

Red-lining forbade financially-eligible African Americans from securing loans from banks and federally-financed housing developments. Racially restrictive covenants which were stipulations in federal-financed housing developments would require the purchaser to agree to not sell or rent their home to African Americans.

African American veterans were unable to redeem the benefits of the GI Bill because of these exclusionary policies attached to federally-financed housing.

This prompted African Americans who wanted to purchase homes to resort to contract sales. With contract sales, homes *(continued on back page)*

PHOTOS FROM WEST LAS VEGAS BY PATRICIA HERSH-WITZKY

“Tough Love”

by Robert Majors

We feed in the morning,
 if no one else does.
 When shelters are closing
 the sun's coming up.
 When it's hard to get going
 the going gets tough.
 Sometimes a tough moment
 can use a tough love.
 One that will stand
 in cold and in pain.
 That would give what it had
 without knowing your name.
 That would sit in a jail
 before turning its face
 on the right thing to do
 in the “wrong” kind of way.
 A love that is hard
 on the one who delivers,
 and strengthens the faith
 of love in its giver.

(continued from front page)
 were sold at inflated prices and
 the buyer would only attain
 ownership after 15 to 20 years
 of prompt monthly installments
 which did not accrue any equity
 until paid off, and often resulted
 in evictions from one late or
 missed payment.

For many of us, these stories
 of discrimination and
 exclusionary practices represent
 remnants of the distant past,
 found in random, unenlightened
 cities across the country. Yet, it
 is clear that these actions of the
 past had a pervasive and
 undeniable impact on the ability
 of African Americans to secure
 the dream of financial stability
 and progress many whites have
 inherited through home
 ownership.

Rothstein contends that unlike
 the common consensus, these
 discriminatory acts were not the

product of incidental bigotry,
 happenstance or accident, but
 instead, the direct consequence
 of unconstitutional policy, and
 warrant a public call for policies
 that move toward retribution and
 restoration.

I cannot do justice to the
 thorough and scholarly content of
 Rothstein's writing, nor can I give
 ample attention to the trauma and
 hardship experienced by the
 victims of these policies. I only
 hope to point our readers,
 people who care about alleviating
 the sufferings of social injustice,
 to be awakened from the false
 narratives that all too often define
 our perspectives and perpetuate
 a stance of inaction.

While my arrival in this
 neighborhood may have been
 uninformed, I am grateful for the
 chance to cultivate relationships
 with people who have endured
 with courage and grace. Perhaps
 by being receptive to learning the
 history of segregation, people of
 faith can show mercy and
 compassion, put aside the
 destructive behaviors of racism
 and move toward seeing the
 sacred in all.

Volunteer & Donor Party
 at the Catholic Worker:
 Sat., April 27, 9 a.m.-Noon
 Brunch served, Playful
 Competition, Fellowship
 R.S.V.P.: Julia: (702) 647-0728
 or julia@lvcw.org

**Nuclear Stations
 of the Cross**
 10:30 a. m., Good Friday
 Mercury Exit, NNSS
 (NV Nuclear Weapons Test Site)
Sacred Peace Walk
 April 13 - 19, 2019
 (702)646-4814
nevadadesertexperience.org/spw

PLEASE JOIN US:

Wed.-Sat., 6:00 a.m.:
 Morning prayer at Catholic
 Worker.
Wed.-Sat., 6:30 a.m.:
 Breakfast served to 150-200
 poor & homeless people.
Wed., 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.:
 Hospitality Day, we invite 20
 homeless men home for
 showers, to wash clothes
 and for a great lunch.
Thurs., 9:00 - 10:00 a.m.:
 Vigil for Peace: Thursdays in

front of Federal Courthouse,
 333 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
Thursday, 10:30 a.m.:
 50 lunches taken to the
 homeless.
Second Sat. of the month:
 Knights of Columbus
 Pancake Breakfast to the
 homeless.
Third Sat. of the month:
 Deliver food boxes to homes
 in need.

100% RECYCLED PAPER, CHLORINE FREE,
 FSC CERTIFIED

Nineteenth Annual Nevada Clay Guild

Empty Bowl Benefit



ARTWORK BY CHRISTA OCCHIOGROSSO

Helping to Feed the Hungry in Las Vegas

Saturday, March 30, 2019

11:30 a.m.- 1:30 p.m.

Green Valley High
 School Cafeteria,

460 Arroyo Grande Blvd.

(just North of Warm Springs Rd.)

Henderson, NV / Adults: \$25

Children & All Students: \$15

Additional Bowls: \$15

A lunch of soup and bread will be served in
 hand-made bowls. Each attendee will select their
 own unique ceramic bowl made by members
 and friends of the Nevada Clay Guild and keep
 it as a lasting reminder of world hunger. All
 proceeds from the luncheon will benefit the Las
 Vegas Catholic Worker and their soup line
 serving the poor and homeless. There will also
 be a silent auction of ceramic art. Tickets will
 be sold at the door. For advance tickets or info
 contact Julia Occhiogrosso at (702) 234-0755
 or julia@lvcw.org, or Donna Potter at (702) 461-
 3398. Thanks to Green Valley High School,
 Aardvark Clay, and all the artists who made the
 bowls. This event is sponsored by the Nevada
 Clay Guild, Green Valley High School, Mission
 Hills Pottery and Aardvark Clay.

lvcw.org/emptybowl.htm
 Buy Tickets Online (small fee)

100% RECYCLED PAPER, CHLORINE FREE, FSC CERTIFIED