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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).