

# Dedicated to Excellence:

## NATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION, LAS VEGAS CHAPTER

BY RICHARD F. BOULWARE, ESQ.



LVNBA members at the 2011 Celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the founding of the association. Front row, left to right: Dan Winder, Andras T. Barbero, Arthur J. Williams, Jr., Booker T. Evans, James O. Porter; Second row, left to right: Augusta Massey, Kelley Jones, Cybill Dotson, F. Travis Buchanan, Bryan Scott, Geraldine Kirk-Hughes, Karen Williams, Cuthbert Mack, Justice Michael L. Douglas, Richard Manhattan, Judge Gloria Sturman, Patricia Lee, Prof. Rachel J. Anderson; Third row: Randolph Westbrook, John Bailey, Sandra Douglass Morgan, Alda Anderson, Richard F. Boulware, [unknown], Alicia Monroe, [unknown], Michael Guy (non-attorney, son of Judge

Guy), Doreen Spears Hartwell, Phung Jefferson, Karl Armstrong, Alzora Jackson-Winder and Jonathan MacArthur) (Source: LVNBA Archive at the Wiener-Rogers Law Library, photo taken by Kathleen J. England)

▶ LVNBA Founder, Judge Johnnie B. Rawlinson, with former and current clerks at the 2011 LVNBA Scholarship Gala (from left to right): Kelley Jones, Berna Rhodes-Ford, Judge Johnnie B. Rawlinson, Ogonna Atamoh and Aaron Ford (Source: LVNBA Archive at the Wiener-Rogers Law Library, photo taken by Marelis Qualls)



This article seeks to present a brief overview of the history of the courageous African-American attorneys who founded the Las Vegas Chapter, the continued commitment of the membership to the chapter and the significance of the chapter to the larger community and the bar. The quotations in this article are taken from transcripts of oral histories that are part of the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association Archive at the Wiener-Rogers Law Library at the UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law. The oral histories used were conducted by Claytee D. White,

Director of the Oral History Research Center at UNLV, in 2011 on behalf of the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association.

The historical and professional context that gave birth to the LVNBA is perhaps best captured in the story of the first African American to actually pass the Nevada bar exam, Charles L. Kellar, but who was initially denied admission on “character” grounds. Kellar had practiced law for many years in Brooklyn, New York before being asked by Thurgood Marshall, the then-head of the NAACP Bar Representation Program, to move to Las Vegas to address issues of racial inequality in the state. Kellar moved to Las Vegas and became involved with the local chapter of the NAACP in 1959 – the same year that Nevada’s 98-year-old anti-miscegenation law (1959 Nev. Stat., ch. 193, at 216) was finally repealed by the Legislature.

The Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association (LVNBA) emerged in 1980 and was incorporated in 1981 at the end of a decade of tremendous racial change in society in general and in Nevada in particular. The National Bar Association is a professional association of African-American attorneys and judges that was founded in 1925 – an era when the few African-American attorneys who practiced were generally not allowed to join most other professional legal organizations. Each chapter of the NBA, however, has its own unique story.



Kellar took and passed the Nevada bar exam in 1961. The state bar denied Kellar's admission for failing to meet "character standards" after conducting *ex parte* hearings at which he was not present, and in which he was alleged to be involved with subversive organizations – most likely the NAACP. (See *Application of Kellar*, 81 Nev. 240, 245 (1965)) Kellar sued the state bar. During the pendency of this case, Earle W. White, Jr. and Robert L. Reid were admitted in 1964 as the first African-American attorneys to the Nevada bar. The Nevada Supreme Court finally ruled in 1965 (in a split 2-1 opinion) that Kellar was denied due process and improperly denied admission. (*Id.*)

In the years that followed this landmark decision and leading up to the founding of the LVNBA, Las Vegas and Nevada witnessed the steady dismantling of the institutional legacies of Jim Crow policies in Nevada. In 1965, the Legislature finally passed, after five previous failed attempts, the Nevada Civil Rights Act, to prohibit discrimination in public accommodations and employment. (1965 Nev. Stat., ch. 332, at 689) The federal court in Nevada ordered in 1971 the desegregation of the gaming industry. (*Consent Decree*, U.S. District Court, Nevada, filed June 4, 1971, *United States of America v. Nevada Resort Association, et al.*) In 1972, the Ninth Circuit upheld the order of the federal court in Nevada to desegregate schools in Clark County. (*Kelly v. Guinn*, 456 F.2d 100 (9th Cir. 1972))

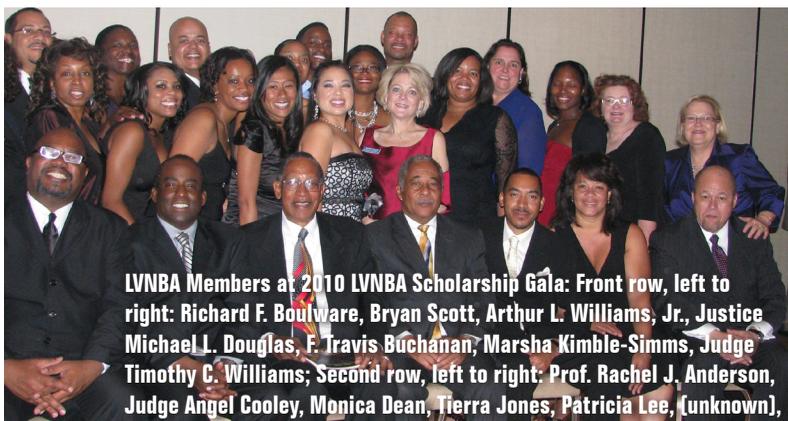
These societal developments were accompanied by similar halting but significant professional advancements for African-American attorneys. For example, in 1969, Robert "Moon" Mullen was elected Las Vegas Municipal Court Judge (as a non-attorney). Robert L. Reid was elected Justice of the Peace for Las Vegas Township in 1970. Addelair D. Guy, III was appointed judge to the Eighth Judicial District Court in 1975.

The turning point for the formation of the LVNBA came in 1980 with the admission of Viveca Monet Woods and Johnnie B. Rawlinson to the Nevada bar as the first African-

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**LVNBA Members at 2010 LVNBA Scholarship Gala: Front row, left to right: Richard F. Boulware, Bryan Scott, Arthur L. Williams, Jr., Justice Michael L. Douglas, F. Travis Buchanan, Marsha Kimble-Simms, Judge Timothy C. Williams; Second row, left to right: Prof. Rachel J. Anderson, Judge Angel Cooley, Monica Dean, Tierra Jones, Patricia Lee, (unknown),**

**Judge Nancy Ailf, (unknown), Judge Kathleen Delaney, (unknown), Judge Gloria J. Sturman, Kathleen J. England, Third row, left to right: Dean John V. White, Doreen Spears Hartwell, Malcom LaVergne, Amber White-Davis, Karl Riley, Berna Rhodes-Ford and Aaron Ford**

(Source: LVNBA Archive at the Wiener-Rogers Law Library)

American women admitted to practice in Nevada. In the words of one of the founders, Arthur L. Williams, Jr., the first African-American general counsel for a major company in Las Vegas, the “idea for the chapter” coalesced “with Viveca and Johnnie.” Despite the advancements, Williams comments, “we knew we needed each other” socially and professionally to flourish in a challenging legal environment with few minority lawyers. The chapter was born of this need and founded in 1981 by Robert Archie, B. Jeanne Banks, Andras F. Barbero, Marcus Cooper, James Davidson, Michael Allen Davis, David Dean, Booker T. Evans, Judge Addelair D. Guy, III, James O. Porter, Johnnie B. Rawlinson, Justice of the Peace Earle W. White, Jr., Arthur L. Williams, Jr. and Dan Winder.

The founders had a shared commitment to the diversity of the Nevada bar. As Judge Rawlinson explained, “Our goal was to have African-American attorneys in every area of the legal arena in Las Vegas from private practice to the DA’s Office to the Public Defender’s Office, to the school district. We just wanted to have the community be exposed to competent, capable African-American attorneys in the community because the community just had not seen that.” They saw a burgeoning legal community with many “kinds of opportunities that were not available to us,” according to Evans. Given the small number of African-American lawyers in Nevada at the time, the creation of the local chapter, according to Winder, “gave us an opportunity for mentoring one another.”

Much of the mentoring occurred in public agencies, such as the District Attorney’s Office, where several founders established their presence professionally and recruited other African-American attorneys to the office. This began, even before the formal inception of the chapter, with Guy being the first African American in the office in 1966. It continued with the later employment of Evans, Rawlinson and Winder at



**2010 Specialty Bar Association Leaders (left to right:) Sophia Long (LVNBA), Jocelyn Cortez (Las Vegas Latino Bar Association), Puoy Premririt (South Asian Bar Association), Richard F. Boulware (LVNBA), Puneet Garg (South Asian Bar Association) and F. Travis Buchanan (LVNBA) at a co-sponsored judicial meet & greet**

(Source: LVNBA Archive at the Wiener-Rogers Law Library)

the District Attorney’s Office. Archie, Cooper and Porter had begun with the Public Defender’s Office.

The founders also shared a commitment to social justice and racial equality in Nevada. This included – and still includes to this day – the LVNBA providing free legal clinics to the minority community to address issues of discrimination and other legal problems. One of the central motivations of the founding was to “bring the message of enlightenment and empowerment to the community through the auspices of the local chapter of the NBA,” remembers Judge Rawlinson.

The LVNBA is committed to giving back to the local community by providing financial assistance to students demonstrating an interest in pursuing a legal career while also providing free legal symposiums to the community at large. At the grade school level, the LVNBA provides school supplies to three or four elementary schools during its annual backpack drive. In addition to the backpack drive, this year the LVNBA has also decided to partner with Sedway Middle School with the intention of sparking an early interest in a legal career among low-income and minority students. At the secondary level, the LVNBA awards scholarships/grants to high school students who participate in the LVNBA’s Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drum Major for Justice Essay and Oral Advocacy Competition. The students must write a 1,000-word essay on a designated topic from the perspective of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. followed by an oral presentation of the essay.

At the college/advanced degree level, the LVNBA works closely with the Black Law Students’ Association at the UNLV Boyd School of Law, providing mentoring and working to identify employment and other opportunities. The LVNBA has a 23-year tradition of providing scholarships to law students who demonstrate a commitment to assisting the most needy and underserved members of the larger community. The Scholarship Gala, which will celebrate its 23rd year in

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2012, was established to have a social event that also created resources for supporting the community. This tradition has continued to this day – with the LVNBA through its non-profit foundation giving over \$10,000 in scholarships in 2011 alone.

The LVNBA tries to give back to the community through its participation in the Ask a Lawyer program on KCEP 88.1 FM. This is an hour-long radio show where members respond to legal questions from the listeners. Last fall, the LVNBA hosted a Juvenile Justice Symposium where both judges and attorneys presented an all-day workshop for youths relating to the juvenile justice system. In 2011, the LVNBA, in conjunction with the UNLV Boyd School of Law, established an archive that is hosted at the Wiener-Rogers Law Library. The archive is a work in progress that contains a number of oral histories from some of the founding members of the LVNBA in addition to historical documents relating to the association. In 2012, the LVNBA joined the Law Related Education Consortium. The consortium is a group of Nevada law-related education providers coming together to help our Nevada communities understand how our government and legal systems work.

We must also recognize that the LVNBA, its members and minority lawyers in general would not have been able to achieve as much as they did without the support of many non-minority attorneys and others in the Las Vegas community. While these individuals are too numerous to acknowledge

in this short article, their public and private efforts for racial equality cannot be overestimated. Indeed, the publication of this issue is a reflection of such a collaborative effort in our legal community.

As this community has evolved over the years since the inception of the local chapter of the NBA, the founders' vision of a diverse bar with increasing opportunities for minority attorneys has begun to take hold. The continuing accomplishments of African-American attorneys in Nevada, including LVNBA members, are documented throughout this issue. Nonetheless, our legal community continues to face ongoing challenges involving low diversity in the bar, minority promotion within law firms, minority appointments to public positions and diversity on the bench. The LVNBA remains committed to the complete fulfillment of its founders' vision of a diverse local bar in which minorities find equal opportunities and representation in all areas of practice. ■



**RICHARD F. BOULWARE** is an Assistant Federal Public Defender, a past President of the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association from December 2009 to November 2011, and a past member of the National Bar Association Board of Governors. He holds a J.D. from Columbia University School of Law.