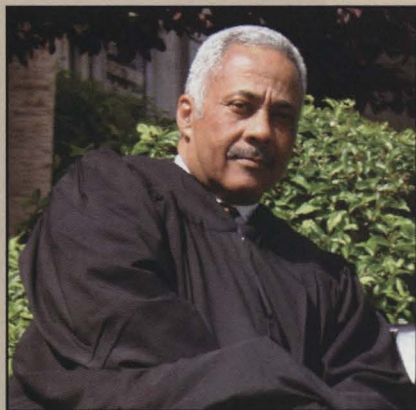


# Making History

## CHIEF JUDGE MICHAEL DOUGLAS NAMED NEVADA'S FIRST BLACK SUPREME COURT JUSTICE



By: Mae Flennoy, Communications Director/ Nevada Lawyer Editor



Calmly seated in his modest Clark County Courthouse chambers, a humbled Chief Judge Michael Douglas politely shuns the impending pageantry of officially taking his place in history. Instead, he chooses to direct his attention to the job at hand — the

job of ensuring access to justice for all and serving diligently as a member of the high court.

Still, he acknowledges reality — that his name will be etched in Nevada's history as the first African-American to don the robe of Nevada Supreme Court Justice in the 140-year history of the court.

Judge Douglas' investiture took place on May 3, 2004, almost 50 years to the day that Thurgood Marshall, who went on to become the first black U.S. Supreme Court Justice, won the landmark case ending segregation in schools. With this badge of honor, he says, comes an immeasurable level of responsibility.

"It's very important that I'm successful, because it impacts people after me," he says. "The history is nice, but within it, you want to feel you got where you are because you deserve to be there. You want to feel you were put there because you have the ability to do the job. If you're put there for the wrong reasons and you fail, you do more harm."

Judge Douglas fills the position left vacant by the sudden passing of Justice Myron Leavitt. Gov. Kenny Guinn appointed him to the position, which expires January 2005. He will then have to run for election to continue in office for the remainder of the term. Judge Douglas had planned to run for Justice Miriam Shearing's position upon her retirement this year.

"About eight years ago, I replaced Judge Guy, who was a legend in his own right. Justice Leavitt was a judge right next door then," he recalls. "Judge Guy asked him to take care of me and mentor me. Justice Leavitt did that. When I went for the Supreme Court, I was hoping to sit next to Justice

Leavitt, not in his stead. I can't fill anybody's shoes. I have my own shoes to fill, and they're much smaller. I'll do the best I can and hope they would be proud. What they would have expected of me is to be fair, courteous, and able to justify the decisions I make. Justice Leavitt kept a common touch and worked with others to bridge gaps. That was his legacy."

Judge Douglas was chosen by Gov. Guinn following recommendations from the Commission on Judicial Selection, which had also selected Las Vegas attorney Gregory Smith and Reno attorney David Hunter Hamilton as finalists.

"Judge Douglas has impeccable credentials and is a worthy addition to the Supreme Court of Nevada," Gov. Guinn said in the announcement. "Since 1996, he has served with distinction as District Court Judge for the State of Nevada. As Chief Judge for the Eighth Judicial District, he is eminently qualified. Although replacing a man like Justice Leavitt — who was a good friend of mine — is by no means easy, Judge Douglas is a man of great intellect with all of the positive character traits that have always distinguished the great justices of our state."

Judge Douglas, 56, was born in Los Angeles, where he graduated from Dorsey High School. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from California State University, Long Beach, in 1971. He is a 1974 graduate of the University of California's Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco.

"I am greatly honored to receive this appointment from Gov. Guinn," Douglas said. "I am extremely excited for the opportunity to work with the other justices of the Supreme Court of Nevada during a very important juncture in the history of our state."

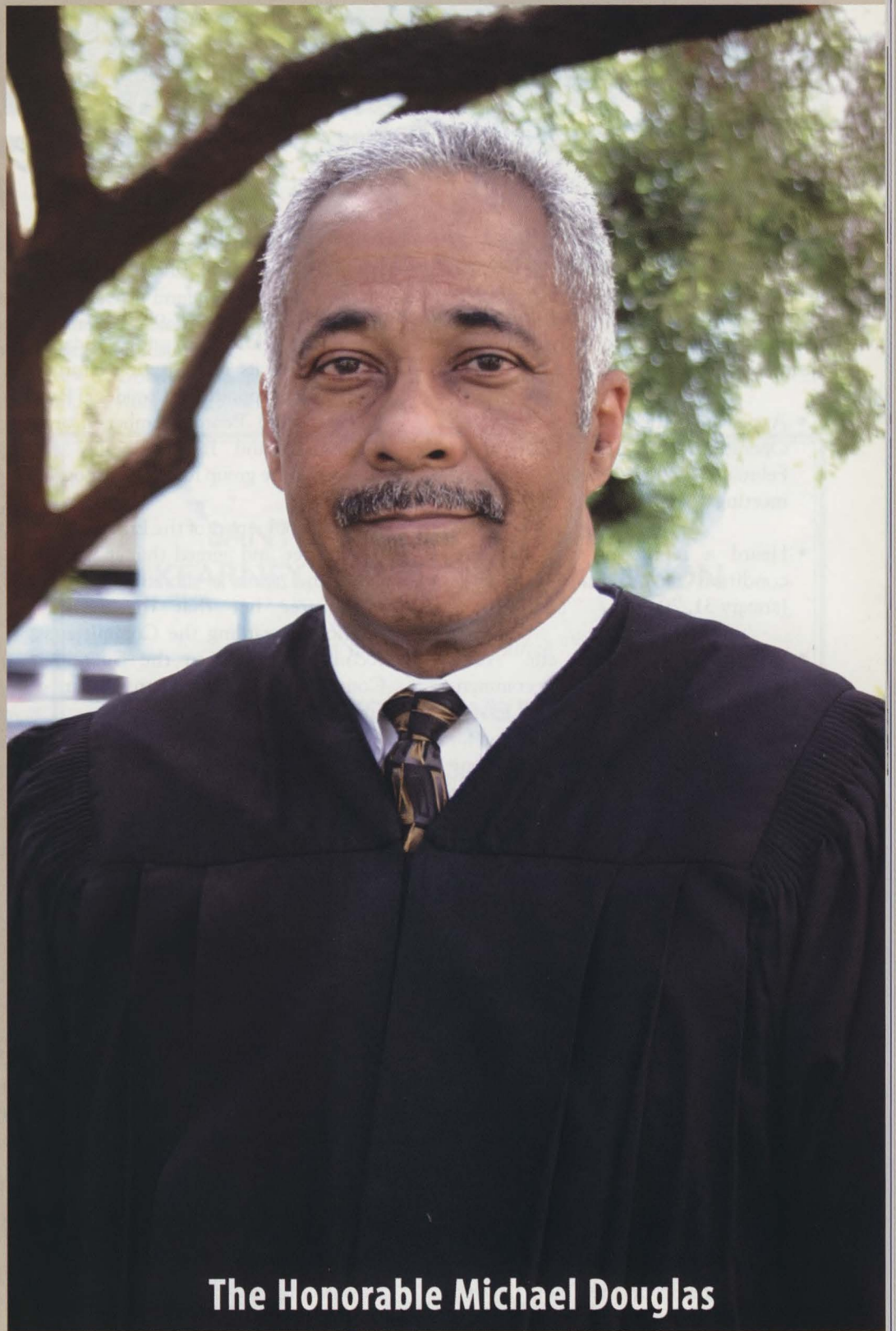
Judge Douglas moved to Las Vegas in 1982. From 1982-84 he worked as staff attorney and directing attorney for Nevada Legal Services in Clark County. From November 1984 through December 1995, he served as Deputy District Attorney for the Clark County District Attorney's Office. Since 1996, he has served as a District Court Judge for the State of Nevada, primarily handling civil and criminal motion practice, evidentiary hearings, and jury and non-jury trials.

Judge Douglas' membership in bar associations, professional or judicial societies as well as other organizations is

extensive. He is a member of the Litigation and Rules Committee and Education Committee for the Judicial Council of the State of Nevada; he is currently the Vice President of the Nevada District Judges Association, having previously served as secretary, trustee and on the organization's Education Committee; he is President-Elect of the Nevada American Inns of Court and is a Judicial Delegate to the American Bar Association; he has served on the Southern Nevada Disciplinary Panel, the Professionalism Committee, and Access to Justice of the State Bar of Nevada; he has served on the Education Committee of the Clark County Bar Association, served as President of the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association and is a member of the Nevada Gaming Attorneys, Pennsylvania Bar Association, Philadelphia Bar Association, National District Attorneys Association and American Judges Association.

His honors include: 1996, National Federation of Black Public Administrators Mark of Excellence Award; 1998, Black Law Students Association (Western Region) Community Service Award; 1998-2004, Distinguished Men in Southern Nevada; 2001, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, 53rd Western Regional Convention Hall of Fame Award; 2002, Who's Who Historical Society; 2003, Nevada Law Foundation Colleague. In addition, Judge Douglas, who is married, has been a long-time youth sports volunteer and coach. ■

*Portions of this article were taken from a press release from the Governor's office.*



## The Honorable Michael Douglas

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