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BLACK FEMALE LAWYERS IN ONTARIO

Chronological History

“If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.”

— **Shirley Chisholm**

1968, the first black woman elected to Congress

1972 the first black woman to make a major-party bid for the Presidency

1855

- Robert Sutherland, **Ontario's first Black lawyer**, is called to the Bar
 - slavery did not legally end in Canada until 1834 (only 4 years after Sutherland was born) and the institution of slavery was still thriving in the United States, which were still more than two decades away from entering the Civil War.

1886

- Delos Roget Davis, after a lengthy struggle, becomes the **second Black lawyer** called to the Bar in Ontario (after Robert Sutherland in 1855)
 - who was born into slavery in Maryland, but later escaped with his family through the Underground Railroad and grew up in what is now Windsor, Ontario.

1897

- Admission of Clara Brett Martin - **first woman lawyer in British Commonwealth.**

1924

- Mr. Ethelbert Lionel Cross –**First Black Lawyer to practice in Toronto** (previously called to the Nova Scotia Bar in 1923).

1943

- Helen Kinnear is appointed judge of the Haldimand County Court, making her the **first federally appointed woman judge in Canada** and also the first woman to hold such an appointment in the British Commonwealth.

1945

- Ivy Lawrence Maynier '45 (1921 - 1999) **First woman of colour to graduate from the U of T Law School and called to the British Bar in 1947.**

1954

- Violet King '53 (Law, University of Alberta) was the first:
 - **first black female lawyer in Canada**
 - black person to graduate law in Alberta
 - and first black person to be admitted to the Alberta Bar.

1959

- **Myrtle Blackwood-Smith** was Osgoode's first female Black graduate in 1959 and first **Black woman called to the Ontario Bar in 1960.**

1970

- 1970 – 1979 - 4 black women called to the Ontario Bar and practice – Including the Hon. Micheline Rawlins who will go on to be the 1st black woman appointed to the Ontario judiciary in 1992.

1971

- Mabel Van Camp becomes a justice of the Ontario Supreme Court's High Court of Justice - the first woman to be appointed to an Ontario Superior Court.

1977

- Marion Ironquill Meadmore became the 1st indigenous woman lawyer in Canada.

1980

- 1982 - the first woman, the Honourable Justice Bertha Wilson is appointed to Supreme Court of Canada.
- 1980-89 – 21 BFL graduates – including 2 sitting judges, 1 associate chair of the OHRT, 1 CABL past president.

1987

- **Justice Corrine E. Sparks is the first black female judge to be appointed in Canada.**
- **Appointed to Nova Scotia Family Court.**

1990

- 1992 - Hon. Micheline Rawlins becomes the 1st black woman appointed to the Ontario judiciary.
- **1996 - Juanita Westmoreland-Traoré - dean of the Law Faculty at the University of Windsor, the first black Canadian to hold such a post. Juanita Westmoreland-Traoré is now a judge in Quebec, and is also the first black Canadian to be appointed to the bench in that province.**

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- 100 known (Ontario) Black female law graduates in the mid 1990s (1997)

2000 – over 200 known black female law graduates

- 2001 – Professor Joanne St. Lewis becomes first black woman elected as bencher to LSUC (Isuc established in 1797)
- #200 – in 2003
- August 9, 2016, Toronto lawyer Tanya Walker became the first elected black woman from Toronto to become a Bencher in the Law Society of Upper Canada's 219-year history.

BFLN recognizes there are many names absent from our list especially

- internationally trained lawyers
- law graduates who were not called to the Bar
- Likely over the #500 mark when you add those considerations
- Updates and corrections are welcome!

OTHER RESOURCES

Excerpt from Racialization and Gender of lawyers in Ontario Professor Michael Orinstein's 2010 Report to LSUC

Link: <http://www.lsuc.on.ca/with.aspx?id=658>

“Because gender and racialization are not independent, examining their “intersection” reveals phenomena change that would otherwise be invisible. It turns out that the last decade’s increases in the proportion of lawyers who are women is largely attributable to racialized women who have been

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making greater gains than racialized men in recent years. The percentage of lawyers who are racialized men appears to have stabilized and may even be declining – it is too soon to tell – while the proportion of racialized women continues to grow. Figures in Table 14, illustrated in Chart 11 show that:

- among Ontario lawyers under 30 in 2006, 7 percent are racialized men and 16 percent are racialized women;
- among lawyers age 30 to 34, 9 percent are racialized men and 12 percent are racialized women
- among lawyers age 35 to 39, 8 percent are racialized men and 10 percent are racialized women; and
- among lawyers age 40 to 44, 7 percent are racialized men and 6 percent are racialized women.”

LSUC Data on Lawyers In Ontario

- 49,048 as of November 25, 2015
 - 24,417 in private practice;
 - 13,931 otherwise employed (education, government, etc.);
 - 10,700 not employed in Ontario (retired, outside of Ontario, etc.))
- 28,706 lawyers are male and 20,342 are female

Link: <http://www.lsuc.on.ca/faq.aspx?id=1275>

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BLFN believes it is important to record and preserve the history of black female legal practitioners in Ontario. BFLN currently maintains documentation that provides an approximate overview of the history of black female lawyers in Ontario.

BFLN's research demonstrates the following:

1. # of black women called in the 1960: 1
2. # of black women called in the 1970s: 6
3. # of black women called in the 1980s: 22
4. # of black women called to the Bar in the 1990s: 128
5. # of black women called to the Bar in the 2000s: 199
6. # of black women called to the Bar in the 2010s: 100+

Past Board Executive Nicole Myers maintains BFLN research and gained the following information from the terrific Records and Information Management Specialists at the LSUC Archives.

The following information is provided for context and present approximate estimations of lawyers called to the Ontario Bar between 1961 – 2000.

Decade / Year	Number of women called to the Ontario Bar	Number of men Called to the Ontario Bar	BFLN List (black women called to the Ontario Bar and identify)
61-70	96	2772	1* called in 1960
71-80	1266	6935	6
81-88	3082	5529	22
90	485	708	4
91	490	680	6
92	525	712	7
93	540	655	8
94	586	671	13
95	580	623	10
96	581	684	15
97	552	598	27
98	598	632	20
99	556	627	17
2000	610	630	13

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