

TRIBUTE TO JOHN ROBIN BRADLEY

*David W. Case**

On the first day of the 1985 fall semester at the University of Mississippi School of Law, I sat in a Lamar Law Center classroom anxiously awaiting the professor's arrival prior to my very first law school class. That class was Contracts and the professor was John Robin Bradley, then beginning his twentieth year on the Ole Miss faculty. To say I nervously awaited the start of that class is a monumental understatement. As I looked around the room, I was convinced that every other person staring back at me was firmly aware that I had no business there. I envisioned that someone from the dean's office was at that moment rushing to that classroom to not so regretfully inform me of the law school's discovery of this now obvious admissions error.

Fortunately for me, Professor Bradley walked into the classroom instead. I like to think that he shut the door right in front of whoever had been sprinting to pull me out of the classroom, and that this person recognized this as constituting the running of the statute of limitations on any ability to reverse my mistaken admission. In the face of this rather frazzled mental state, Professor Bradley's gentlemanly demeanor combined with his razor sharp wit immediately put me, at least somewhat, at ease. Soon afterwards, Professor Bradley's oratory skill in the tradition of the finest Mississippi story tellers and ability to deliver a hilarious punch line seemingly out of nowhere became one of my favorite aspects of my first year of law school.

Some twenty-eight years following this rather shaky start to my legal career, my colleague John Bradley announced to the faculty his intent to retire at the end of the 2012-13 academic year, his forty-seventh on the law school faculty. In an emotional burst of nostalgia triggered by John's announcement, I subsequently shared my recollection of my first day of law school

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with students in one of my classes at the Ole Miss Law School. After class, one of those students approached me to say that Professor Bradley had similarly taught her first class in law school two years earlier. I related to this student that I had heard John Grisham say something very similar about John Bradley teaching his first law school class in 1978, and later that of his son in 2006, during Grisham's 2011 speech at the dedication of the new Khayat Law Center.¹ The fact is that many thousands of former Ole Miss law students share this common experience. John Robin Bradley has been an enduring pillar connecting multiple generations of Ole Miss law students from 1966 to 2013. For the last several years, he has been the longest serving active faculty member at the University of Mississippi. His retirement is truly the end of an era.

As a two-time graduate of the University of Mississippi, I have very much enjoyed being John Bradley's colleague on the law school faculty for the past six years. My time with him on the faculty taught me something important about John that I was not fully aware of as his student. That is, that John is an absolutely remarkable historian. Outside of certain individuals affiliated with the department of history, Professor Bradley has perhaps the deepest reservoir of knowledge at the University of Mississippi on the intertwined history of the state of Mississippi and the university. This includes, most certainly, the equally intertwined nearly 160-year history of the law school. The many hours spent over the last several years discussing aspects of law school, university, and Mississippi history with John have been a tremendous personal pleasure. Law students often come to me as a graduate of the university and the law school seeking historical information on both institutions. After disclosing what I know, I always tell them that for much greater detail and far better context and nuance they absolutely *must* go talk to Professor Bradley. His well of information never seems to run dry and no one paints a more lush, robust, and entertaining historical landscape on any subject relating to the law school than John.

¹ See Dedication Ceremony Speech of John R. Grisham Jr., 81 MISS. L.J. 18, 18 (2011) (issue commemorating the dedication of the Robert C. Khayat Law Center at the University of Mississippi).

In the many months surrounding the law school's move in 2011 from the Lamar Law Center to our new home at the Khayat Law Center, John shared with me numerous stories about the various buildings that have housed the law school, both on and off the Ole Miss campus (including on the Oxford Square). In particular, I found utterly fascinating John's detailed knowledge of Farley Hall (the original Lamar Hall, subsequently renamed for three generations of Farleys associated with the School of Law and now home to the School of Journalism and New Media), where Professor Bradley was a law student and where he began his career on the university faculty. Some of John's Farley Hall stories were shared in my office in the Lamar Law Center, as we stood in front of my window looking across the parking lot at Farley. Although he never said it directly, John's tone in relating these stories convinced me that John continues to this day to disagree with the decision to move the law school across the parking lot from Farley to Lamar in the first place.

Other of John's stories about Farley Hall were shared with me in John's office at the Khayat Law Center, as he described the significance of some original shelving from Farley that he had installed in his Lamar Law Center office and subsequently reinstalled in his office in the new law school building. As he discussed these and other artifacts rescued from the days that Farley Hall housed the law school, I was deeply moved by how connected to the law school and its history John is and has been over the years, and how incredibly important that connection is to him. As his faculty colleague and his former law student, the depth of that connection and John's immense affection for the law school and the university have meant a great deal to me on a very personal level. I am extremely proud to have that in common with him.

It has also been an immense pleasure to have access to John's insight and depth of historical knowledge during this past academic year, which was the fiftieth anniversary of the integration of the university in 1962 (also, significantly, the year of John's graduation from Ole Miss and the year of my birth). In particular, John shared with me many fascinating insights regarding the inspiring examples of former Ole Miss law professor William Murphy and former law dean Joshua Morse and their

roles in events involving the law school during the civil rights era.² John's natural abilities as a compelling storyteller were, of course, greatly enhanced by the fact that he was a front row spectator as a law student and editor-in-chief of the *Mississippi Law Journal* as these unfortunate but historically meaningful events unfolded.³ I also spent many remarkable hours in discussions with John about former University of Mississippi history professor James W. Silver and the 1964 publication of his treatise *Mississippi: The Closed Society*⁴ that motivated segregationists to force Professor Silver to leave the university and the state, as had also been the case with Professor Murphy and Dean Morse.

In truly extraordinary service to the university, John successfully chaired the Silver Commemorative Committee whose efforts spearheaded university programs honoring Professor Silver and the dedication of the Silver Pond built in front of the first Residential College on the Ole Miss campus in 2011.⁵ Again, this meant a great deal to me on a personal level. Two of my children, R.J. and Jane Costner, are current Ole Miss students and live in the Residential College next to the Silver Pond. As an Ole Miss parent (and faculty member), it was a wonderful experience to share with my children (and members of the student body) a great deal of the remarkable history of Professor Silver and *Mississippi: The Closed Society* that John had shared with me. This included passing along to them a copy of Professor Silver's treatise that John had kindly located and given to me.

As a law school alumnus and a member of its faculty, I believe it extremely important that we carry on John Robin Bradley's legacy of understanding and appreciating the law school's history. This is unquestionably a lofty standard given how

² For a representative sampling of Professor Bradley's insight on these issues, see John R. Bradley, Jr., *A Salute to William P. Murphy*, 77 MISS. L.J. 923 (2008) and John R. Bradley, Jr., *The Five Eventful Years of Josh Morse's Eventful Deanship*, 82 MISS. L.J. (forthcoming 2013).

³ See Spencer M. Ritchie, *The Journal's Journey: A History of the Mississippi Law Journal*, 81 MISS. L.J. 1527, 1541 (2012).

⁴ James W. Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society*, 30 J. OF S. HIST. 3-34 (1964).

⁵ See Office of Univ. Comm'ns, *UM Tribute Set for Professor James W. Silver*, OLE MISS NEWS (Sept. 26, 2011), <http://news.olemiss.edu/um-tribute-set-for-professor-james-w-silver/#.UU9nJzeq6ZQ>.

high John has set the bar, but rightly so. The law school as an institution cannot understand how far it has progressed and how far there is yet to go if those responsible for that progress do not appreciate the substantive details of the history of our journey from our past to our present. For all of the students who have passed through the Ole Miss Law School over the past forty-seven years, Professor Bradley has connected us to that history and to each other in ways both tangible and intangible. Those shared bonds should help us carry Professor Bradley's legacy forward into the hopefully extremely bright future of the University of Mississippi School of Law.

It is an honor and a privilege to be both John Robin Bradley's former law student and his faculty colleague at the Ole Miss Law School. On behalf of the legions of his former law students and his many faculty colleagues, I say to John for his incredible forty-seven years of service to the law school, the university, and the state of Mississippi, thank you.

