

## James Ferguson Bio

James E. Ferguson, II was born in Asheville, North Carolina into the Jim Crow South, in the late 1950s. While still in high school he began his journey toward justice as a leader of local citywide desegregation efforts. He worked with fellow students to form the Asheville Student Committee On Racial Equality (ASCORE). The group was successful in desegregating department store lunch counters and other Asheville public facilities, including libraries and parks. It is believed that ASCORE was the only group of its kind at the time, and as its first president young Ferguson attended the founding meeting of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1960.

Mr. Ferguson went on to become Student Body President at North Carolina College for Negroes, now known as North Carolina Central University, receiving his degree in 1964. He continued his academic career at Columbia University Law School graduating in 1967 and settled in Charlotte as a founding member of North Carolina's first integrated law firm, Ferguson, Stein, and Chambers, with colleagues Adam Stein and the late Julius Chambers.

After just three short years in practice, in the early 1970's Mr. Ferguson led the defense in one of North Carolina's most well-known criminal trials, the Wilmington Ten. This world-renowned case involved America's first political prisoners of conscience, as declared by Amnesty International. Forty years later he secured Pardons of Innocence for each of the defendants.

Beginning in 1986 he established a groundbreaking legal training program in Apartheid-era South Africa that continued through the presidency of Nelson Mandela into the 21st century. Mr. Ferguson has served as co-founder, coordinator and faculty member of the Trial Advocacy Program for Black Lawyers of South Africa. The opportunity to share essential litigation skills, with Black South African jurists seeking legal and social justice, has been one of the most rewarding of Mr. Ferguson's career.

Mr. Ferguson can be seen in "The Trials of Darryl" on HBO, a documentary chronicling the life journey of Darryl Hunt, for whom Mr. Ferguson won a judicial declaration of innocence after Mr. Hunt spent nearly 20 years in prison following a wrongful conviction of rape and murder. In addition, Mr. Ferguson recently obtained commutations, from death sentences to life imprisonment, in the four cases decided under North Carolina's Racial Justice Act, the only law of its kind in the nation. In 2018 Mr. Ferguson filed and resolved a contentious police misconduct action against the City of Asheville.

Seeing the continuing tensions in Asheville between law enforcement and the African American community inspired Mr. Ferguson to make the city a point of focus along with his longtime hometown of Charlotte, as he pursues his vision for expanding the use of restorative justice. He is now working with experts as well as local leaders and residents, to apply principles of this philosophy in pursuit of broader healing in both communities.

Mr. Ferguson has been included in every edition of The Best Lawyers in America. He was featured in The National Law Journal as one of the top ten litigators in the country. He was featured in the Charlotte Observer as “The Lawyer Lawyers Come to See”. He has been recognized as a Super Lawyer by Super Lawyers Magazine. He is a member of the coveted Inner Circle, a group of 100 of the best plaintiffs’ lawyers in the country.

Mr. Ferguson joined Emily Zimmern as co-chair of the Leadership Team of the Community Building Task Force in April 1997. His leadership and guidance established the foundational work upon which CBI continues to operate today.