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The Charlotte Post

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THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY

THE WEEK OF DECEMBER 31, 1997
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Protesters gathered at The Square in January to protest the shooting of African Americans by Charlotte-Mecklenburg police. A citizens review board was a byproduct of those efforts.



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Haitians can stay in U.S.

By Lawrence L. Knutson
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Clinton acted Tuesday to delay for a year the deportation of up to 40,000 Haitians who fled to the United States while an abusive military junta ruled their island nation.

Clinton also promised to work with Congress to provide the Haitians long-term legislative relief of the kind provided earlier this year to Central Americans who also fled civil strife in their homelands.



Clinton

"Haitians deserve the same treatment we sought for Central Americans," Clinton said in a statement. "Like Central Americans, Haitians for many years were forced to seek the protection of the United States because of oppression, human rights abuses and civil strife at home."

Despite a fragile peace in Haiti, Clinton said he believes he is fully justified in permitting Haitian exiles to remain in the United States.

"Staying the deportation of these Haitians and obtaining for them permanent legislative relief will help support a stable and democratic Haiti, which, in turn, is the best safeguard against a renewed flow of Haitian immigrants to the United States," the president said.

The White House said the president's action applies to Haitians who were admitted to Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba after the 1991 overthrow of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, those who reached U.S. shores and were permitted to remain, and those who applied for asylum before the end of 1995.

Haitians convicted of serious crimes or marked by the Department of State for removal will not be eligible, the White House said.

The generals who ruled Haiti after Aristide's overthrow were expelled in 1994 by an American-led peacekeeping force.

In a battle between the White House and the Republican-controlled Congress over immigration policy, the Haitians were omitted from legislation exempting hundreds of thousands of refugees from civil wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador from deportation rules under the strict 1996 immigration law.

With U.N. peacekeeping forces withdrawing from Haiti, administration officials argued that sending thousands of Haitians back home would destabilize an

See HAITIANS on page 2A

Attorney led fight for justice, equality

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte finally decided to do something about its deep racial divide.

And James Ferguson was there amid the action.

Ferguson, The Post's newsmaker of the year, represented the families of three black motorists slain by Charlotte-Mecklenburg police in as many years. He is seeking to reopen the landmark busing case won by his law firm 30 years ago. And, he chaired the task force which organized the city's first race summit.

Ferguson said he is humbled by the honor.

"There's always someone else equally deserving," he said. "That's certainly true where I am concerned."

This year's decision wasn't an easy one. Others were considered by virtue of strong opinion and bold action, as was the case with Mecklenburg County Commissioner Hoyle Martin, or because of attempts at change, as was the case with former West Charlotte High School principal Kenneth Simmons. Even former TransAmerica executive Bill Simms was in the running. And new school board member Vilma Leake dominated during election season.

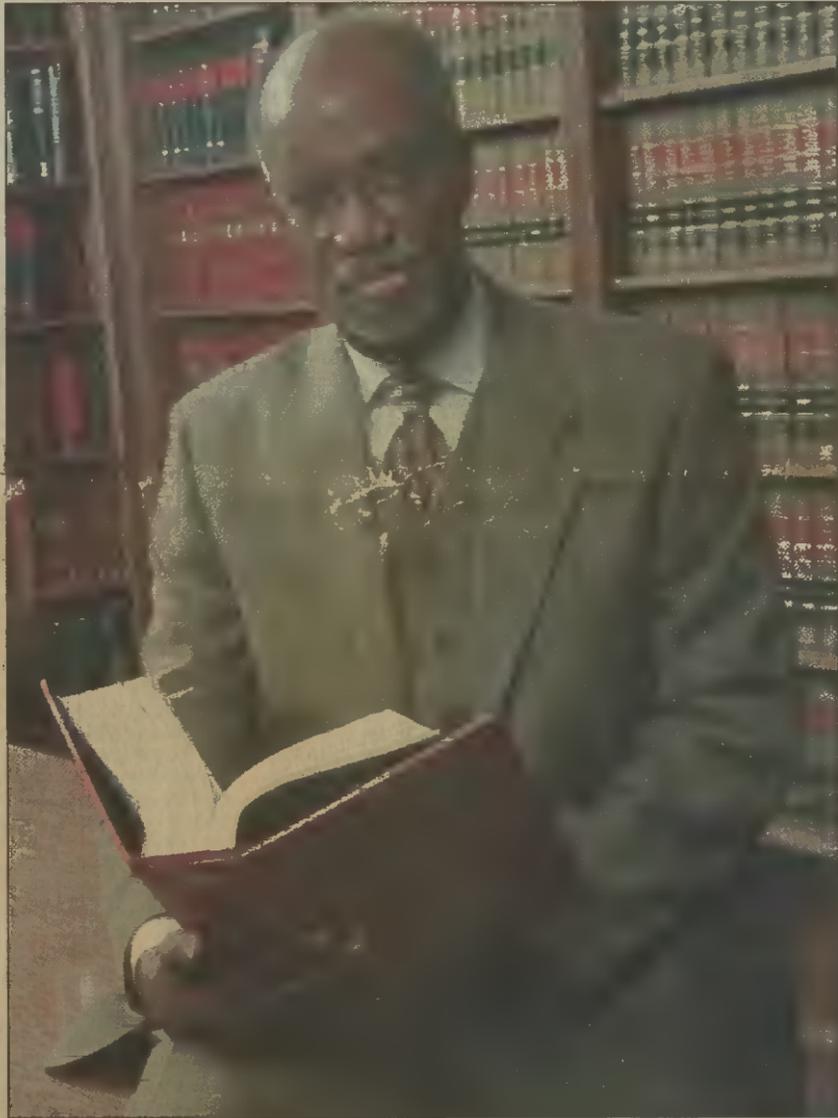
Ferguson has been making news most of his life: As a high school student, he organized a sit-in movement in his hometown, Asheville.

Then it was off to college and eventually Columbia University law school, where he met Julius Chambers in 1967. Chambers had opened a law practice in Charlotte in 1963 and invited Ferguson to join him. They formed the first integrated law firm in the state and perhaps the nation when Adam Stein and Jim Lanning became associates.

Ferguson says it was coincidence that brought him to Charlotte.

"I was going back to Asheville to practice civil rights law," he said. "I happened to meet Chambers in New York at the (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund. We talked about me coming here to join him since we were both going to be doing the same thing. I came down during spring break. I liked what he was doing. He was willing to give me a chance to work with him. That was the greatest coincidence of my life."

NEWSMAKER OF THE YEAR: James Ferguson



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Charlotte attorney James Ferguson is best-known for his work in the civil rights arena. This year, he represented the families of three African Americans shot and killed by Charlotte-Mecklenburg police

rights cases. Within two years Chambers and Ferguson were involved in the school integration controversy and fought and won the historic Swann v. Board of Education case, which established busing as a method of integration.

Since then, the firm, now headed by Ferguson, has been involved in dozens of civil

to build a new school. When I went back that was part of a continuation." Community leaders say the man they call "Fergie" has been a community resource for years, often eschewing the limelight while advising and guiding the efforts of others. "I think you are making a

See VOLATILE on page 2A

See VOLATILE on page 2A

See VOLATILE on page 2A



PHOTO/PAUL WILLIAMS III

Ferguson also chaired a multiracial committee that organized Charlotte's race summit. The two-day event drew hundreds of community leaders of varying races, ethnic groups and religions to talk about divisions between groups of people.

1997: Race matters again

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The issue of race permeated much of what made news in Charlotte in 1997.

The city was filled with racial tensions six weeks after the Nov. 16, 1996 shooting death of James Willie Cooper, an unarmed black motorist, by Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officer Michael Marlow. Cooper was the second unarmed black motorist killed by police in three years.

Carolyn Sue Boetticher was shot and killed by police after the car in which she was a passenger ran a license checkpoint on the westside.

TransAmerica Reinsurance president Bill Simms, the city's highest-ranking black business executive fell from grace, admitting to several lies on his resume.

Kenneth Simmons, the black principal of West Charlotte High School — the city's last remaining former all-black high school — was reassigned after 44 white faculty members threatened to transfer if

he stayed.

The year ends with acrimonious debate over what some consider Mecklenburg County Commissioner Hoyle Martin's betrayal of his constituency in favor of an anti-gay agenda. Martin, a Democrat, not only led a successful right-wing effort to cut arts funding because of homosexuality, but helped elect Republican Tom Bush chair of the county board.

The news was not all bad, however.

The city — spurred apparently by the

See RACE on page 3A

Museum recalls history

National Afro-American Cultural Center in Ohio

By James Hannah
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WILBERFORCE, Ohio — John McLendon Jr. felt the sting of racial discrimination as a college athlete and later as a coach. That is why he contributed part of his own past to the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center.

"We've contributed too much to American life and it should be remembered," he said, referring to black Americans. "You should have a history of it."

On exhibit at the only congressionally recognized museum specializing in African American history is an autographed basketball. McLendon took to the Soviet Union when he coached the U.S. Olympic team in the 1960s.

"It talks about the importance of fighting for something that's right, and success," museum curator Floyd Thomas said of McLendon's basketball and life story.

In the 1930s, McLendon, from Cleveland, was banned from swimming pools, cafeteria tables, campus housing and filling stations because of the color of his skin, when he was a student at

See MUSEUM on page 2A

Inside

Strictly Business 8A
Editorials 4A-5A
Religion 10A
Health 12A
Sports 1B
A&E 5B
Travel 7B
Region 9B
Classified 12B
Auto Showcase 14B

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