

# Jason Frierson

Speaker, Nevada State Assembly

**R**aised in Compton, Calif., Jason Frierson attended the University of Nevada, Reno, where he played football and served as study body president. Frierson made Nevada his home, joining the charter class at the UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law. Upon graduating, he was awarded the Barbara Buckley Community Service Award and clerked for a state Supreme Court justice. Frierson was first elected in 2010, lost his seat in 2014, then won it back in 2016, when he was also elected speaker.

**Are leaders born or made?** I don't think leaders are born or made. I think leaders are realized. People have a leadership trait in them, and it is about to what extent individuals are given the opportunity to explore their potential. I think there's a leader in all of us.

**When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?** I have always found myself in an advocacy position. I have probably been class president or student body president since seventh grade. I jokingly say that I wanted to be a lawyer since I can remember because I was quite argumentative as a child.

**How did you cope with growing up in a tough neighborhood?** Athletics created a significant outlet. It not only kept me busy when I may have otherwise been influenced by more negative parts of my environment, but there was also the discipline, teamwork and focus. Also, we were one of the few real stable two-parent families in the neighborhood. I was blessed with friends that said, 'Jason, you can't come where we're going' because they didn't want to deal with my parents. My friends say that I was always a politician because I lived between two really bad rival neighborhoods. I always had to keep the peace, because I had to walk by them to go to school or the store. I've always been someone who was born to build bridges, to develop and maintain relationships. It's served me in my adult life very well.

**What lessons did you learn playing football?** Sports provided me with exposure to people from different backgrounds in a way that I would have otherwise never experienced. I had maybe two white friends growing up, and

participating in sports, in particular in college, there were folks from big cities and small towns, urban cores and rural farms. We became a team and we had to put those differences aside for a common goal. When we were on that field, we forgot we were from different places. That helped me relate to people who I might not agree with, but recognize that if we have a common goal, we can put those differences aside. I carry that with me.

**What would surprise people most to learn about you?** I have always been and continue to be anxious and uncomfortable about public speaking. It's something I have to work hard at. I feel like I have improved. I attribute it to my recognition that I'm better when I'm genuine.

**How do you stay at the top of your game?** I have relieved myself of the pressure of trying to be someone other than who I am. I'm more effective when I remember that this legislative role doesn't define me; this is just an opportunity to serve. As long as I leave it better than how I found it, when it's over, I'm OK.

**Who is your role model?** My big brother, Damian. When he and I are in a room together, we are two peas in a pod, but objectively we couldn't be more different. He's not a politician. He's not one that's comfortable in the public eye. He's not interested in that at all. He always kept me out of trouble, but he also let me handle challenges so that I grew from it. I think we're unusually close for being five years apart.

**As the parent of a 5-year-old boy and 3-year-old girl, what are you learning from them?** My children are wonderful. They are really cool. They're interesting and smart and they amaze me every day. They remind me that everybody has potential, and everybody is an individual. We raised our kids the same, but they are very different.

**What final words would you like to share?** In this climate of political dysfunction and partisan rhetoric, I'm so passionate and driven about setting a foundation for the institution of the state legislature to be different than the national story. I think on a state level, we have a chance to do what Congress hasn't been able to do. We not only have a chance, we have an obligation to innovate and advocate for those ideas, and then ultimately lead. I think it falls on us. Every week we're reminded that we can't sit back and wait for someone else to do it. As state leaders we have an opportunity and an obligation to be at the forefront of dictating where this country goes.

Jane Carroll Andrade, a contributing editor to the magazine, conducted this interview, which has been edited for length.