

Remembering the Presidency of Carolyn Jefferson Jenkins

By Deborah Hayes

Expanding upon Debby Vink's LWV history quiz elsewhere in this *Voter*, I would recommend a new book, "[The Untold Story of Women of Color in the League of Women Voters](#)," by Carolyn Jefferson Jenkins, our LWVUS president from 1998 to 2002 and our only Black president before Deborah Turner.

Carolyn was nominated and elected in 1998 in what must have been inclusionary zeal. That zeal apparently faded by 2000, when the nominating committee chose someone else. It's unusual for a president not to be nominated for a second term, so Carolyn arranged to be nominated from the floor. She had support from her board, almost all of whom the nominating committee replaced as well—also unusual. Anyway, she won re-election, but she met resistance in presiding at the 2000 convention. Her new board made a rule (contrary to the bylaws) that she was not allowed to appoint anyone herself. So I guess by 2002 she was used to anger and resistance.

I attended the LWVUS convention in Miami in 2002. No one else from Boulder Valley or Longmont LWVs went. I didn't know Carolyn but she lived in Colorado Springs at the time and was friends with several LWVCO delegates; in the book she names Gerry Cummins in particular as providing constant support. As at the 2000 convention, a fairly well-organized group of White delegates decided to register their disapproval of Carolyn. At convention sessions they introduced motions to confirm that her term was about to end; they made insinuations about her qualifications; they challenged her rulings as chair. It was all straight out of the racist playbook—White people resenting a Black person's brilliance. I was appalled and almost ashamed to be a League member.

We Colorado delegates were her support group. We got her to join us in the LWVCO hotel suite between sessions so that she could relax among friends before the next ordeal. She was undaunted. And in February 2020, Carolyn was optimistic. In discussion at a [LWV/Santa Barbara meeting](#), she commented that DEI is accomplishing more than previous attempts at integrating LWV because DEI is funded.

