

David Augustus Straker

First Black lawyer to argue before the Michigan Supreme Court; first Black jurist in Michigan; civil rights leader

David Augustus Straker, who grew up in Barbados, moved to the U.S. South after the Civil War to teach at a freedmen's school in Kentucky, earn a law degree at Howard University, and later win political office in South Carolina although he was stymied by those who opposed Reconstruction. After moving to the North to establish a law office in Detroit, Straker became the first Black lawyer to argue before the Michigan Supreme Court in *Ferguson v Gies* (1890), a civil rights case that established separate was not equal under Michigan law. He also became the state's first Black jurist when he was elected as a Wayne County Circuit Court Commissioner, a post that was similar to a judge but with a more limited jurisdiction. Today, the [D. Augustus Straker Bar Association](#) is named in his honor.



- **1868** Moved from Barbados, where he was an educator, to teach at a freedmen's school in Kentucky.
- **1869–86** Graduated from Howard University with a law degree; married Anna M. Carey of Detroit; practiced law and was elected to the South Carolina state legislature, although political opponents refused to seat him and others.
- **1887–95** Established a law practice in Detroit; argued civil rights case *Ferguson v Gies* (1890); served as Circuit Court Commissioner; helped found National Federation of Colored Men.

Straker also wrote [books](#) and articles, including contributions to Frederick Douglass' [New National Era](#) newspaper.