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The year 1865 saw the end of the Civil War and with it the abolition of slavery in America. Nevertheless, the dream of true equality remained elusive for many Americans. Discriminatory attitudes and practices were often slow to change, as were the laws that reflected them. Even a state like Nevada, with its frontier traditions of equality and individual freedom, was not immune.

This is not to say that discrimination was tolerated in early day Nevada. Many prominent Nevadans voiced their disapproval of discriminatory legislation and joined in the struggle to bring about equality for all a citizens. Some of these early day civil rights crusaders went on to take their places in the pages of Nevada history. Yet there were other Nevadans of the time who, while less well-remembered, made their own unique contributions to social progress. One such unsung hero, whose name has all but escaped completely from the recognition of history, was a seven year-old boy named David Stoutmeyer.

David's story began in 1871 when his father requested that the trustees of the public schools in District 1 of Ormsby County allow David to attend classes in that district. The Stoutmeyers' high hopes for David's education were dashed when David was denied admission under a Nevada law which excluded blacks from public schools. David and his family were unwilling to accept this denial of his rights, however, and they enlisted the aid of Nevada lawyer T.W.W. Davies. With T.W.W. Davies' help, David took his case directly to the Supreme Court--and won.

The Stoutmeyer case marked an important advance toward equal rights in Nevada, and within a year the Nevada legislature repealed the statute which allowed the exclusion of students on the basis of race or color. Thanks to seven year-old David Stoutmeyer, Nevada's schools were opened to all students.

Narrator: Paul Dominique Laxalt. Paul Laxalt is a Nevada native and son of Basque immigrants. He attended the University of Santa Clara and graduated from the University of Denver. He graduated from the University of Denver Law School in 1949 and was admitted to practice law in Nevada that same year. He served as District Attorney of what was then Ormsby County (now Carson City) and as City Attorney for Carson City until 1954. He was elected Lieutenant Governor of Nevada in 1962 and Governor in 1966 (1967-1971). In 1974 he was elected to the United States Senate; he was subsequently appointed by the Governor to fill the vacancy caused by the early resignation of Senator Alan Bible for the term ending January 3, 1975. Senator Bible resigned early so that Senator Laxalt would have seniority over other incoming freshmen senators. Senator Laxalt was re-elected in 1980 and served until 1987. He now practices law in Washington, D.C. but maintains regular contact with family and his many associates in Nevada.

Photograph of Nevada Supreme Court Chief Justice James F. Lewis; and photograph of high school graduating class of 1883, Virginia City, beneficiaries of the Stoutmeyer v Duffy decision, courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.

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[Ten Famous Cases of the Nevada Supreme Court, 1865-1937](#)