

Julius LeVonne Chambers
Doctor of Laws

Julius Chambers is a nationally renowned lawyer whose life's work has had a profound influence on winning for African Americans the civil rights guaranteed to all Americans by the Constitution and laws of the United States. He is chancellor emeritus of North Carolina Central University and today serves as director of the UNC Center for Civil Rights in Carolina's School of Law. He holds earned degrees from Carolina (LL.B. with High Honors, 1962), the University of Michigan (M.A., 1959), and Columbia University (LL.M., 1963).

Chambers grew up in Mt. Gilead, a small town not far from Charlotte, in a family that placed a high value on education. Chambers' father planned to send him to a private boarding school with the earnings from work he had done for a prominent local citizen. Those plans were dashed when the customer refused to pay and the family was unable to find a local lawyer who would sue a white person on behalf of an African American client. Julius Chambers credits that searing injustice for his resolve, at the age of twelve, to pursue a career that would end such discrimination.

Chambers graduated in 1958 from North Carolina Central University (then known as North Carolina College), where he was president of the student body. In 1960 he became one of the first African Americans accepted in the UNC Law School. He was an outstanding student, rising to become first in his class of 100 and editor-in-chief of the *North Carolina Law Review*. When asked by *Time* magazine to comment on this milestone in history, the dean said simply, "he earned it." Julius Chambers was not only the first African American to edit the law review; he was the first to be inducted into the Order of the Golden Fleece, Carolina's oldest and most prestigious honorary society.

Chambers' legal career has been marked by quiet and effective courage and determination, and consummate skill. He successfully argued *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* before the Supreme Court of the United States. That landmark decision approved busing as a desegregation tool. As a result Chambers' law offices were burned to the ground, his car was fire-bombed, and his home was attacked. He did not flinch but continued his determination to root out the last vestiges of segregation. Had John Kennedy lived to write a sequel to *Profiles in Courage*, Julius Chambers would surely have been included.

In 1992 Chambers was called back to his undergraduate alma mater to serve as chancellor of North Carolina Central University. During his nine-year tenure he doubled the institution's research funding, launched a capital campaign, increased the number of endowed chairs from one to fourteen, persuaded the General Assembly to fund a new building for the School of Education, and oversaw creation of a biotechnology research institute for the study of diseases that affect minorities. Today that institute is named in his honor. Upon his retirement he was quoted as saying, "Education is still the most important issue to me. Only through education can we learn to respect and understand each other."

Julius Chambers is a recipient of Carolina's Distinguished Alumnus Award (1983) and the University Award (2001), the highest honor conferred by The University of North Carolina. He is a member of the North Carolina Academy of Trial Lawyers and a past member of The University of North Carolina Board of Governors (1972-77).