

## LAWYER WHO WROTE THE BOOK ON MISS. APPELLATE LAW RETURNS TO BUTLER SNOW

» After writing essay "Why Return South?", Luther Munford says he didn't have "much choice" other than coming back to Jackson

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The lucrative life of an elite litigator in the Big Apple or perhaps the nation's capital stood easily within Luther Munford's grasp in 1979.

But Munford couldn't shake the "briar patch" that the South had been for him and seven generations of his family.

Nor could the Jackson native shake the danged old essay he had written for a book earlier in the decade: "You Can't Eat Magnolias," a 1972 collection of writings that presented a new vision for Mississippi and the rest of the South.

Munford's essay "Why Go Back South?" theorized that a reformation of sorts was unfolding in the South and he had to be a part of it.

He recognized that the centers of power, fame and fortune lay outside the South and that not many of his neighbors — or relatives — shared

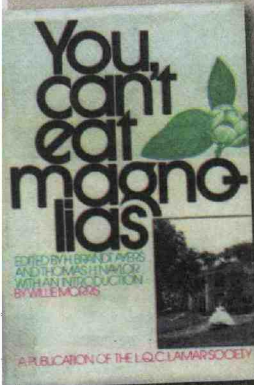


Munford

what he had grown to consider most important — "freedom of expression and association, respect for human dignity, respect for minority rights and for human dignity."

But Munford also saw a South

that was becoming more democratic and more humane. Further, the cultural values the region puts on personal relationships offered an opportunity



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"for one person to make the reformation work in his town," he wrote in his essay.

"So seven years later when I finished my judicial clerkships, I didn't have much choice," he said, in explaining why more than 30 years later he is a fixture in Mississippi legal circles instead of somewhere else.

Besides the essay, another factor came into play, he said. "I met and married a woman who had grown up in Mississippi."

Today, Munford is making another return to his roots, at least professionally.

After earning a law degree from the University of Virginia, under-graduate degrees from Princeton and Oxford and completing clerkships in the U.S. Appeals Court, 5th District and under U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun, Munford made his return to Jackson. His first stop: Butler Snow, O'Mara, Stevens & Cannada.

He became a partner, departed the firm in 1986 to teach law at Mississippi College's School of Law and three years later joined Phelps Dunbar.

Nearly a quarter century later he has made a return to Butler Snow, joining the fast-growing regional law firm's Appellate and Written Advocacy Group. He arrived as an acknowledged leader in appellate practice in Mississippi and elsewhere and with a reputation as the attorney who wrote the book on appellate law in Mississippi. (His book "Mississippi Appellate Practice" is in its eighth printing.)

"I got recruited," Munford said in an interview a few days after returning to his former firm.

The main draw: A product liability law practice that is making a name for itself around the country.

Appellate work, at both the appeals and trial stages, is a key part of Butler Snow's product liability practice, much of which involves defending pharmaceutical companies. "They are hoping that I can help expand the dimension of the appellate law practice," he said.

Amy Pepke, appellate practice group leader, says Munford's arrival has greatly strengthened her roster of litigators. "His experience extends well beyond Mississippi appellate practice," she said.

Munford, she said, gives Butler Snow "a strategic advantage that few firms can offer."

Going by the numbers, Munford has been involved in about 75 appellate opinions, Pepke said. "That is unique."

How he came to write the book on appellate law in Mississippi goes back to 1987, when the Mississippi Supreme court decided to redo its rules for appeals. "I got hired as the reporter to basically do the first draft of those rules," he

said. "I turned that into a book about how to practice in the Mississippi Supreme Court."

### Litigation, Not Journalism

Munford may have pursued a career in journalism had he not concluded during his time covering trials for Greenville's *Delta Democrat Times* that he would rather be "the guy standing up in front arguing than sitting in the back writing about what he was arguing."

While the former college newspaper editor and graduate of Jackson's Callaway High School never returned to a newsroom after his Greenville newspaper stint, he has influenced how journalism is practiced in Mississippi. For three decades Munford has represented Jackson's *Clarion-Ledger* newspaper and other media in First Amendment and press freedom cases.

"When I first came to Butler Snow in 1979 they were representing the *Clarion-Ledger* and I have done that ever since," he said.

His first press freedom case, he recalled, involved getting a camera returned to the *Clarion-Ledger* after a Rankin County judge unhappy with the photographs taken with the camera confiscated it.

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The newspaper got wind that the judge was serving his Christmas party guests illegal liquor he had confiscated during the year. "When the *Clarion-Ledger* came in with the camera, he took the camera and destroyed the film. But we sued and won," forcing the judge to return the camera, Munford said.

Munford went on to successfully argue cases that established the right of the public to attend meetings of the College Board and the right of the media to have access to court proceedings in a murder case.

In his essay "Why go Back South?", he recalled an elderly friend's prediction "that if you come back, you'll never be bored."

"He was right," Munford noted.

