

'Volatile' race relations spurred Ferguson to action

Continued from page 1A

wonderful choice," said U.S. Rep. Mel Watt (D-N.C.), a former Ferguson law partner. "I am delighted about this choice. I think he deserves to be the newsmaker of the century. If you go back and look at all of the things that have happened in Charlotte in the last 10, 20 or 25 years, Fergie's presence will be there.

"You are honoring him for what he did this year, but he has been there all these years and just stayed the course."

Watt said he was not surprised that Ferguson chaired the race summit Leadership Team.

"He got thrust out front," Watt said. "He had positioned himself behind Bill Simms as the person who would take leadership. Fergie got thrust into that position of necessity, not by choice. That's generally the way Fergie is going to be. He has been there, always the kind of right hand person, behind the scenes person, everybody went to for advice."

Ron Leeper, a former Charlotte City Council member and now construction company owner, said Ferguson deserves selection as Newsmaker of the Year.

"He has been a trailblazer in this community," Leeper said.

"This year, he got recognized for it, but for many years he has been involved in fighting for issues affecting the African American community."

Leeper said Ferguson was a natural leader for the summit.

"I have been in many private meetings with him," Leeper said. "I always saw the side of him that tried to make sure all sides of any issue were heard. I've seen him play the peacemaker. That's the person I know him to be."

N.C. Rep. Pete Cunningham (D-Mecklenburg) called Ferguson's honor "excellent."

"I congratulate him and I congratulate you on having made him your choice," Cunningham said. "He has consistently been one of the few black professionals who has been consistent with his involvement with the NAACP, the Legal Defense Fund, the Black Political Caucus. He is involved heavily with the Anita Stroud Foundation."

Madine Fails, executive direc-

tor of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Urban League, called Ferguson's honor "great."

"The Urban League is very pleased with The Post's selection," Fails said. "Mr. Ferguson has worked in this community a long time, sometimes in the public eye, sometimes out of the public eye, in the quest for equal opportunity and justice."

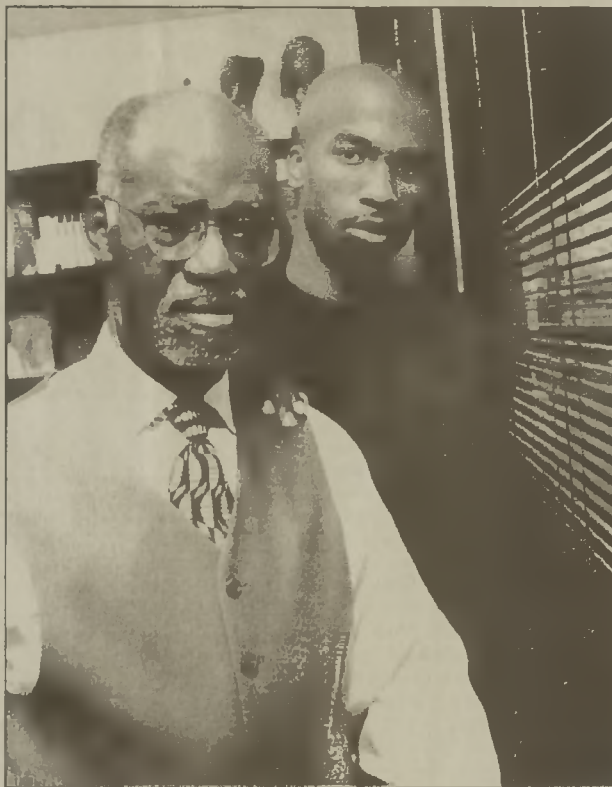
Ferguson now lives in the Providence Woods community in southeast Charlotte with his wife, Barbara. A son, James Ferguson III, also attended Columbia University Law School and has joined his father's practice. Another son, Taj, is a student at N.C. Central University, his father's alma mater. A daughter, Kali, is a student at UNC Greensboro.

Ferguson's activism isn't limited to Charlotte, or the U.S., for that matter. For years, he has provided business and legal training in South Africa.

"The experience I have had teaching trial skills to lawyers in South Africa, since 1986, has been very important to me," Ferguson said. "I primarily worked with black lawyers. That has given me the opportunity to see race relations in another context. It has given me a broader perspective on race problems here. I have watched that struggle from apartheid to the non-racial society they have now."

Ferguson is also chairman of the National Institute for Trial Advocacy, a group of lawyers that teaches lawyers how to perform in the courtroom. He is a member of the national board and executive committee and general counsel to the National Civil Liberties Union and a member of the board of governors and executive committee of the N.C. Bar Association. He chairs the race relations commission formed by the N.C. Bar Association and the N.C. Association of Black Lawyers.

This year was filled with issues both in and out of court which required someone of Ferguson's strong-willed, but reasoned nature. He settled a lawsuit with the city of Charlotte in the 1993 shooting death of Windy Gail Thompson for \$550,000, but



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

James Ferguson and his son, James III, practice law together

keeping the community focused on the issues involved when an officer shoots an unarmed suspect. He notes for example that most often the officer is white and the victim is black.

"If I think back to beginning of the year, I did a column in The Charlotte Observer and was talking about how volatile our race situation was in Charlotte," Ferguson said. "They were seething and at some point the pot would boil over. I said we need to put race at the top of agenda. We needed to take a look at where we were."

"As I look back over the past year, I think we have begun to do that. The police shootings...I believe we have begun to take a different look at how we deal with those situations."

Ferguson said the race relations conference was sorely needed.

"It was important for me personally to be involved," Ferguson

said. "It was different from participating as an advocate."

Ferguson said chairing the Leadership Team "was a challenge I was willing to take up because it is so important that anything I could do I was willing to do. Any member of the team could have done it."

Dealing with issues of race have been at the center of Ferguson's life.

"I have to look at everything I do as part of a continuum that started for me when I was very young," Ferguson said. "I first got involved in trying to do something about race when I was in junior high school and I was in a group called the Greater Asheville Youth Group. It was an interracial group, with blacks, whites and Jews. We talked about bettering race relations, even in that day of stark racial segregation. Then in high school, I got involved in another way. The sit-in movement started

when I was a senior in high school. I started a group with desegregated Asheville. I determined what I wanted to do was go into law. In high school, black lawyers showed me that was the way to bring about social change."

"What I foresee for the future is...a shift coming where greater emphasis has to be placed on economics...We're not just talking about jobs in management. I'm talking about creating wealth, creating jobs from within the black community and creating an attitude among blacks and whites where blacks will have services and goods to offer that whites who have not been consumers of black services before will begin (to buy). Dollars will flow both ways."

Ferguson said he expects to continue the legal battles for equal rights and justice he has fought most of his life.

"You have plateaus, but no victory ever stays won," he said.

"You find yourself fighting battles over again. We are back in 1997 asking the court to re-open Swann."

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Museum a monument to African Americans

Continued from page 1A

the University of Kansas.

During road trips as a coach at North Carolina Central University, McLendon had to direct bus drivers to restaurants where he knew the players were welcome.

"We even knew which filling stations to stop at and which not to," he said. "It was a game."

The nation has made much progress since then, but black Americans still should know what occurred, McLendon said.

Records, paintings, posters, sculptures and a civil rights exhibit also can be found at the museum in southwest Ohio.

"Our mission includes documentation of this history nationally," said Vernon Courtney, assistant museum director.

From William Lawless Jones came a collection of 2,000 jazz records.

"I wanted everybody to enjoy it," said the retired Army colonel from Cincinnati. "Jazz is actually Afro-American classical music and it's part of the Afro-American culture. I wanted young people to know that and not get carried away with all of this hippy hop stuff that is here today and gone tomorrow. This is serious music."

Rep. Clarence Brown, R-Ohio, introduced legislation for the

museum in 1970. In 1977, the National Park Service chose the old 88-acre campus of Wilberforce University as its site, and the Legislature appropriated \$3.5 million to build the museum in 1978. It was chartered by Congress in 1980 and was opened in 1988.

About 50,000 people, most of them schoolchildren from Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky, visit the museum each year.

McLendon's story is one of successes as well as segregation.

After persuading the National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics to open its national tournaments to blacks, McLendon

took a coaching job at Tennessee State University to try to integrate athletics on a national level. He led the school to NAIA championships in 1957, 1958 and 1959 while posting a record of 142-18 there.

McLendon and other black students at KU were not welcomed on the school's basketball team or in the gymnasium's swimming pool.

When he pursued his master's degree at the University of Iowa, McLendon had to find housing off-campus and was not permitted to sit down in the schools cafeteria.

Haitians can stay in U.S. for another year

Continued from page 1A

already frail government.

The immigration law revisions that Clinton signed last month granted amnesty to Nicaraguans and Cubans who have been in the United States since Dec. 1, 1995,

and allowed them to apply for status as legal permanent residents.

Guatemalans and Salvadorans who applied for asylum on or before April 1, 1990, would be considered for a suspension of deportation under the less strin-

gent rules that existed before the 1996 immigration legislation.

The presidential authority that Clinton exercised has been invoked only rarely.

President Bush granted protection to Salvadorans in 1992, to

Chinese students after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre and to Kuwaitis after the Persian Gulf War. In his only previous exercise of the power, Clinton extended the deportation waiver for Salvadorans.

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