

## What Haywood County Lost When Citizens' Voting Rights Were Illegally Repressed

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In October of 1884, twenty-eight-year-old John Shepard, an African American living in District 2 of Haywood County, was called to serve on a county grand jury. Fourteen months later C. B. Bailey and Oscar Walker, both African Americans were Haywood County magistrates (today's county commissioners). Bailey was from District 5 and Walker from District 7.

In the August election of 1886, William Winfield, also an African American, was duly and constitutionally elected Registrar for Haywood County (today's Registrar of Deeds). The following men made bond for \$12,500 as a guarantee Winfield would faithfully discharge the duties of this office: William Winfield, Benjamin Hay, Robert Collier, John Hawkins, Charles Bond, Harry Parker, James Thornton, Jack Parker, George Owen, and W. J. Lyle. All guarantors were African Americans except W. J. Lyle. During this same period, Mitchell Holloway was constable for the 11<sup>th</sup> District. His bondsmen were Tom Read, Casso Winfield, Jacob Read, Clem Taliaferro, George Moore, and W. J. Lyle with Lyle being the only one not African American.

The voices of African Americans in Haywood County government began to be heard in the 1870s and the period when their representation in government was highest was between 1884 and 1888 when the general election was stolen and the illegal curtailment of African American participation in local government began. The end result was that by 1907 District 7, which included the city of Brownsville, had 400 white men registered to vote and only 4 African Americans. By 1915 there were no African American registered voters in Haywood County. This would remain so until 1960. No African Americans served on juries or in any other governmental capacity. This meant during this 50-year period the concerns and desires of African Americans who constituted more than 60% of the population went unheard in all aspects of Haywood County government.