

# Foundation of Leadership: Maurice Mitchell

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In honor of our firm's 70th anniversary, we are proud to share the stories of our founding leaders – the attorneys who are Mitchell, Williams, Selig, Gates & Woodyard, P.L.L.C. Here, we are sharing the legacy of Maurice Mitchell.

## **H. Maurice Mitchell**

*(October 23, 1925 - April 2, 2011)*

An original partner and firm founder, distinguished attorney, counselor, mentor and civic leader; H. Maurice Mitchell left a legacy of integrity, professionalism, leadership, philanthropy and civic service that continues to anchor our culture today.

Born in Clarendon, Ark., Maurice was a Little Rock school system graduate. He earned a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, a Juris Doctor from Washington and Lee School of Law and quickly began his distinguished legal career. He served as an Internal Revenue Service agent from 1948 to 1949, joined the Arkansas State Revenue Department as Assistant Attorney from 1949 to 1951, was admitted to the Arkansas Bar in 1949 and entered private practice in Little Rock in 1951. On January 1, 1954, Maurice became a founding member of the law firm Lasley, Spitzberg, Mitchell & Hays which through the years transitioned to Mitchell, Williams, Selig, Gates & Woodyard, P.L.L.C. Maurice held primary responsibility for managing the firm from 1971 to 1991.

Maurice was a sophisticated and accomplished lawyer. He concentrated his law practice on organizing banks, savings and loans, life insurance companies and other business entities. He also focused his legal practice on reorganizing existing businesses, structuring financing for real estate projects and representing debtors and creditors in matters involving financially troubled business organizations and real estate projects. Maurice was instrumental in establishing the firm's statewide and regional reputation in banking and finance law having handled the first conversion of an Arkansas federally-chartered savings and loan association into a national bank. But Maurice was more than a skilled lawyer, he was also a dynamic and compassionate leader.

As a Little Rock school system graduate, Maurice had an intense personal interest in the polarizing 1957 desegregation crisis at Little Rock Central High School. He worked behind the scenes in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the closing of the area's public schools in 1958. He then aided a successful effort to recall segregationist school board members in 1959 (known as the S.T.O.P. campaign). Maurice's lifelong commitment to the city's public school system was further evidenced by his service as chairman of numerous campaigns to secure additional funding for the public schools.

Maurice's progressive views and civic mindedness were never confined to education. He was an active member and leader of numerous organizations, including the Little Rock Junior Chamber of Commerce,

Arkansas State Junior Chamber of Commerce, Fifty for the Future, Baptist Health Foundation, Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church Foundation, Arkansas Arts Center Foundation (now known as the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts Foundation) and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Foundation Fund Board.

Maurice possessed a keen political mind and spent many years representing Arkansas nationally. In 1992, he served as chairman of U.S. Senator Dale Bumpers' campaign finance committee, a member of the William J. Clinton presidential campaign's national finance committee and as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention. From 1993-1998, Maurice served as legal counsel to the Democratic Party of Arkansas and served on the Clinton-Gore national finance committee in 1996.

Among Maurice's many awards, the 1992 dedication and naming of the H. Maurice Mitchell Courtroom at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Bowen School of Law was one of the most meaningful. This project was funded by the personal contributions of each partner in the Mitchell Williams law firm. In 2000, the firm established the H. Maurice Mitchell Leaders in Law Scholarships in Maurice's honor which are awarded annually to the law student who is selected as the Moot Court Board Chair at the University of Arkansas Little Rock William H. Bowen School of Law and the law student who is selected as Chair of the Board of Advocates at the University of Arkansas School of Law, Fayetteville. The courtroom dedication and scholarships are a testament to Maurice's legacy of leadership.

Maurice was recognized by a distinguished group of organizations. He received the National Humanitarian Award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews in Arkansas, the Vincent Foster Jr. Outstanding Lawyer Award from the Pulaski County Bar Association, the Edwin Hanlon Memorial Award for Outstanding Individual Contributions to the Arts from the Little Rock Arts and Humanities Association, the Outstanding Service Award from the Arkansas Bar Foundation, the William F. Rector Memorial Award for Distinguished Civic Achievement from Fifty for the Future, the Citizen of the Year Award from the Arkansas Chapter of the March of Dimes and the Winthrop Rockefeller Memorial Award from the Arkansas Arts Center (now known as the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts).

Despite numerous opportunities to take his legal experience and expertise elsewhere, Maurice never wandered from Arkansas. His tireless work and great passion for the law, business, politics, philanthropy and the State of Arkansas have made our state better for all who followed. This is his legacy.