Timeline of African-American Legal History in Nevada (1861-2011)

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AFRICAN-AMERICAN LEGAL HISTORY IN NEVADA (1861 – 2011)

BY PROF. RACHEL J. ANDERSON

This timeline depicts selected events in the history of African-American lawyers, civil rights, and diversity in Nevada’s bar and on the bench. A more comprehensive version of this timeline is available on the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association website (www.lasvegasnba.org) and in the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association Archive at the Wiener-Rogers Law Library at the UNLV Boyd School of Law.

1800

1861 American Civil War (until 1865)
1861 Nevada organized as a U.S. territory
1861 First Nevada Territorial Legislature criminalizes gambling
1861 First Nevada Territorial Legislature criminalizes interracial marriage (1861 Nev. Terr. Stat., ch. 32, at 93) and prohibits “coloreds,” including blacks, Native Americans and Chinese from appearing as witnesses against white men; blacks publicly object and demand civil rights, right to vote, public education for children, right to bear witness in court and to serve on juries (This timeline uses the term “blacks” until African Americans are granted citizenship under 14th Amendment in 1868.)
1864 Nevada admitted as 36th state of the United States
Mid-1860s Blacks migrate to Virginia City
1865 Slavery abolished except as punishment for a crime (U.S. Const. amend. XIII)
1865 Nevada Executive Committee formed by blacks in Virginia City petitions Nevada Legislature for voting rights
1866 U.S. Congress passes Civil Rights Act of 1866 (ch. 31, 14 Stat. 27 (1866)), granting civil rights to all persons in the United States
1866 Nevada Executive Committee petitions Nevada Legislature for school desegregation and right to testify in civil cases
1868 African Americans granted citizenship, right to due process of law and equal protection of law under federal and state governments (U.S. Const. amend. XIV)

1870 African-American men receive voting rights (U.S. Const. amend. XV)

1872 Nevada Supreme Court holds that excluding African Americans from public schools is unconstitutional but approves separate schools segregated by race as constitutional (State ex rel. Stoutmeyer v. Duffy, 7 Nev. 342 (1872)); Virginia City public schools integrate following ruling

1896 U.S. Supreme Court upholds "separate but equal" racial segregation as constitutional (Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896))

1909 Clark County created

1909-1910

1910

1910 City of Las Vegas incorporated

1912 Nevada Legislature expands statutory ban on interracial marriage to prohibit marriages between "any person of the Caucasian or white race" and "any person of Ethiopian or black race, Malay or brown race, Mongolian or yellow race, or American Indian or red race..." (Rev. Laws Nev., §§ 6514-17 (1912))


1914 World War I (until 1918)

1919 Nevada Legislature amends statutory ban on interracial marriage to permit marriages between Caucasians and Native Americans (1919 Nev. Stat., ch. 72, at 124)

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1920  Women, including African-American women, granted right to vote (U.S. Const. amend. XIX)
1924  Ku Klux Klan (KKK) members march on Fremont Street in Las Vegas
1925  KKK burns crosses on Peavine Mountain during initiation of 2,000 men
1925  National Bar Association (NBA) established in Des Moines, Iowa (of the fewer than 1,000 African-American lawyers in the United States, 12 percent belonged to newly founded NBA)
1928  Nevada Legislature establishes State Bar of Nevada
1928  NAACP establishes Las Vegas branch
1928  U.S. Congress authorizes Hoover Dam construction project

1930  Six Companies, Inc. hires 4,000 men to work on Hoover Dam, none are African American; construction starts in 1931
1931  NAACP members found Colored Citizens’ Labor and Protective Association to locate and prepare proper candidates for jobs on dam work crews
1931  Casino gambling legalized in Nevada
1932  Federal government creates and manages Boulder City, a racially segregated town initially excluding African Americans (first Boulder City housing was completed and occupied by fall of 1931)
1932  Six Companies, Inc., responding to pressure by federal officials, hires first 10 African-American workers for Hoover Dam project, employing only 44 African Americans out of 20,000 workers during entire construction period

Mid-1930s  At least one Las Vegas newspaper begins anti-African American reporting, a shift from a seemingly race-neutral tone to negative coverage

Late 1930s  Las Vegas city officials force African-American-owned businesses to relocate to Westside as precondition to obtaining licenses
1939  World War II (until 1945)
1939  Nevada Assembly rejects Assembly Bill 88, which, if successful, would have mandated equal rights in Nevada

1940  Circa 1940  Veterans Administration Hospital in Reno integrates after Alfred Smith, an African-American World War I veteran, is refused service several times
1941  President Franklin D. Roosevelt issues Executive Order 8802, prohibiting racial discrimination in federal government and defense industry hiring practices
1942  African Americans start migrating to Nevada from small southern towns
1942  Operating permit for Shamrock Hotel, proposed by Horace Heidt Corp. as first interracial hotel in downtown Las Vegas, denied due to protests by nearby whites and Las Vegas’s emerging Jim Crow policy
1943  City of Henderson founded
1943  200 African-American men strike Basic Magnesium Incorporated (BMI) Las Vegas for better working conditions
1943  Carver Park, a segregated section of Henderson comprised of a 324-unit project for BMI’s African-American employees, opens

Living conditions in racially segregated, predominantly African-American “Westside” Las Vegas (Source: Nevada State Museum, photo taken in 1942)

1945  NAACP founds Reno Chapter
1947  Hotel casinos ban African-American entertainers from staying in hotels where they perform
1950

1950 Korean War (until 1953)
1953 City of Henderson incorporated
1954 United States official involvement in Vietnam War (until 1973)
1955 Moulin Rouge opens, making it first integrated hotel and casino
1955 Hotel casinos again allow African-American entertainers to stay at hotels where they perform
1955 NAACP forms Mineral County Branch in Hawthorne
1957 Nevada Legislature fails to pass civil rights bill
1959 Governor Grant Sawyer proclaims February 8-15 Negro History Week (Proclamation by Governor Grant Sawyer declaring “February 8-15 as Negro History Week,” 4 Proclamations 326 (Feb. 6, 1959))
1959 Charles L. Kellar, an African-American attorney admitted to practice in New York, relocates to Nevada at request of Thurgood Marshall, head of NAACP Bar Representation Program
1959 Nevada Legislature repeals ban on interracial marriage (1959 Nev. Stat., ch. 193, at 216) after Harry Bridges and Noriko Sawada successfully challenge a court clerk’s denial of a marriage license in Reno on grounds that it violated the state’s ban on interracial marriage
1959 State Advisory Committee to U.S. Commission on Civil Rights finds general discrimination against minority groups in public accommodations in Las Vegas and Reno

1960

1960 Reno activists and community leaders use visibility of Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley ski resort to apply pressure to reform racially discriminatory policies and practices in northern Nevada
1960 NAACP members picket F.W. Woolworth Co. in Reno as part of national protest
1960 NAACP threatens massive march if Las Vegas Strip not desegregated
1960 Moulin Rouge Verbal Agreement between NAACP leaders, Las Vegas Mayor Oran Gragson and Hank Greenspun results in integration of Las Vegas Strip

1959 Nev. Stat., ch. 193, at 216

1959 Nev. Stat., ch. 126, at 137

1961 Nev. Stat., ch. 364, at 731

1961 Charles L. Kellar receives a passing score on Nevada bar exam, making him first African American to pass State Bar Exam, but State Bar of Nevada denies him admission to practice law (Petition of Kellar, 79 Nev. 28 (1963))
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March 1960 meeting between Dr. James McMillan (head of table) and other NAACP Leaders (unknown), Las Vegas Mayor Oran Gragson (left of Dr. McMillan) and Hank Greenspun (right of Dr. McMillan) at Moulin Rouge Hotel-Casino that results in Moulin Rouge Oral Agreement (Source: Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries)

Meeting of NAACP leaders Donald M. Clark, Bob Davis, Leo Jones, Charles L. Kellar, George McNeal, Eddie Scott, Rev. Prentiss Walker, Joe Williams and Ulysses Woddard at the El Capitan in Hawthorne, Nevada on Jan. 27, 1962 (Source: Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries)

1961 Over 200 African Americans picket and march in Carson City (reported to be first time protesters picket and march in state capitol)

1961 Civil rights advocates demonstrate in downtown Reno (protest has economic, not political focus)

1961 Sit-in at Overland Café in Reno


1961 U.S. Department of Justice requested to investigate Nevada’s civil rights violations

1961 Nevada Gaming Commission adopts non-discriminatory policy for licenses

1963 Nevada Gaming Commission revokes non-discriminatory policy

1963 Nevada Legislature fails to pass bill to give Nevada Commission on Equal Rights of Citizens more power; prompts picketing

1963 Nevada Supreme Court denies motion to disclose Board of Bar Examiners confidential written reports concerning Charles L. Kellar (Petition of Kellar, 79 Nev. 28 (1963), rehearing denied)

1964 U.S. Congress passes Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibiting discrimination in employment and public places, conferring jurisdiction upon district courts to...
provide injunctive relief against discrimination, authorizing Attorney General to institute suits to protect constitutional rights in public facilities and public education, and preventing discrimination in federally assisted programs, among other things (Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241 (1964))

1964
Earle W. White, Jr. (1933-2005) and Robert L. Reid admitted to practice law, making them first African-American attorneys admitted in Nevada

1965
Nevada Supreme Court orders admission of Charles L. Kellar to practice law (Application of Kellar, 81 Nev. 240 (1965)); Kellar subsequently admitted to State Bar of Nevada

1965
Nevada Legislature passes Nevada Civil Rights Act, prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations and employment by race, color, religion or national origin (1965 Nev. Stat., ch. 332, at 689)

1966
Las Vegas City Commission appoints Robert L. Reid Alternate Municipal Court Judge, making him first African-American judge in Nevada

Clark County District Attorney’s Office hires Addeliar D. Guy, III (1923-1997), making him first African-American Deputy District Attorney in Nevada

Las Vegas NAACP files complaint with National Labor Relations Board against Las Vegas Culinary and Teamsters unions as well as 18 Las Vegas hotels

Clark County Public Defender’s Office hires Earle W. White, Jr.; believed to be first African-American Deputy Public Defender

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1968
U.S. Supreme Court holds prohibition on race-based discrimination in housing is valid exercise of Congressional power under 13th Amendment (Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer Co., 392 U.S. 409 (1969))

1969
Robert E. “Moon” Mullen elected to Las Vegas Municipal Court, Dept. 2, making him first African-American elected to Nevada judiciary (non-attorney judge)

Earle W. White, Jr. goes into private practice in Las Vegas; believed to be first African-American lawyer in private practice in Nevada

1970
Alternate Municipal Court Judge Robert L. Reid elected Justice of the Peace for Las Vegas Township, making him first African-American Justice of the Peace in Clark County

Las Vegas NAACP files complaint of employment discrimination against unions and hotels in Las Vegas

Consent Decree, U.S. District Court, filed April 6, 1971, United States of America v. Nevada Resort Association, et al. requires desegregation of gaming industry, mandates 12 percent minority on gaming juries

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of all jobs in casino industry at all industry levels to qualified African Americans in 16 named hotel casinos and several labor unions, training programs and reporting (Consent Decree is still in effect but most casinos no longer send out semiannual reports required under Decree).

1971

1971
U.S. Supreme Court holds bussing is legitimate means for achieving integration of public schools (Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education, 402 U.S. 1 (1971)).

1971
Sixth Grade Center Plan of Integration adopted by Clark County School District; white children bussed to African-American schools in Westside for sixth grade and African-American children bussed to white schools for other 11 years (plan remains in place for 20 years).

1972
U.S. Court of Appeals for Ninth Circuit holds against Clark County School District in class action alleging violations of 5th and 14th Amendments under 42 U.S.C. §§1981 and 1983 (1964); almost total racial segregation of students and teachers in racially mixed school district is violation of substantive constitutional rights and District Court has power to remedy constitutional violation by court-ordered integration (Kelly v. Guinn, 456 F.2d 100 (9th Cir. 1972), argued by Frank A. Schreck).

1972
Clark County schools integrate following decision in Kelly v. Guinn.

1972
U.S. Congress amends Title IX of Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination in education by sex, opening doors to law schools for women of all races (20 U.S.C. §§ 1681).

1972
U.S. District Court, Nevada, holds in United States v. Local 357 of the Int’l Bhd. of Elec. Workers, 356 F. Supp. 104 (D. Nev. 1973) that (1) where all-white union and its apprenticeship committee exercise subjective and non-reviewable discretion in admitting members, referring individuals for work and selecting apprentices, and it is shown that white applicants fare significantly better than African-American applicants, a prima facie inference of discrimination arises; (2) where union has engaged in pattern or practice of discrimination on account of race, affirmative and mandatory relief is required in order to insure full enjoyment of right to equal employment opportunities; and (3) in ordering such relief, a court is not limited to parroting prohibitions but must order affirmative action which is appropriate to insure full enjoyment of employment rights.

1974

1975
Governor Michael O’Callaghan appoints Addelair D. Guy, III to Eighth Judicial District Court, Dept. XI,
making him first African-American District Court Judge in Nevada

1976
Nevada Supreme Court reverses and remands case in which Washoe County Court grants sole custody to African-American father and denies custody to white mother based on review of children’s “Negroid” characteristics in a photo holding that strict scrutiny also must be applied to state judicial officers’ actions which classify persons according to race (Beazley v. Davis, 92 Nev. 81 (1976))

1977
Arthur L. Williams, Jr. becomes first African-American attorney in legal office of Reynolds Electrical & Engineering Co., Inc. (REECo), prime contractor operating Nevada Test Site, making him first African-American attorney employed at a major corporation in Nevada

Nevada Supreme Court holds that 60-day limitation period in employment discrimination law does not apply to judicial review and enforcement of administrative determinations by Nevada Equal Rights Commission; case involves denial of promotion to an African-American woman because of her race (State Comm. for Equal Rights of Citizens v. City of N. Las Vegas, 93 Nev. 446 (1977))

1979
U.S. District Court, Nevada, holds that seniority expectations of white employees are outweighed by benefits to be achieved by affirmative action under a collective bargaining agreement’s seniority override provision in favor of minority employees to insure minority representation in employer’s work force and “eliminate a manifest racial imbalance” pursuant to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Tangren v. Wackenhut Servs., Inc., 480 F. Supp. 539 (D. Nev. 1979))
Second Vice-President he is company’s first African-American officer and first and only one at this time of a major corporation in Nevada (REECo was a wholly owned subsidiary of Edgerton, Germeshausen, and Grier, Inc. (EG&G), a Fortune 500 corporation; EG&G has no other African-American executives holding similar positions at this time.)

1980 Clark County District Attorney’s Office hires Johnnie B. Rawlinson, making her first African-American woman Deputy District Attorney in Nevada

1981 Robert Archie, Andras F. Barbero, B. Jeanne Banks, Marcus Cooper, James Davidson, Michael Allen Davis, David Dean, Booker T. Evans, Judge Addeliar D. Guy, III, James O. Porter, Johnnie B. Rawlinson, Dan Winder, Arthur L. Williams, Jr. and Justice of the Peace Earle W. White, Jr. found Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association (LVNBA)

1982 U.S. District Court, Nevada, holds that failure of hiring officer at State Division of Personnel to investigate African-American applicant’s job performance for four year period prior to applying, supports finding that decision not to consider seriously African-American applicant was based on intentional racial discrimination (Cooper v. Dep’t. of Admin., State of Nevada, 558 F. Supp. 244 (D. Nev. 1982))

1983 Liz R. Hatcher opens law firm in Las Vegas, making her first African-American woman to open a solo practice in Nevada

1987 District Court Judge Earle W. White, Jr. elected Chief District Court Judge, making him first African-American Chief District Court Judge in Nevada

1987 Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association holds first Scholarship Banquet at Alexis Park Resort


1993 Nevada Attorney General’s Office hires Karl Armstrong, making him first African-American Deputy Attorney General in Nevada

1995 Johnnie B. Rawlinson becomes Chief Deputy District Attorney, making her first African-American woman Chief Deputy District Attorney

1995 U.S. Supreme Court holds affirmative action programs constitutional if they fulfill a “compelling governmental interest” and are “narrowly tailored” to fit particular situation (Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Pena, 515 U.S. 200 (1995))

1997 Nevada Supreme Court upholds University and Community College System of Nevada’s narrowly tailored affirmative action plan which uses race as one of several factors as constitutional based on a demonstrated
compelling interest in fostering culturally and ethnically diverse faculty (Univ. and Cmty. College Sys. of Nevada v. Farmer, 113 Nev. 90 (1997))

1997 Las Vegas Veterans Affairs Facility names Addeliar D. Guy, III Ambulatory Care Center after Judge Guy, a decorated veteran of WWII and Korea

1998 Reno City Council appoints Kenneth Howard to Reno Municipal Court by making him first and only African-American judge to sit on Reno Municipal Court

1998 President William J. Clinton appoints Johnnie B. Rawlinson to U.S. District Court, Nevada, making her first African-American woman judge on U.S. District Court in Nevada

2000 President William J. Clinton appoints U.S. District Court Judge Johnnie B. Rawlinson to U.S. Court of Appeals for Ninth Circuit, making her first African-American woman judge on Ninth Circuit

2001 Nevada Trial Lawyers Association (now Nevada Justice Association) elects Timothy C. Williams President, making him first African-American president of that organization

2002 Clark County Commission appoints Karen Bennett-Haron to Las Vegas Justice Court, making her first African-American woman appointed to Las Vegas Justice Court and first African-American woman appointed to Nevada’s state justice system

2002 EEOC settles race discrimination lawsuit against Mirage Hotel and Casino (Case No. CV S-02-1554 RLH - LRL, in U.S. District Court, Nevada) U.S. Supreme Court holds race can be one of many factors considered by colleges when selecting students because it furthers “a compelling interest in obtaining the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body” (Grutter v. Bolinger, 539 U.S. 306 (2003))

2004 Governor Kenny Guinn appoints Judge Michael L. Douglas to Nevada Supreme Court, making him first African-American justice on Nevada Supreme Court

2006 Kevin Williams (1959-2010) appointed Clark County District Court Hearing Master, making him first criminal arraignment hearing master in Nevada

2006 Professor Kay Kindred appointed as Commissioner on National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, making her first African-American woman to represent Nevada in that organization

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2007    John Valery White becomes second dean of UNLV Boyd School of Law
2008    Washoe County Public Defender’s Office hires Christine Jones Brady, making her first African-American Deputy Public Defender in that office; Brady is daughter of Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer Co. (1968) plaintiffs Joseph Lee and Barbara Jones
2009    Barack H. Obama sworn in as President of the United States

2010

2010    EEOC files lawsuit against Henderson car dealerships for race discrimination (Case No. 2:10-cv-01692-KJD-RJJ)
2011    Justice Michael L. Douglas selected as Chief Justice of Nevada Supreme Court, making him first African-American Chief Justice of Nevada Supreme Court

2011    Brotherhood of Klans Knights of KKK remains active in Nevada
2011    Henderson City Attorney’s Office hires F. Travis Buchanan as Assistant City Attorney for City of Henderson, making him first African-American lawyer in that office
2011    Berna Rhodes-Ford opens law firm of Rhodes-Ford & Associates, believed to be first African-American-owned firm in Henderson
2011    Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association establishes Archive at Wiener-Rogers Law Library, UNLV Boyd School of Law

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