





Presiding Judge John H. Ruffin, Jr. became the 62nd Judge of the Court of Appeals of Georgia when he was administered the oath of office by Governor Zell Miller on August 24, 1994, after 33 years of practicing law and serving on the superior court bench. Presiding Judge Ruffin was appointed a Superior Court Judge of the Augusta Judicial Circuit in 1986 by Governor Joe Frank Harris. He was elected without opposition in 1988 and continued to serve as Superior Court Judge until his appointment to the Court of Appeals.

In addition to being the first African-American Superior Court Judge for the Augusta Judicial Circuit, Presiding Judge Ruffin was also the first African-American member of the Augusta Bar Association and the third African-American to serve on the Court of Appeals of Georgia. Presiding Judge Ruffin was born and reared in Waynesboro, Burke County, Georgia, the son of John H. Ruffin, Sr. and Anna Davis Ruffin. Presiding Judge Ruffin is a graduate of Waynesboro High and Industrial School. He attended and graduated from Morehouse College and Howard University School of Law in Washington, D.C. Presiding Judge Ruffin was admitted to the Georgia Bar on July 5, 1961.

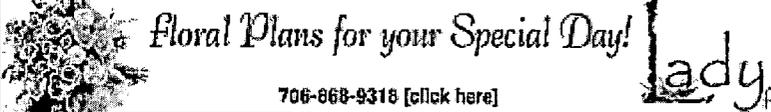
In addition to his membership in the State Bar of Georgia, Presiding Judge Ruffin is a member of the bars of the Supreme Court of Georgia, United States Supreme Court, United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit and United States District Courts for the Southern and Middle Districts of Georgia.

Presiding Judge Ruffin has many professional, civic and religious affiliations. Some of his current and former memberships include: Council of Superior Court Judges of Georgia; Council of Juvenile Court Judges of Georgia; Tenth Judicial Administrative District; Chairman, Board of Trustees, Institute of Continuing Judicial Education; Georgia Commission on Gender Bias; Court Reform Committee, Governor's Conference on Justice in Georgia; Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers; Georgia Advisory Council to the Legal Services Program; Judicial Nominating Commission; Georgia Conference of Black Lawyers, Inc.; State Bar Judicial Compensation Committee; American Judicature Society; National Bar Association; American Bar Association, Augusta Bar Association and the Atlanta Bar Association. He has lectured extensively at professional seminars and at the National Judicial College, Reno, Nevada.

Shortly before being appointed to the Court of Appeals, Presiding Judge Ruffin was elected Secretary-Treasurer of the Council of Superior Court Judges. In addition to being the first African-American officer of the Council of Superior Court Judges, Presiding Judge Ruffin was on track to become the first African-American to serve as President of the Council of Superior Court Judges of Georgia.

Presiding Judge Ruffin is married to Judith Fennell Ruffin and they have one son, Brinkley Ruffin, who is currently employed by the Georgia Department of Labor.

Presiding Judge Ruffin and his family are members of the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Augusta.



January 5, 2005

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Pioneer to lead court of appeals

Web posted Thursday, December 30, 2004
By Sandy Hodson | Staff Writer

Waynesboro native John H. Ruffin Jr. will take yet another step in his pioneering legal career when he is sworn in next week as the first black chief judge of the Court of Appeals of Georgia.

Known for his dry wit, keen intelligence and concisely written opinions, Judge Ruffin began his legal career in Augusta.

"A lot of people talk about public service, but this guy lived the life," said former State Rep. Ben Allen, who credits Judge Ruffin with leading the battle for civil rights here and throughout Georgia.

It was a career that almost didn't happen.

"I didn't decide I wanted to be a lawyer until I was a junior in college. I had no judicial aspirations at all," Judge Ruffin said in a telephone interview. He said he chose a legal career because of the civil rights movement.

"I thought it would be the best contribution I could make."

Judge Ruffin was admitted to the Georgia Bar on July 5, 1961, but he wouldn't be invited into the Augusta Bar Association until 10 years later. He didn't wait for acceptance from the local bar before launching into civil rights work.

In the 1960s, he challenged the treatment blacks received from police and the system that allowed for all-white grand juries. He successfully battled against at-large representation in local government and won equal treatment for black city police officers.

Many consider his best-known success the Acree case in which he filed the 1964 federal lawsuit to force the desegregation of Augusta schools.

It was an eight-year effort. The circuit judge constantly ruled against him, forcing him to repeatedly appeal, said Augusta attorney Pete Fletcher, who took over representation of the school board in 1972.

For all those years of work, Mr. Ruffin's bill was only \$10,000, Mr. Fletcher said. It must have been a financial hardship to stay with the case for nearly a decade, he said.

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"He was always a gentleman and always professional even with all he was going through," Mr. Fletcher said.

When Augusta attorney Leon Larke started practicing law in 1980, he said, Judge Ruffin was someone to look up to.

"I always found him to be a very conscientious individual ... intelligent and with a passion for the law," he said.

District Attorney Danny Craig said he always marveled at Judge Ruffin's courtroom abilities.

"He was certainly a pioneer in the legal profession in Georgia, but more important, he was a wonderful role model for all those who have had the privilege of knowing him," he said.



John H. Ruffin Jr.
Special

Mr. Allen, who worked with Judge Ruffin for a couple of years, remembers the judge's stories of his affiliation with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Then an attorney, Judge Ruffin would try civil rights cases in south Georgia where people had never seen a black lawyer, Mr. Allen said.

Sometimes he would take his pastor on those trips, Mr. Allen said. A little spiritual protection was a good thing, Mr. Allen remembered the judge saying.

"He understood his calling. If you can rise to the level of accepting it as a calling, you forget self and think about others," Mr. Allen said.

"His handprint in terms of civil rights is all over this city. He is Mr. Civil Rights."

Mr. Allen still sees that dedication in Judge Ruffin. As an example, he cited a recent appeals court opinion the judge wrote in the case of a gay mother. Her children were taken, not because she was an unfit parent but apparently, Mr. Allen said, because she is gay. The appeals court reversed the case, and the mother and children were reunited in time for Christmas.

"I think that speaks volumes. While I don't know how he may personally feel about homosexuality and lifestyles ... he understands the importance of civil rights. He has stayed true to the civil rights mode that he was brought up in," Mr. Allen said.

As a lawyer and on the bench, Judge Ruffin has been one to teach lessons. Mr. Allen said one of his first trials after law school was opposite Judge Ruffin.

"He beat me up and down that courtroom," Mr. Allen said. When he asked Judge Ruffin why he had been so hard, Judge Ruffin responded, "But if I hadn't, you wouldn't learn."

Mr. Allen said he did learn - not to be intimidated and to always be prepared.

Judge Ruffin was the first black man appointed to the Augusta Judicial Circuit's Superior Court bench in 1986.

Judge Ruffin impressed attorney Patrick J. Claiborne with his precision and his close attention to what the lawyers had to say.

"And I think he was genuinely concerned about the people who came before him," Mr. Claiborne said.

Chief Judge William D. Jennings III said that when he began presiding over cases in Richmond County Civil and Magistrate Court, he went to Judge Ruffin for advice. He once asked Judge Ruffin when he might stop feeling theatrical wearing a robe.

"He looked at me a long time and said, 'Well, the day you feel comfortable in a robe is the day you need to take it off,'" Judge Jennings said.

In August 1994, Judge Ruffin was appointed to the Court of Appeals of Georgia. At 10 a.m. Wednesday, he will be sworn in as its chief judge.

The judge said the position is really just an honorific title he will hold for two years.

It was a casual assessment almost as self-deprecating as he would describe the man who will take the oath



Wednesday.

"He's witty, he enjoys living. He knows you can't take any of this too seriously, that you shouldn't be ashamed of laughing - even laughing at yourself," he said.

Reach Sandy Hodson at (706) 823-3226 or sandy.hodson@augustachronicle.com.

John H. Ruffin Jr.

1934: Born in Waynesboro 1957: Graduated from Morehouse College

1960: Graduated from Howard University School of Law

1961: Admitted to practice law in Georgia

1986: Appointed to the Augusta Judicial Circuit's Superior Court bench

1994: Appointed to the Court of Appeals of Georgia

—From the Thursday, December 30, 2004 printed edition of the Augusta Chronicle

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January 6, 2005

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Judge John H. Ruffin Jr. (right), of Augusta, gets a hug from fellow Augusta Judge Richard Slaby after taking the oath to become the first black chief judge of the Georgia Court of Appeals. He has been on the court since 1994.
Associated Press

Georgia appeals court greets 1st black chief

Web posted Thursday, January 6, 2005
By Brandon Larrabee | Morris News Service

ATLANTA - John H. Ruffin Jr., a Waynesboro native who fought for civil rights during his career as a lawyer in private practice, made history Wednesday when he was sworn in as the first black chief judge of the Georgia Court of Appeals.

Judge Ruffin, 70, takes over from Judge J.D. Smith, who previously held the job for a two-year term.

"One would have to be the lord of language to express how I feel today," said Judge Ruffin, who has served on the court since 1994. "I cannot measure up to that lordship."

During the brief ceremony, a handful of his colleagues spoke about Judge Ruffin's career and the job he will assume as members of the judge's family, including his wife and his father, looked on from a packed courtroom.

"We owe him a debt of gratitude for what he's already done as well as what he's about to do for our court," Judge Smith said.

It was the latest in a string of firsts for Judge Ruffin, who was also the first black judge to sit on the Augusta Circuit Superior Court, where he served from 1986 to 1994.

He was also the first black member of the Augusta Bar Association.

He becomes the third black judge to sit on the appeals court.

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U.S. District Judge Anthony Alaimo, who swore in Judge Ruffin, recalled his work on a Richmond County school desegregation case.

Judge Alaimo also discussed a lawsuit Judge Ruffin filed to win equal treatment for Augusta's black police officers, pointing out that it was not an easy time to fight for civil rights.

"He was a perfect gentleman," he said. "He kept his cool throughout that turbulent period."

Judge Alaimo also complimented Judge Ruffin on his honesty.

"He was a person whose word you can accept without questions, which is the highest accolade you can give a lawyer," he said.

Supreme Court Justice Robert Benham, who described Judge Ruffin as a mentor and friend, highlighted the historic nature of his career.

"He was also a trailblazer for all of us," Judge Benham said. "He was one of a small group of lawyers who helped flesh out the Constitution, not just here in Georgia, but across this nation."

Judge Ruffin is known for his humor.

The praise prompted him to begin his speech with a tag line politicians now have to use on campaign commercials.

"I'm John Ruffin, and I approved this message," he said.

Judge Ruffin used his comments mostly to thank friends, family members and others who have contributed to his career.

But he also said holding the office is a first for him personally.

"I have never been the chief of anything before, not even the house for which I pay the note," he quipped.

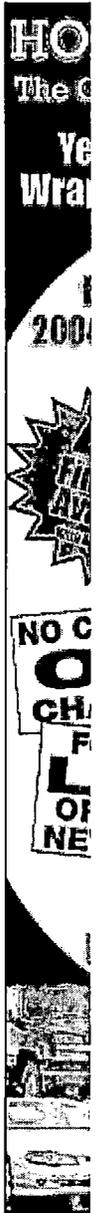
Reach Brandon Larrabee at (404) 681-1701 or brandon.larrabee@morris.com.

—From the Thursday, January 6, 2005 printed edition of the *Augusta Chronicle*



Judge Ruffin takes the oath from U.S. District Judge Anthony Alaimo. Judge Ruffin became the first black judge on the Augusta Judicial Circuit Superior Court in 1986.

Associated Press



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