



Background

The criminal law was never far away from Courtenay Griffiths' upbringing: being the second youngest of a family of eight boys and one girl, born in Kingston, Jamaica, and growing up in a Coventry not yet used to the presence of a community different in colour and experience. The criminal law was an integral part of his experience and the process of his acculturation into British society.

Courtenay came to the Bar directly from university. He soon realised that a law degree was not the most appropriate qualification for a criminal barrister. He was always interested in politics and had long understood that black-letter law was not, in itself, a sufficient grounding for a proper application of the criminal law. Time spent as Legal Assistant to the Greater London Council's Police Support Committee, and as a Revson Fellow at the City College in New York, completed his education. He returned to full time practice now able to articulate what hitherto had only been understood viscerally.

Areas of Practice

On his return from the USA, Courtenay spent a large proportion of his time practising in the provinces, particularly in West Yorkshire, Leeds and Bradford. That experience taught him the social importance of practice in the provinces, where the sight of a black man in a white wig and black gown then often generated looks and sentiments of amazement. He still practises a great deal out on circuit, particularly in Manchester and Birmingham.

He specialises in all aspects of criminal justice, including the criminal law, civil actions against the police and inquests. His practice has remained national and he has appeared in most major Crown Courts in England. His criminal practice ranges from fraud to terrorism, murder and serious public order to drugs. His appellate work has included the 'M25' appeal (Johnson, Davis and Rowe). His practice has recently taken him to Sierra Leone where he was due to appear before the Special War Crimes Tribunal in that country. He strongly believes that International Criminal Law will be one of the expanding areas of law in the 21st Century. More recently Courtenay has been practicing in the Caribbean and Bermuda.

Courtenay has always been particularly interested in civil liberties. He views the introduction of the European Convention on Human Rights into English law as a unique opportunity for him to bring his unique experience as an outsider to the development of the law in his roles as Queen's Counsel and Recorder.

Courtenay (Lead defence Counsel) and Terry Munyard are currently involved in a landmark case in The Hague where they are defending the former president of Liberia, Charles Taylor.

For more information click [here](#)

To read the **Times Online** blog about this case click [here](#)

Notable Cases

Amongst the many notable cases in which Courtenay has been involved, he

Year of Call

1980

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Queen's Counsel

1998

Education

LLB (Hons) (LSE), Honorary LLD Leeds Metropolitan University, Honorary LLD Coventry University, Bencher for Grays Inn.

Practice Areas:

Courtenay Griffiths QC is a member of the following Practice Areas:

- Claims Against The Police & Public Authorities
- Courts Martial
- Crime
- Inquests
- International Advice and Litigation

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regards the following as being the most note-worthy: R v Silcott & others (The Blakelock murder trial); The Brighton Bombing; The Harrods Bombing; The Canary Wharf bombing, The Rislely Riot; The Dartmoor Riot; Johnson, Davis and Rowe; Goswell v Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis (for a while the highest award of damages made by a jury against a police force); and the Damilola Taylor murder trial. R-V- White and Hanson (The murder of the Chelsea banker) and R-V-Brown and Carty (The murder of the City solicitor)

Publications

Courtenay has written and lectured extensively on all aspects of the criminal justice system. He has debated these issues on television and radio, in both the United Kingdom and the USA. He has addressed these issues at the Norwegian Bar Association's annual conference. More recently he has addressed audiences at Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley.

Other Activities

Legal Assistant Greater London Council Police Committee Support Unit 1981-1984 (on sabbatical leave from Chambers). Revson fellow on the Urban Legal Studies programme at City College, City University, New York 1984-1985. He has lectured at many academic institutions around the country. He was a speaker at the American Bar Association Conference 2000 on the topic of trial by jury, and again in 2002 in Washington DC, and again in 2003 in San Francisco.

He was chair of the Public Affairs committee of the Bar Council, and was for several years chair of its Race Relations Committee. He retains many community interests and is currently a Trustee of the Bernie Grant Trust.

Personal

Courtenay is married to Angela. They have two boys, Marcus and Adam. He is a long-suffering Liverpool supporter. Steve Heighway is his all-time favourite Liverpool player. He also loves cricket but does not pass the Tebbitt test - he remains a supporter of the West Indies.