

**PRESENTERS FOR THE  
NINTH BIENNIAL CLE ON PROFESSIONALISM  
AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE/MENTAL HEALTH:  
RACE, EQUITY, AND THE PRACTICE OF LAW**

**The Honorable Cheri Beasley, Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court,** began her twenty-year judicial career as a District Court Judge in Cumberland County, North Carolina in 1999. Prior to her appointment to the bench, she practiced law in the Twelfth Judicial District's Public Defender's Office where she tried cases ranging from misdemeanors to capital murder. After ten years of service on the district court bench, she was elected to serve as an Associate Judge on the North Carolina Court of Appeals. Her election made her the first African-American woman elected in any statewide race without first being appointed to the office. Chief Justice Beasley served four years as an Associate Judge on the North Carolina Court of Appeals. She was then appointed by Governor Perdue to fill the vacancy on the North Carolina Supreme Court created by the retirement of Justice Patricia Timmons-Goodson in 2012.

At the time of her appointment, Chief Justice Beasley was the sixth woman and only the second African-American woman to serve on the Court. With her appointment by Governor Cooper in March, 2019, Beasley became the first African-American woman in the Supreme Court's 200-year history to serve as Chief Justice of the state's highest Court, and only the fourth African-American woman to lead a state's highest court in the entire United States.

She is a graduate of Douglass College of Rutgers University and of The University of Tennessee College of Law. In 2018, she earned an L.L.M. in Judicial Studies from Duke University School of Law. She has received Honorary Doctorates of Humane Letters from North Carolina Central University and Fayetteville State University.

Chief Justice Beasley's commitment to serve North Carolina and her residents has extended far beyond the halls of justice. She has worked tirelessly mentoring students and judges. She lectures at area law schools and travels extensively nationwide and abroad to promote the rule of law, the administration of justice, the importance of an independent judiciary, and fair judicial selection.

Chief Justice Beasley has spent her career in dedicated support of the legal profession. She is the Chair of the North Carolina Equal Access to Justice Commission as well as the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism. She has served on the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defense (SCLAID) for many years. She holds memberships in the American Bar Association, the North Carolina Bar Association, the North Carolina Association of Women Attorneys, the Capital City Lawyers Association, and the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers. She formerly served as vice-president of the North Carolina Bar Association and is a member in a host of other professional and civic organizations.

Chief Justice Beasley is the proud recipient of a number of professional awards and honors, including the Fayetteville State University Chancellor's Medallion, the Gwyneth B. Davis

Award of the North Carolina Association of Women Attorneys, the University of Tennessee Knoxville's Trailblazer Award, and the Women of Justice Public Official Award. She has received inductions into The Douglass Society, the highest honor bestowed by Douglass College-Rutgers University, and the Hall of Fame of the Rutgers University African-American Alumni Alliance.

Chief Justice Beasley and her husband Curtis Owens are the proud parents of twin sons, Thomas and Matthew, who are currently attending college at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Their home church is First Baptist Church, Moore Street, in Fayetteville, and they are members of First Baptist Church, South Wilmington Street, in Raleigh where Chief Justice Beasley serves on the Board of Trustees.

**Melvin F. Wright, Jr.** received his undergraduate degree from the University of North Carolina in 1967 and his law degree from Wake Forest University School of Law in 1973. Mel was a private practice attorney for 26 years until he became the Executive Director of the North Carolina Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism in November 1999. He served in that capacity until his retirement in August 2017 and has resumed this role in March 2019.

As a newly formed Commission, Mel had the challenging task of establishing the office from only a Supreme Court Order. He has worked tirelessly for the cause of professionalism, both as Executive Director of the Commission and as a private practice attorney. In addition to his many years in private practice, he has served as President of the Forsyth County Bar Association and the 21st Judicial District, Chairman of the Ethics and Grievances Committee of the Forsyth County Bar Association, officer of Executive Committee of the Forsyth County Bar Association and the Forsyth County Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, Chairman of the National Consortium on Professionalism Initiatives, Chairman of the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Professionalism, member of the Board of Directors for the North Carolina Bar Association's BarCARES, member of the National Legal Mentoring Consortium, member of the North Carolina Bar Association and the Wake County Bar Association Professionalism committees; member of the North Carolina Bar Association Transitioning Lawyer Commission, and member of the Advisory Committee for the National High School Mock Trial Championship, and member of the Wake County, North Carolina and American Bar Associations, the American Bar Association Center for Professional Responsibility, and the North Carolina Advocates for Justice. Mel has been awarded the Bronze Star and Air Medal for his service in Vietnam; the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, the Wake County Bar Association Professionalism Award, the Chief Justice's Professionalism Award, the Robinson O. Everett Professionalism Award from the Campbell University School of Law, the John B. McMillan Award for Public Service, and the CJCP Award for Meritorious and Extraordinary Service. He has also received the Martindale Hubbell AV Rating.

Lastly, Mel has served as an adjunct professor at both the University of North Carolina School of Law and the Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law at Campbell University, teaching Professional Responsibility.

**Alyson A. Grine** is an Assistant District Attorney in the Homicide and Violent Crimes Unit of the Durham District Attorney's Office. Previously, Grine served as an Assistant Professor at North Carolina Central University School of Law and the Defender Educator at the UNC School of Government, where she focused on criminal law and procedure and indigent defense education. Grine received the Albert and Gladys Hall Coates Teaching Excellence Award from the School in 2012 and the Margaret Taylor Writing Award in 2015 for her work on the publication, *Raising issues of Race in North Carolina Criminal Cases*. She has co-authored three manuals in the North Carolina School of Government Defender Manual series and is a frequent contributor to legal journals such as the *North Carolina State Bar Journal*. Prior to 2006, Grine worked for five years as an Assistant Public Defender in Orange and Chatham counties. She served as a judicial clerk for Chief Justice Henry Frye of the NC Supreme Court in 2000 and for Judge Patricia Timmons-Goodson of the NC Court of Appeals in 1999. In recognition of her work on issues of race and criminal justice, Grine received the James E. Williams award in 2016 from the North Carolina Public Defenders Association. Grine earned a BA with distinction and a JD with honors from UNC-Chapel Hill and an MA in Spanish from the University of Virginia.

**Erika K. Wilson** is Thomas Willis Lambeth Distinguished Chair in Public Policy and Associate Professor of Law at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her areas of expertise include civil litigation, civil rights, critical race theory, public education and school reform, public policy, and race discrimination. She currently teaches Critical Race Theory, Civil Lawyering Process, Civil Litigation Clinic, and Education Law. Professor Wilson's research interests focus on issues related to education law and policy, specifically obtaining educational equality for disadvantaged students, and the intersection between race and the law. Her articles have appeared in the *Cornell Law Review*, *UCLA Law Review*, *Duke Journal of Constitutional Law and Public Policy*, and *Michigan Journal of Law Reform*, *National Black Law Journal*, among various others. In 2016, her work was selected for presentation at the Harvard Yale Stanford Junior Faculty Forum. In 2017, she was awarded the James H. Chadbourn Award for Excellence in Scholarship from the UNC School of Law. In 2018, she was awarded the Thomas Willis Lambeth Distinguished Chair in Public Policy.

Prior to joining the UNC law faculty, Professor Wilson previously worked as an associate at Arnold & Porter LLP, where she litigated complex commercial cases involving antitrust, copyright infringement and product liability issues. Professor Wilson also served as the George N. Lindsay Fellow for the Education Project at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law where she engaged in a broad range of litigation and law reform projects involving school desegregation, the No Child Left Behind Act, special education, school discipline and federal funding to Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

**Dr. April Harris-Britt** is a licensed psychologist in private practice in Durham. She is the owner of AHB Center for Behavioral Health and Wellness. Her work has been featured on CNN, in Newsweek, on local television and radio news programs, and in the New York Times Bestseller, “NurtureShock.” She has held several board and committee positions for the NC Psychological Association (NCPA) and the American Psychological Association (APA). She received her doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.