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A Short Road to Statehood, A Long Road to Washington

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NEVADA 2012

A Special Series on African Americans in Nevada Politics – Past and Present

In 2012, Nevadans elected the first African American in the state's history to represent Nevada in the U.S. Congress, reelected the first Black Supreme Court Justice in the state's history, elected one Black woman and two Black men to the Nevada State Senate, reelected five African Americans to the Nevada Assembly, and elected two African Americans (one of whom was reelected) to serve concurrent terms, for the first time, on the University of Nevada Board of Regents.



Pictures of Nevada elected officials subject to copyright and used with permission.

Not Pictured: Senator Kelvin Atkinson, Senator Patricia Spearman, Assemblyman Harvey Munford, Assemblyman Steven Brooks, University Regent Cedrick Crear, and University Regent Allison Stephens.

Nevada – 2010 Census Results: Percent Change in Population by County: 2000 to 2010
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Census 2000 and 2010 Census Redistricting Summary File*, available at http://www.census.gov/geo/www/maps/2010pop/nv_perchange_2010map.jpg.

A Short Road to Statehood, A Long Road to Washington

Almost 150 years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the proclamation by which Nevada was admitted as the 36th state in the Union on October 31, 1864, the election of U.S. Congressman Steven Horsford (dem.) marks a milestone in the state's and the nation's history.

It is common knowledge that the first Black President of the United States, President Barack Obama, was reelected in the 2012 election. However, many people are not aware that 2012 is also the year that Nevadans elected the first African American to represent the state in the U.S. Congress in the state's 149-year history. What may be even less well known is that Representative Steven Horsford's successful

election to Nevada's fourth congressional seat also has national significance.

Nevada was admitted to the Union in 1864 as part of efforts to ensure the constitutionally required two-thirds majority to pass the Thirteenth Amendment, which made slavery illegal in the United States except as a punishment for crime. At the time Nevada was admitted, the state's population was too small to meet the population requirement for statehood. Now in 2013, an African American, who represents a new congressional district created as a result of growth in the state's population, will vote in the U.S. Congress on behalf of Nevada, a state whose votes helped to abolish the widespread practice of legal enslavement of Blacks in the United States.



Supreme Court Justice Michael Douglas



Senator Aaron Ford



Assemblyman Jason Frierson



Assemblyman William Horne



U.S. Congressman Steven Horsford



Assemblywoman Dina Neal

By Professor Rachel J. Anderson



(l-r) Nevada Supreme Court Justice Michael Douglas, U.S. Congressman John Lewis, U.S. Congressman Steven Horsford (during the 2012 campaign) at the 23rd Annual LVNBA Scholarship Gala in Las Vegas on Oct. 20, 2012. © LVNBA, used with permission

Blacks in Nevada Elections

By Professor Rachel J. Anderson

Over the years, Blacks have faced many uphill battles in Nevada elections. After the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, William M. Bird ran for mayor of Virginia City in the 1870 election. Mr. Bird was a well-known local barber and had been a political activist at a national level. Despite his popularity and position as an influential member of the Black community, Mr. Bird was subjected to disproportionately negative coverage in the local print media and a paucity of neutral or positive coverage. This and other challenges that have been present since statehood continue to be hurdles for Black candidates in Nevada to this day.

However, persistence, strategy, hard work, and being a qualified candidate can pay off. Over the years a small but growing number of Blacks, among them LVNBA members, have been elected to statewide and local offices in Nevada. In the 2012 election cycle, a number of LVNBA members ran for public office. They included Justice Michael Douglas, Senator Aaron Ford, Assemblyman Jason



Attorney Berna Rhodes-Ford organizes numerous election events each year. © Berna Rhodes-Ford, used with permission

Frierson, Assemblyman William Horne, Attorney Phung Jefferson, Attorney Jonathan MacArthur, Assemblywoman Dina Neal, and Attorney Marsha Kimble Simms.

LVNBA Members also participated in the 2012 elections by disseminating information about voting rights, registering voters, offering their offices for the training of election observers, poll watching, driving voters to the polls, answering calls in the Obama campaign boiler room and on voter information hotlines, and hosting debate watch events and open forum discussions.



Rachel Anderson is an Associate Professor of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) William S. Boyd School of Law, Vice President of the LVNBA, and a member of the NBA. She earned her J.D. from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law and her M.A. from Stanford University.



Claytee White is a historian and the Director of the Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries. She received her bachelor's degree from California State University Los Angeles, master's degree in history from UNLV, and has completed work toward a doctorate at the College of William & Mary.

Selected Sources for the Nevada 2012 Special Series

Books

Earnest N. Bracey, *The Moulin Rouge and Black Rights In Las Vegas: A History of the First Racially Integrated Hotel-Casino* (2009).

Effie Mona Mack, *Nevada: A History of the State from the Earliest Times Through the Civil War* (1936).

Elmer R. Rusco, "Good Time Coming?," *Black Nevadans in the Nineteenth Century* (1975).

Jerry L. Simich & Thomas C. Wright, *The Peoples Of Las Vegas: One City, Many Faces* (2005).

Nevada State Bar Magazine

Rachel J. Anderson, *Timeline of African-American Legal History in Nevada* (1861-2011), *Nevada Lawyer*, Feb. 2012, at 8.

Richard Boulware, *Dedicated to Excellence: National Bar Association, Las Vegas Chapter*, *Nevada Lawyer*, Feb. 2012, at 26.

Claytee White & Geralda Miller, *Charles L. Kellar: Legal Trailblazer in Nevada*, *Nevada Lawyer*, Feb. 2012, at 20.

Oral History Transcripts

Oral histories from interviews of Aaron Ford, William Horne, and Joseph M. Neal, Jr. on October 5-9, 2012 housed at the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association (LVNBA) Archive at the Wiener-Rogers Law Library at the UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law and the African-American History Collaborative Collection at the Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries Special Collections.

Newspaper Articles

THE EVENING REVIEW JOURNAL, 22 July 1930 and Clark County, Nevada 1910 Federal Census (transcribed by Patricia A. Scott & proofread by Daniel A. Scott for the USGenWeb Census Project), available at <http://ftp.us-census.org/pub/ungenweb/census/nv/clark/1920/>.

"A.B. MITCHELL RANCH BEING BROUGHT UNDER CULTIVATION," LAS VEGAS AGE, MAR. 3, 1923.

"COLORED FOLK ENJOY PICNIC," LAS VEGAS AGE, OCT. 30, 1928.

Web-Based Resources

Election of 1932: Changing the Guard, History Program, www.AMUOnline.com/History, at <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h894.html> (last visited Oct. 9, 2012).