

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA

INTERVIEW OF  
**MARIE McMILLAN THURMAN**  
former Chief Deputy Clerk  
of the United States District Court  
for the Middle District of Alabama

as a part of the  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
of the  
U.S. DISTRICT COURT  
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA

Interviewed by Vanzetta Penn McPherson  
Montgomery, Alabama  
February 2, 2017

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3

BACKGROUND AND EARLY YEARS 4

EDUCATION 10

RELIGION 18

SORORITY LIFE 21

EARLY CAREER 29

CLERK'S OFFICE EMPLOYMENT 31

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY 59

COURT LIFE 67

BRIDGE 80

COURTROOM DEPUTY 83

CHIEF DEPUTY CLERK 85

FLORENCE 91

AUTOMATION 97

RETIREMENT 105

REFLECTIONS 108

\* \* \* \* \*

1 MS. McPHERSON: Today is February 2nd, 2017. And I am  
2 very pleased to interview Marie McMillan Thurman, the retired  
3 chief deputy clerk of the U.S. District Court for the Middle  
4 District of Alabama.

5 My name is Vanzetta Penn McPherson. I was a U.S.  
6 magistrate judge in this Court from April of 1992 to October of  
7 2006. I served along with Marie. She retired before I did.  
8 And we had a professional relationship before that time when I  
9 practiced law in this district.

10 Marie, welcome.

11 MS. THURMAN: Thank you.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Welcome home in a lot of ways.

13 Tell us your title at the courthouse and your length of  
14 service when you retired.

15 MS. THURMAN: My title when I retired was chief deputy  
16 clerk. And my number of years was 32.

17 MS. McPHERSON: How does that 32-year tenure compare  
18 with the tenure of other clerk office personnel with whom you  
19 were familiar?

20 MS. THURMAN: Wow. I think the clerks -- the chief  
21 deputies were here for a long period of time. There's not a  
22 great turnover.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Was there anyone when you retired who  
24 had been with the clerk's office longer?

25 MS. THURMAN: I don't -- Ernestine. I believe

1 Ernestine -- well, Ernestine was here before I came.

2 MS. McPHERSON: And Ernestine's last name?

3 MS. THURMAN: Ernestine Lewis.

4 MS. McPHERSON: All right.

5 MS. THURMAN: And, of course, Ms. Gordon.

6 MS. McPHERSON: How many clerks did you work for?

7 MS. THURMAN: I worked for the first -- the clerk that  
8 was here when I was hired was Robert Dobson. And then  
9 Ms. Gordon, Jane Gordon, became clerk, and then Curtis Caver.  
10 So there were three clerks.

11 MS. McPHERSON: I see. And you were a deputy clerk  
12 under Mr. Dobson and Ms. Gordon. And you were chief deputy  
13 clerk under Mr. Caver.

14 MS. THURMAN: That's correct.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Let's talk a little about your  
16 background. You were born here in Montgomery?

17 MS. THURMAN: No.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Where were you born?

19 MS. THURMAN: I was born in Mobile.

20 MS. McPHERSON: I see. And how old were you when you  
21 moved here?

22 MS. THURMAN: I was about four, going on five. My  
23 father died when I was that age, and my mother moved to  
24 Montgomery.

25 MS. McPHERSON: All right. And how many siblings did

1 you have?

2 MS. THURMAN: There were 11 of us.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Oh, my goodness.

4 MS. THURMAN: Two boys and nine girls.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Where were you in this array of  
6 siblings?

7 MS. THURMAN: Everybody calls me the baby, but I did  
8 have twins that were younger than I. But they died in a couple  
9 of weeks after birth.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Do you remember how old you were when  
11 that happened?

12 MS. THURMAN: I was very, very young. In grade school.

13 MS. McPHERSON: So your mother and father were not  
14 native Montgomerians either.

15 MS. THURMAN: No.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Why do you think your mother  
17 chose Montgomery?

18 MS. THURMAN: My mother was born in Vinegar Bend,  
19 Alabama.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Vinegar Bend? Does it have a county  
21 attached to it?

22 MS. THURMAN: That's very close to Mobile.

23 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

24 MS. THURMAN: And my father was born in Orrville.

25 MS. McPHERSON: I see. In Dallas County.

1 MS. THURMAN: That's correct.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

3 MS. THURMAN: And she moved here, and I don't really  
4 remember the reason. But she moved here and, of course, she  
5 went to work. Because before that, she was a housewife.

6 MS. McPHERSON: I see. How many of your siblings do  
7 you recall being in the house at the same time with you, since  
8 you were effectively the baby?

9 MS. THURMAN: Three.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Only three?

11 MS. THURMAN: Only three.

12 MS. McPHERSON: I see. Three others and you made a  
13 fourth, or a total of three?

14 MS. THURMAN: A total of three.

15 MS. McPHERSON: I see. So --

16 MS. THURMAN: Now, from time to time, they were back  
17 and forth, but --

18 MS. McPHERSON: I see. Are all of them still living?

19 MS. THURMAN: No. I only have one sibling still  
20 living.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Just one?

22 MS. THURMAN: A sister.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Where is she?

24 MS. THURMAN: She's in the Atlanta area, Douglasville,  
25 Georgia.

1 MS. McPHERSON: What did your mother do for a living  
2 when she began working?

3 MS. THURMAN: My mother, when she came to Montgomery,  
4 she went to work for St. Peter's Catholic Church.

5 MS. McPHERSON: The church. Okay.

6 MS. THURMAN: Or St. Peter's Parish.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

8 MS. THURMAN: She was the housekeeper and cook.

9 MS. McPHERSON: All right. Were you --

10 MS. THURMAN: And she worked there for 35 years.

11 MS. McPHERSON: Goodness.

12 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Were you already Catholic when you  
14 moved to Montgomery?

15 MS. THURMAN: I was not.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Do you believe that you became Catholic  
17 as a result of her work?

18 MS. THURMAN: No. My mother was Catholic.

19 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

20 MS. THURMAN: And so that's why I became Catholic. But  
21 I was not baptized as an infant.

22 MS. McPHERSON: And your home church when you were a  
23 child?

24 MS. THURMAN: My home church is St. John the Baptist,  
25 and it still is my home church.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Here in Montgomery on Union Street.

2 MS. THURMAN: Right.

3 MS. McPHERSON: I see. Where did you move to when you  
4 first came to Montgomery? When I say where, I mean where in  
5 Montgomery.

6 MS. THURMAN: When we first moved to Montgomery, I  
7 lived on Saint James Street off of Hall.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Which was then on the east side of  
9 town.

10 MS. THURMAN: No, south.

11 MS. McPHERSON: South side of town. Okay.

12 MS. THURMAN: It's over near Alabama State.

13 MS. McPHERSON: I see. How long did you stay there?

14 MS. THURMAN: Wow. I don't remember.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Did you ultimately move to another  
16 location?

17 MS. THURMAN: We ultimately moved to the projects.

18 MS. McPHERSON: And the name of the project?

19 MS. THURMAN: Was Paterson Court.

20 MS. McPHERSON: And Paterson Court is that housing --  
21 public housing project adjacent to Alabama State University;  
22 correct?

23 MS. THURMAN: That's correct.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Let's talk a little about the nature of  
25 public housing projects at that time. Explain it to us, if you



1 will.

2 MS. THURMAN: It was very different than it is now.  
3 The -- of course, back then, you didn't have to lock doors. And  
4 the neighbors saw after the kids if the mother was not home, you  
5 know. It was that type of thing.

6 MS. McPHERSON: You knew your neighbors?

7 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah. Very well.

8 MS. McPHERSON: And they knew you?

9 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Did they have permission to discipline  
11 you?

12 MS. THURMAN: Yes, they did.

13 MS. McPHERSON: And they did.

14 MS. THURMAN: And they did. Yes.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Was it a place where people considered  
16 themselves to be upwardly mobile; that is to say, they were  
17 middle class and they were hard-working people in the housing  
18 projects at that time?

19 MS. THURMAN: They were all hard-working people. And a  
20 lot of them were professional people, people -- they were  
21 teachers, you know -- it was not just the ordinary jobs that  
22 some people had.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Sure. Was there a crime problem at  
24 Paterson Court?

25 MS. THURMAN: There was not at that time.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Very quiet?

2 MS. THURMAN: Very quiet. Very peaceful.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Where did you end up going to school?

4 MS. THURMAN: Meaning elementary?

5 MS. McPHERSON: Yes, when you --

6 MS. THURMAN: Okay. I went to Booker T. Washington  
7 elementary school.

8 MS. McPHERSON: And that was located up the hill from  
9 you, wasn't it?

10 MS. THURMAN: That's correct.

11 MS. McPHERSON: Did you walk to school?

12 MS. THURMAN: We walked to school. We did not own a  
13 car, so I had no choice.

14 MS. McPHERSON: And you didn't ride a bus?

15 MS. THURMAN: Didn't ride a bus.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

17 MS. THURMAN: Didn't have a need to ride a bus.

18 MS. McPHERSON: What sorts of activities did you  
19 participate in as a child other than school and church?

20 MS. THURMAN: Basically, other than playing with the  
21 neighborhood kids, I didn't do a lot of playing outside when my  
22 mother was not at home, when she was at work.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Well, since you came from such a large  
24 family, did you have a host of cousins or nieces and nephews  
25 here in Montgomery?

1 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah. A lot of nieces and nephews.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Here?

3 MS. THURMAN: As a matter of fact, my baby was my  
4 mother's thirtieth grandchild.

5 MS. McPHERSON: You mean your son?

6 MS. THURMAN: My son.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Oh, my goodness. Did she remember all  
8 of them?

9 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah. She would never forget them.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Interesting.

11 MS. THURMAN: Every birthday, she remembered. She  
12 would send them a card with a dollar in it.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Oh, my goodness.

14 MS. THURMAN: She always did that. She did that until  
15 she passed away.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Did you find yourself knowing them that  
17 well?

18 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah.

19 MS. McPHERSON: By name and birthday and all of that?

20 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Goodness.

22 MS. THURMAN: We're a very close family.

23 MS. McPHERSON: While you were in elementary school,  
24 did you participate in any extracurricular activities?

25 MS. THURMAN: I did not.

1 MS. McPHERSON: You didn't sing in the kiddie choir or  
2 anything?

3 MS. THURMAN: I did not. I don't remember.

4 MS. McPHERSON: What about at St. John?

5 MS. THURMAN: I've never been able to sing. And --

6 MS. McPHERSON: What about at St. John?

7 MS. THURMAN: Well, now, I didn't go to St. John  
8 School.

9 MS. McPHERSON: No. I mean the church.

10 MS. THURMAN: I went to Booker T. Washington. The  
11 church.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

13 MS. THURMAN: Well, I didn't sing in the choir, ever,  
14 because I'm not a singer.

15 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

16 MS. THURMAN: So I never did participate in the choir.  
17 But we would have what you call CCD classes, you know, where you  
18 would go to that. And I would participate in that.

19 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

20 MS. THURMAN: And then as I grew up, then I became like  
21 one of the readers during mass. They call them lectors. And I  
22 still am a lector.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Here's a question I've always wanted to  
24 ask. When you were going to St. John Church as a child -- and  
25 obviously, since you are still a member, that means that you

1 went to St. John church through college. Did you at any time  
2 feel that because you were not a student at St. John, which I  
3 believe went to only eighth grade at the time --

4 MS. THURMAN: That's correct.

5 MS. McPHERSON: -- that you were regarded any  
6 differently from the children who attended St. John and were  
7 also members of St. John Church?

8 MS. THURMAN: I was not. And the reason I didn't go is  
9 because after my father died and my mother moved to Montgomery,  
10 she could not afford. Because you paid --

11 MS. McPHERSON: Sure. The tuition.

12 MS. THURMAN: -- you know, to go to Catholic school.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Also at that time, Booker  
14 Washington was a three-part institution from first grade through  
15 twelfth.

16 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

17 MS. McPHERSON: And did you attend Booker T. Washington  
18 from first grade through twelfth?

19 MS. THURMAN: I did.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Were there any elementary  
21 schoolteachers whom you had who influenced you especially?

22 MS. THURMAN: I remember Ms. Arrington. Ms. Arrington  
23 at one time, she was the principal.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Elizabeth Arrington.

25 MS. THURMAN: But other than that, I can't remember the

1 names. I don't remember the names.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Do you currently have any friends with  
3 whom you went to school from first through twelfth grade?

4 MS. THURMAN: Actually, my -- some of my classmates  
5 from Booker T. Washington, we still get together once a month  
6 and have lunch. And it's about -- between 15 and 20 of us.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Really?

8 MS. THURMAN: Uh-huh. And we go to restaurants. And  
9 whoever's having a birthday that month, they choose the  
10 restaurant we --

11 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

12 MS. THURMAN: -- when we go.

13 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

14 MS. THURMAN: So there are a few whom I went from --

15 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Those few people --

16 MS. THURMAN: -- elementary through --

17 MS. McPHERSON: -- who really know you.

18 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Yes. So then you went on to junior  
20 high. And it was called junior high in those days, not middle  
21 school.

22 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

23 MS. McPHERSON: And then high school.

24 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

25 MS. McPHERSON: What activities did you participate in

1 in high school?

2 MS. THURMAN: In high school, I was on the debate  
3 club -- I was in the debate club. I was a majorette for four  
4 years. And matter of fact, I was head majorette my senior year.

5 MS. McPHERSON: We remember (laughter).

6 And did you have any especially influential teachers in  
7 high school?

8 MS. THURMAN: I did. I loved business, and so typing  
9 and shorthand were my favorite subjects. And Mrs. -- she was  
10 Bennye Black at that time. Of course, now she's Mrs. Bennye  
11 Reasor.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

13 MS. THURMAN: But I watched her, and I so wanted to be  
14 like her in many ways.

15 MS. McPHERSON: What do you think sparked your interest  
16 in business courses, in the business world? Did you have anyone  
17 in your family who had been in business?

18 MS. THURMAN: I did not. I did not.

19 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

20 MS. THURMAN: I just always wanted to be in that  
21 profession.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Did Mrs. Reasor encourage it?

23 MS. THURMAN: She did. She did.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. When you were in high school,  
25 were those courses electives or were they required?

1 MS. THURMAN: Elective.

2 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

3 MS. THURMAN: Uh-huh.

4 MS. McPHERSON: What did you not take in -- in order to  
5 take business?

6 MS. THURMAN: I didn't take a whole lot. Of course,  
7 you had to take the --

8 MS. McPHERSON: Sure.

9 MS. THURMAN: -- regular math and science classes, but  
10 I didn't take a whole lot of them.

11 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did you later pursue that in  
12 college?

13 MS. THURMAN: I did.

14 MS. McPHERSON: How did you decide where you were going  
15 to college?

16 MS. THURMAN: I actually wanted to go to college away  
17 from home. And I had planned to go to Tennessee State  
18 University. And, of course --

19 MS. McPHERSON: In Nashville?

20 MS. THURMAN: In Nashville, Tennessee. And then right  
21 before I was ready to go, you know, I just realized my mother  
22 really couldn't afford that. I had already been accepted. We  
23 had started buying things, you know, the trunk and all that so  
24 my things could be shipped and all. But I realized she couldn't  
25 afford it, and so I decided to stay home --



1 MS. McPHERSON: Your mother didn't tell you you  
2 couldn't go.

3 MS. THURMAN: -- and go to Alabama State. She did not  
4 tell me I couldn't go.

5 MS. McPHERSON: You just decided.

6 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Why Tennessee State?

8 MS. THURMAN: I remember when I was in high school I  
9 did belong to the Girl Scouts. And we went to Nashville on one  
10 of our Girl Scout trips, and I just fell in love with the area.

11 MS. McPHERSON: I see. How did you announce this to  
12 your mother?

13 MS. THURMAN: I watched my mother, and she worked very  
14 hard. And we just sat down and talked, and I told her that I  
15 knew she wanted -- that she would allow me to go and I knew what  
16 a hardship it would be on her, and so I decided to stay home.  
17 And, of course, she was thrilled that I --

18 MS. McPHERSON: Thrilled that you weren't going and  
19 costing her money or thrilled that her baby was staying at home?

20 MS. THURMAN: Thrilled that her baby would stay at  
21 home.

22 MS. McPHERSON: I see. Let's identify her. Her name?

23 MS. THURMAN: Justine Moody McMillan.

24 MS. McPHERSON: All right. So you decided to go to  
25 ASU, which was then Alabama State College?

1 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

2 MS. McPHERSON: And, again, it was in walking distance.

3 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely.

4 MS. McPHERSON: So instead of going up the hill, you  
5 went around the corner.

6 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did you have to declare a major  
8 when you went?

9 MS. THURMAN: Not the first couple years, you did not.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Did you find it to be --

11 MS. THURMAN: You know, you took the major --

12 MS. McPHERSON: Did you find it to be a very different  
13 experience from high school?

14 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yes, it was, because you are more or  
15 less on your own when you go to college, you know.

16 MS. McPHERSON: When you were growing up,  
17 African-American children who were Catholic were in the decided  
18 minority among people who went to church. Tell me how your  
19 being Catholic affected how you conducted yourself and how you  
20 saw the world as a young woman.

21 MS. THURMAN: I never belonged to any other religion  
22 other than Catholic. And, of course, my mother was Catholic.  
23 And so it was -- it was -- the whole family was Catholic as we  
24 were growing up. And, of course, as my sisters and brothers  
25 went their way, they joined other denominations. But I never

1 changed.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Why not?

3 MS. THURMAN: Because that's -- well, one thing, that  
4 was all I had ever known was the Catholic church. And I've  
5 never had a desire to leave it, even though I've visited other  
6 denominations.

7 MS. McPHERSON: What is it that you think about the  
8 Catholic church that influences you most strongly?

9 MS. THURMAN: Even though I didn't go to the Catholic  
10 school, I had friends that went to the Catholic school. And so  
11 it was always -- it was what I was taught by my mother, the  
12 Catholic faith and the one true faith and --

13 MS. McPHERSON: Was it the structure?

14 MS. THURMAN: I think the structure had a lot to do  
15 with it.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Have you ever met or seen a Pope?

17 MS. THURMAN: Not in person.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And did you continue practicing  
19 actively your faith in college? I ask that question because so  
20 many go to college and drop off.

21 MS. THURMAN: I did. Yeah. That was something that we  
22 knew we had to do, and that was go to church --

23 MS. McPHERSON: Sure.

24 MS. THURMAN: -- on Sunday. And even when I went away  
25 for the few months I did in leaving Montgomery after I graduated

1 from college, I found a church, a Catholic church. And I do  
2 that now when I travel. I don't care where I am. I find a  
3 Catholic church and go to mass on Sundays.

4 MS. McPHERSON: Do you?

5 MS. THURMAN: I do.

6 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Do you feel strange or lacking  
7 when you don't?

8 MS. THURMAN: It just doesn't feel like it's Sunday if  
9 I don't go to church.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

11 MS. THURMAN: And I'm sure that's because of the way I  
12 was brought up. It was just instilled in me that I go to  
13 church.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Do you think that having been Catholic  
15 all your life, especially in your work here, that it facilitated  
16 your ability to assume your responsibilities?

17 MS. THURMAN: Not necessarily, but --

18 MS. McPHERSON: Which is another way of asking how big  
19 of a role did your faith have in your sense of duty or  
20 responsibility.

21 MS. THURMAN: I've always been a responsible person.  
22 And everybody -- all the people that I was around knew that.  
23 And they knew I was dependable. If things needed to get done, I  
24 would see that they were done.

25 MS. McPHERSON: How about your activities in college

1 other than classes, of course? And don't mention your sorority  
2 just yet, because that's a special category all to itself.

3 MS. THURMAN: Well, even though I was a majorette in  
4 high school, that was not something I wanted to continue when I  
5 got in college.

6 MS. McPHERSON: Why not?

7 MS. THURMAN: I just didn't have a desire to. And so I  
8 didn't go out for the majorettes. I felt that I needed to study  
9 and not participate in a whole lot of activities. I was on the  
10 debate team in college and I was in some of the organizations,  
11 business organizations. But other than that --

12 MS. McPHERSON: Were you the type of student who  
13 attended every game?

14 MS. THURMAN: No.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Really?

16 MS. THURMAN: I wouldn't say that.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Football or basketball?

18 MS. THURMAN: No. Even though I do enjoy football and  
19 basketball now.

20 MS. McPHERSON: And in spite of the fact that you lived  
21 so close.

22 MS. THURMAN: Right. And I did go to some, but not  
23 just every -- every game.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Now, anyone who knows Marie  
25 Thurman knows that her name is almost synonymous with Alpha

1 Kappa Alpha Sorority, so I have a series of questions about  
2 that. First and foremost, which person or persons were the  
3 major influences on your pledging AKA in college?

4 MS. THURMAN: My sister --

5 MS. McPHERSON: Really?

6 MS. THURMAN: -- Florence. She pledged when she was in  
7 college at Alabama State.

8 MS. McPHERSON: By how many years was she older than  
9 you?

10 MS. THURMAN: Four, almost five.

11 MS. McPHERSON: And was it Little Marie worshipping  
12 Florence pledging AKA, or was it Older Florence drafting Marie  
13 into AKA?

14 MS. THURMAN: I just adored her. And I would just --  
15 when she was even pledging and studying and -- I would learn the  
16 material with her. And so she was a great influence.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Was she living at home with you at the  
18 time?

19 MS. THURMAN: She was at first, but she moved away.  
20 She got married and moved to New York.

21 MS. McPHERSON: I mean during the time when she was  
22 pledging. She was --

23 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah. She was home, oh, yeah, when  
24 she was in school.

25 MS. McPHERSON: She was with you every -- so you saw

1 her go through the pledging activities?

2 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely. Yes.

3 MS. McPHERSON: And it's something you found really  
4 attractive --

5 MS. THURMAN: I did.

6 MS. McPHERSON: -- and you learned all about it.

7 MS. THURMAN: I did.

8 MS. McPHERSON: So by the time you pledged, you had a  
9 head start on the material.

10 MS. THURMAN: Of course.

11 MS. McPHERSON: You knew the alphabet.

12 MS. THURMAN: I knew the -- yes, alphabet, some of the  
13 songs, because I would listen to her as she studied.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Were there any women who were  
15 upperclassmen, as we called them at the time, whom you  
16 specifically admired when you pledged?

17 MS. THURMAN: That were at Alabama State --

18 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

19 MS. THURMAN: -- or just in general?

20 MS. McPHERSON: Yes. No. At Alabama State.

21 MS. THURMAN: Yes. There were some of the sorors that  
22 I admired.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Now, let's explore this sorority  
24 business a bit, because sorority pledging and sorority  
25 activities in African-American colleges and African-American

1 society is different from sororities and the role of sororities  
2 in white societies. Would you agree?

3 MS. THURMAN: I agree.

4 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Describe, if you will, the role  
5 of sorority membership in the African-American community.

6 MS. THURMAN: Basically, when you join, it's like a  
7 lifelong thing. It's not -- I know I think in the white  
8 society, after they graduate from college, they don't continue.  
9 And, of course, in the black sororities and fraternities, you do  
10 continue and belong to the graduate chapter. And it was the  
11 service things that we would do that I enjoyed and still enjoy  
12 doing.

13 MS. McPHERSON: I spoke with a white friend not long  
14 ago about this very thing, and she boiled it down to white  
15 sororities being social and black sororities being service.  
16 Would you agree with that?

17 MS. THURMAN: I do.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. So your activism in Alpha Kappa  
19 Alpha is a lifelong activism.

20 MS. THURMAN: It is. I actually am a life member of  
21 Alpha Kappa Alpha and a golden, considered a golden soror  
22 because I've been there over -- in the organization over 50  
23 years.

24 MS. McPHERSON: And you go to every single regional and  
25 national meeting.



1 MS. THURMAN: I do.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Your sorority --

3 MS. THURMAN: And I've never been inactive --

4 MS. McPHERSON: Never?

5 MS. THURMAN: -- since I made the sorority.

6 MS. McPHERSON: And your sorority celebrated its 100th  
7 anniversary recently, and you were there.

8 MS. THURMAN: We did. In Washington D.C. Yes.

9 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And you have made, I assume,  
10 some very close friendships with sorors who are not in  
11 Montgomery or even Alabama.

12 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Have any of them been federal clerk's  
14 office employees?

15 MS. THURMAN: I don't recall right off.

16 MS. McPHERSON: How has sorority life changed in those  
17 50 years? I know one thing that's changed is I understand that  
18 let's say 50 years ago, in a graduate chapter, women actually  
19 wore gloves to meetings.

20 MS. THURMAN: That's true. And we still dress  
21 professional when we go to meetings. There are some meetings  
22 where you can wear paraphernalia, but that's very seldom.

23 MS. McPHERSON: I see. Okay. Have you ever been an  
24 advisor to any of the college chapters here in Montgomery?

25 MS. THURMAN: I have not. But when I -- after I

1 pledged on campus, I became dean of pledges. And so I was  
2 helpful in helping other young ladies become members of our  
3 great organization.

4 MS. McPHERSON: Uh-huh.

5 Tell me about which of your high school teachers had  
6 the greatest influence on you other than Ms. Reasor.

7 MS. THURMAN: In high school, Margaret Elmore. She  
8 taught me French.

9 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

10 MS. THURMAN: And she is also an Alpha Kappa Alpha  
11 woman. And she --

12 MS. McPHERSON: And you knew that at the time?

13 MS. THURMAN: I did not know that at the time.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

15 MS. THURMAN: And there were others.

16 MS. McPHERSON: What about Louise Spears?

17 MS. THURMAN: Louise Spears.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Let me tell you why I mentioned her.

19 MS. THURMAN: Actually, when I did my student teaching,  
20 I did it under Louise Spears at Booker Washington.

21 MS. McPHERSON: At your home high school?

22 MS. THURMAN: I did.

23 MS. McPHERSON: How did you finagle that?

24 MS. THURMAN: Well, I had spoken to her about it.

25 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

1 MS. THURMAN: And she was in the business department,  
2 and so I was able to do it under her.

3 MS. McPHERSON: I plan to explore it a bit more broadly  
4 later, but I volunteered Mrs. Spears' name because together with  
5 Mrs. Elmore, the two of them were probably the ladies of style  
6 on the Booker T. Washington campus at the time. And in addition  
7 to AKA and Catholicism, you are also closely identified as a  
8 woman of immense personal style. Do you think that you were  
9 influenced by either Mrs. Elmore or Mrs. Spears or anyone else  
10 at Booker Washington?

11 MS. THURMAN: Oh, certainly. I would watch the  
12 teachers and -- very closely and watched how they dressed. And  
13 then we were taught that in the business department, how to  
14 dress and how we should look.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Did that influence continue when you  
16 went to college?

17 MS. THURMAN: It did.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Under whom?

19 MS. THURMAN: Mrs. Donnely. I had a lot of classes  
20 under her. And, of course, they also taught that -- they talked  
21 about how you should dress, especially, you know -- well, not  
22 only at all times, but when you're going out on interviews and  
23 things of that nature.

24 MS. McPHERSON: So personal appearance was something  
25 that you learned to pay close attention to early.

1 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yes.

2 MS. McPHERSON: All of your education was racially  
3 segregated, was it not, through college?

4 MS. THURMAN: It was.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Did you ever have any aspirations as a  
6 teenager other than working in the business world? Did you ever  
7 fancy yourself as something else, like most little girls?

8 MS. THURMAN: Not that I recall.

9 MS. McPHERSON: Nothing else?

10 MS. THURMAN: Always -- no.

11 MS. McPHERSON: After you graduated from college, did  
12 you go to graduate school?

13 MS. THURMAN: I did not.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Did you deliberately refrain from going  
15 to graduate school, or was there something else about your work  
16 life that simply turned you in another direction.

17 MS. THURMAN: It was just that when I graduated from  
18 college, I needed to work. And I went right to work.

19 MS. McPHERSON: What about later?

20 MS. THURMAN: Well, once I guess I was stable in the  
21 position, then I just didn't -- I just never had a desire to  
22 further my education.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Do you believe now that furthering your  
24 education would have advanced your career at the courthouse at  
25 all?

1 MS. THURMAN: No.

2 MS. McPHERSON: When you graduated, you went far away  
3 from Montgomery and far away from this courthouse for your first  
4 job.

5 MS. THURMAN: I did.

6 MS. McPHERSON: Tell me about that.

7 MS. THURMAN: I went to Sparta, Georgia, which is -- it  
8 was a very small town, one red light, but one of my friends  
9 worked there. And she told me about the position and I applied.

10 MS. McPHERSON: What was the position?

11 MS. THURMAN: It was a business teacher. It was Sparta  
12 High -- Hancock Central High School in Sparta, Georgia.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Was it a segregated school as well?

14 MS. THURMAN: It was. And I taught typing, shorthand,  
15 and bookkeeping.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Did you have a car?

17 MS. THURMAN: I did not. When I first went there, I  
18 had to ride the bus. And there was not even a bus station. So  
19 you would get off in front of the store and somebody would be  
20 there to pick you up. But I did purchase a car after I got  
21 there.

22 MS. McPHERSON: How often did you commute by bus?  
23 Every weekend?

24 MS. THURMAN: Every weekend. They used to call me the  
25 suitcase teacher because I would want to come home. There was

1 nothing to do there.

2 MS. McPHERSON: So how did you find a church?

3 MS. THURMAN: Just asking around. And then, actually,  
4 the closest Catholic church was Milledgeville, Georgia. And so  
5 I had friends that would, you know, take me to church. And that  
6 was one of the big reasons I needed a car.

7 MS. McPHERSON: How far away was Milledgeville?

8 MS. THURMAN: Milledgeville was about 25, 28 miles one  
9 way.

10 MS. McPHERSON: How long did you remain at that high  
11 school?

12 MS. THURMAN: I taught eight months, I think it was.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Until?

14 MS. THURMAN: Until I got the job in Montgomery.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Tell me how that happened.

16 MS. THURMAN: During the summer, I would always work  
17 during the summer to help my mom and then to save money.

18 MS. McPHERSON: You mean while you were in college?

19 MS. THURMAN: Right.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

21 MS. THURMAN: I even worked in high school. I even  
22 worked during school.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Did you?

24 MS. THURMAN: I would work at the school office. Yeah.

25 MS. McPHERSON: Really?

1 MS. THURMAN: I did.

2 MS. McPHERSON: What other kinds of summer and  
3 part-time jobs did you have?

4 MS. THURMAN: I worked for Charles Conley, an  
5 attorney. I also went to New York. One of my sisters was  
6 living there. And I worked there one summer for an insurance  
7 company.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Office work?

9 MS. THURMAN: Office work. Uh-huh. And I applied down  
10 at First Alabama.

11 MS. McPHERSON: Bank?

12 MS. THURMAN: Right.

13 MS. McPHERSON: The predecessor to Regions.

14 MS. THURMAN: Right.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

16 MS. THURMAN: And I took the test and all, but they  
17 didn't have any openings at the time. And so Mr. William  
18 Baldwin was friends with the clerk of the court, Rob Dobson, at  
19 that time. And Mr. Baldwin told Mr. Dobson about me, that I had  
20 taken the test and I did so well on it. And I think at the  
21 time, they were looking for a black to work in the office.

22 MS. McPHERSON: The clerk's office?

23 MS. THURMAN: In the clerk's office. So --

24 MS. McPHERSON: And so that we establish the time, this  
25 was 1966-67?

1 MS. THURMAN: This was 1966. I graduated in 1965. And  
2 so I received a phone call from Mr. Dobson telling me, you know,  
3 about what Mr. Baldwin had told him. And they were interested  
4 in hiring --

5 MS. McPHERSON: Now, I take it --

6 MS. THURMAN: -- a black.

7 MS. McPHERSON: -- when you get to First -- First  
8 National Bank, which became First National, which became First  
9 Alabama --

10 MS. THURMAN: Right.

11 MS. McPHERSON: -- which became Regions, you didn't  
12 have any conversation with Mr. William Baldwin.

13 MS. THURMAN: I did not.

14 MS. McPHERSON: How did William Baldwin know about you?

15 MS. THURMAN: Well, he was the person, I think, that  
16 did the hiring at that time. And he was also a commissioner. I  
17 think back then, they had commissioners in the courts, and he  
18 was one of the jury commissioners.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Did you ever meet him?

20 MS. THURMAN: I did.

21 MS. McPHERSON: When did you meet him?

22 MS. THURMAN: I met him after I came to the courts.

23 MS. McPHERSON: After you became a court employee?

24 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

25 MS. McPHERSON: Had you ever seen or spoken with him



1 before then?

2 MS. THURMAN: I don't recall that today.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Well, the lawyer in me wants to  
4 know how Mr. Baldwin could possibly have known that you were  
5 black.

6 MS. THURMAN: Well, I'm sure from the application.

7 MS. McPHERSON: You indicated your race on the  
8 application?

9 MS. THURMAN: I think it was.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

11 MS. THURMAN: And I'm sure the person who gave me the  
12 test, that he probably spoke with him.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Who told you that the courthouse  
14 was looking for an African-American employee?

15 MS. THURMAN: Well, Mr. Dobson called me. Nobody told  
16 me. He called me. I was working in Sparta at that time at  
17 Hancock Central.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

19 MS. THURMAN: And he said that Judge Johnson would like  
20 to interview me. They had an opening. And, of course, I told  
21 him that I could not come during the week, but I could certainly  
22 come and be interviewed on a Saturday, if that was okay. And he  
23 said he would see about making the arrangements. And he did.

24 MS. McPHERSON: His reference was to Judge Frank Minis  
25 Johnson Jr. --

1 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

2 MS. McPHERSON: -- who was the sole district judge of  
3 this Court at that time --

4 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

5 MS. McPHERSON: -- and in whose library we are  
6 currently sitting.

7 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

8 MS. McPHERSON: So it was Mr. Dobson who told you that  
9 the courthouse was looking for an African-American employee.

10 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely.

11 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did he say why?

12 MS. THURMAN: He did not. But, you know, it was during  
13 desegregation time. And I -- I don't recall him --

14 MS. McPHERSON: So did you make an appointment to be  
15 interviewed on a Saturday?

16 MS. THURMAN: I did.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

18 MS. THURMAN: And I came.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Who interviewed you?

20 MS. THURMAN: Judge Johnson.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Was anyone else present?

22 MS. THURMAN: No.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Was it in his chambers?

24 MS. THURMAN: It was in his chambers.

25 MS. McPHERSON: Which is right across the hall from

1 where we're now sitting?

2 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Tell me about that interview.

4 MS. THURMAN: Well, we talked. And then he told me  
5 about Mr. Baldwin and about what Mr. Baldwin thought of me, you  
6 know, but they didn't have any openings and that Mr. Baldwin  
7 thought that I would be a good employee for the position. And  
8 so he told me if I could be relieved from my job -- because I  
9 had signed a contract -- that he wanted to hire me.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Did you carry with you to Judge  
11 Johnson's chambers a resume or anything else describing your  
12 qualifications?

13 MS. THURMAN: I did. I did.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

15 MS. THURMAN: And, of course, it wasn't a very long  
16 resume, but --

17 MS. McPHERSON: Did you complete any other application  
18 forms?

19 MS. THURMAN: No.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Did you know what the job involved when  
21 you went to talk with Judge Johnson?

22 MS. THURMAN: Well, once -- once I was able to be  
23 relieved from my job in Sparta, then I spoke, of course, with  
24 Mr. Dobson. And he told me, you know, about it and what it  
25 entailed. And at that time, Judge Johnson was the sole judge

1 here and there were like four or five people in the office.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Was it your impression that at that  
3 time -- and when I ask you this, I want you to use what you knew  
4 at the time and what you observed after you became an employee.  
5 Was it your impression at the time that it was Judge Johnson who  
6 hired employees in the clerk's office or Mr. Dobson?

7 MS. THURMAN: It was my impression that it was  
8 Mr. Dobson but that Judge had the last word on it.

9 MS. McPHERSON: I see. I see. Did you ever observe,  
10 after you became an employee, a potential hiree going to Judge  
11 Johnson for an interview?

12 MS. THURMAN: No.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Did you, during the course of your  
14 employment here, while Judge Johnson was a judge here, observe  
15 that?

16 MS. THURMAN: No.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Had you ever heard of Frank Johnson  
18 before Mr. Dobson called you?

19 MS. THURMAN: You know, I don't think so. I don't  
20 think so.

21 MS. McPHERSON: This was 1966. So you weren't aware of  
22 his role in the desegregation cases, especially the voting  
23 rights cases that arose from the Selma-to-Montgomery March or  
24 any of those cases?

25 MS. THURMAN: Not at that time.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And during that time or period,  
2 the first floor of this courthouse was the United States Postal  
3 Service.

4 MS. THURMAN: That's correct.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Would you agree that it is likely that  
6 most African-Americans generally went no farther than the first  
7 floor of this building?

8 MS. THURMAN: Do you mean --

9 MS. McPHERSON: Using this building. Using the  
10 facilities of this building. That you came in, you used the  
11 first floor, and you went -- you went out.

12 MS. THURMAN: Right. Right.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Had you ever been to the second floor  
14 of this building?

15 MS. THURMAN: I had not.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Did you know that there was a  
17 courthouse or courtrooms and judge office on the second floor?

18 MS. THURMAN: I did not at that time.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Did you have any idea what was up here?

20 MS. THURMAN: I did know that it was a federal  
21 courthouse.

22 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

23 MS. THURMAN: Uh-huh.

24 MS. McPHERSON: You had never attended a trial --

25 MS. THURMAN: No.

1 MS. McPHERSON: -- or been involved in any action or  
2 gone to the clerk's office for any reason?

3 MS. THURMAN: No.

4 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. There was an African-American  
5 employee working for the U.S. District Court or U.S. Bankruptcy  
6 Court before you were hired; correct?

7 MS. THURMAN: That's correct.

8 MS. McPHERSON: What is her name?

9 MS. THURMAN: Carolyn Elaine Wright.

10 MS. McPHERSON: And as I recall, she, too, is a member  
11 of Alpha Kappa Alpha.

12 MS. THURMAN: She is.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Did you know that Ms. Wright was  
14 already here?

15 MS. THURMAN: I did not. After I came to work here, we  
16 became friends.

17 MS. McPHERSON: So she did not pledge with you.

18 MS. THURMAN: No. She pledged under me.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Ahh.

20 MS. THURMAN: She pledged the graduate chapter --

21 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

22 MS. THURMAN: -- not in college.

23 MS. McPHERSON: I see. Okay. Where was the bankruptcy  
24 court located?

25 MS. THURMAN: It was all a part of the clerk's office,

1 the bankruptcy court. And --

2 MS. McPHERSON: Was there a bankruptcy judge?

3 MS. THURMAN: There was. Leon Hopper --

4 MS. McPHERSON: Was the bankruptcy judge at the time?

5 MS. THURMAN: -- was the bankruptcy judge at that time.

6 MS. McPHERSON: All right. Do you know whether or not  
7 you competed with anyone for the position?

8 MS. THURMAN: I do not.

9 MS. McPHERSON: What's your guess?

10 MS. THURMAN: I don't think I did. I think they just  
11 took Mr. Baldwin's word. And after the interview --

12 MS. McPHERSON: Is that the way that clerk's office  
13 personnel were hired when you came aboard?

14 MS. THURMAN: I don't know. I just know that's the way  
15 I was hired.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Did you ever have any reaction from  
17 coworkers after you came to work here? When I say reactions, I  
18 mean to the fact that the likelihood is that you were, shall we  
19 say, plucked and you didn't compete with anyone.

20 MS. THURMAN: No.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Did anyone ask you about it?

22 MS. THURMAN: No.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Had you ever worked with whites before?

24 MS. THURMAN: I had. I worked when I was in New York  
25 at the insurance company.

1 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

2 MS. THURMAN: There were white people there. So I did  
3 work with them during that time.

4 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Had you worked with southern  
5 whites before?

6 MS. THURMAN: No.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Were you nervous going to see Judge  
8 Johnson?

9 MS. THURMAN: I was. I certainly was.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Do you think he could tell?

11 MS. THURMAN: I don't think so.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Were you nervous reporting for  
13 duty in the clerk's office?

14 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Why?

16 MS. THURMAN: It was very new to me. It was something  
17 that I'd always wanted to do, you know. Always wanted to be --  
18 I never really wanted to teach. But when I was in college, I  
19 took business education because I knew that was something I  
20 could fall back on if I couldn't find a job -- another job, you  
21 know, in the business world.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Were you also aware of the limited  
23 opportunities available to African-Americans at the time?

24 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

25 MS. McPHERSON: Suggesting that you would likely have



1 to teach?

2 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

4 MS. THURMAN: Which I did for a few months.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Which you did.

6 MS. THURMAN: Yeah.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Was -- by the way, was First National  
8 Bank the only corporate or commercial entity to which you  
9 applied?

10 MS. THURMAN: That's the only one that I recall.

11 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

12 MS. THURMAN: Uh-huh.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Who gave you orientation to your work?  
14 Who told you what you were going to do, told you where the  
15 restroom was, told you what the salary would be?

16 MS. THURMAN: Mr. Dobson and Mrs. Gordon, Mrs. Jane  
17 Gordon.

18 MS. McPHERSON: What was Mrs. Gordon's position when  
19 you were hired?

20 MS. THURMAN: Mrs. Gordon was the person in charge of  
21 the civil part -- actually, of the office at that time.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Was there an operational division in  
23 the clerk's office at that time between civil and criminal?

24 MS. THURMAN: It was, but there was only one judge,  
25 so --

1 MS. McPHERSON: So if you were an employee in the  
2 office, you handled both civil and criminal cases?

3 MS. THURMAN: No. When I first came to work here, I  
4 handled only bankruptcy.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Only bankruptcy cases?

6 MS. THURMAN: Right.

7 MS. McPHERSON: I believe you said there were four  
8 employees.

9 MS. THURMAN: I believe there was four. It was Mr. Rob  
10 Dobson, who was Clerk of the Court; Mr. Jim -- James Guttery,  
11 who was chief deputy; Mrs. Gordon; Ernestine Lewis; and I'm  
12 trying to remember if Ridge Lent was here at that time, because  
13 he was Judge Johnson's courtroom deputy.

14 MS. McPHERSON: So the four of you. And you did  
15 bankruptcy. I assume someone else did civil and someone else  
16 did criminal?

17 MS. THURMAN: Correct. I did bankruptcy. And I also  
18 did -- helped with naturalization. People would come up to make  
19 application to become citizens of the United States.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Well, that is what I was referring to  
21 when I asked you who gave you orientation. Who -- since you  
22 knew nothing about any of those areas --

23 MS. THURMAN: Right.

24 MS. McPHERSON: -- who was it who told you what you  
25 would be doing, essentially, and how to do it?

1 MS. THURMAN: Mrs. Gordon. Mrs. Jane Gordon.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did she also tell you what the  
3 expectations would be?

4 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah. She did.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Were you evaluated?

6 MS. THURMAN: I think periodically we were evaluated.

7 MS. McPHERSON: How often did you get paid?

8 MS. THURMAN: Let me see whether it was every two weeks  
9 then or monthly.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. What were you paid?

11 MS. THURMAN: It was a little over \$5,000.

12 MS. McPHERSON: A year?

13 MS. THURMAN: A year (laughter).

14 MS. McPHERSON: What was your salary in Sparta?

15 MS. THURMAN: It was less than that.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Was it?

17 MS. THURMAN: Yes. Teachers just didn't make very  
18 much; of course, still don't, in my opinion.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Now, I am assuming that up to the time  
20 that we are discussing, you were living at home with your  
21 mother.

22 MS. THURMAN: I was still living at home.

23 MS. McPHERSON: All right. A little over \$5,000.  
24 Interesting.

25 So let me ask you a question for those who might watch

1 this in today's time. Was a little over \$5,000 for what you  
2 were doing in 1966 in Montgomery, Alabama, living at home with  
3 your mother, enough for your needs?

4 MS. THURMAN: Well, being that I lived with my mother,  
5 I would say it was, but --

6 MS. McPHERSON: You could pay your bills?

7 MS. THURMAN: I could pay my bills.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

9 MS. THURMAN: I didn't have any bills at that time,  
10 but --

11 MS. McPHERSON: You didn't have any college loans?

12 MS. THURMAN: No.

13 MS. McPHERSON: How was your education paid for?

14 MS. THURMAN: My mother worked and paid for it. And,  
15 of course, you know, my sisters and -- family helped.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. All right. So you never had any  
17 loans.

18 MS. THURMAN: Never had any student loans.

19 MS. McPHERSON: No financial aid.

20 MS. THURMAN: No.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Any scholarship aid?

22 MS. THURMAN: No.

23 MS. McPHERSON: A rare breed.

24 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

25 MS. McPHERSON: So now you are a deputy clerk. Was

1 that your title at the time?

2 MS. THURMAN: Deputy clerk was my title. Uh-huh.

3 MS. McPHERSON: All right. Now, it appears as though  
4 you remained in that position for approximately 14 years until  
5 you became a courtroom deputy.

6 MS. THURMAN: Right. But I moved, like, in different  
7 areas of the clerk's office.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Meaning different subject areas?

9 MS. THURMAN: Right.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Like criminal, civil?

11 MS. THURMAN: Like civil.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

13 MS. THURMAN: Criminal. Right.

14 MS. McPHERSON: When did you become a supervisor in the  
15 office first?

16 MS. THURMAN: Well, after I had learned every area of  
17 the clerk's office. I'm trying to see. It was probably the  
18 mid-seventies, maybe.

19 MS. McPHERSON: What was your title when you became a  
20 supervisor?

21 MS. THURMAN: It was civil supervisor.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Civil supervisor.

23 MS. THURMAN: At that time.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

25 MS. THURMAN: First.

1 MS. McPHERSON: So when you first became a supervisor,  
2 you were over, so to speak, deputy clerks who were handling  
3 civil cases?

4 MS. THURMAN: Right.

5 MS. McPHERSON: How many of them were there at the  
6 time?

7 MS. THURMAN: Wow. It was probably five, six.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Was there an equal number doing  
9 criminal cases?

10 MS. THURMAN: Yes. Because the -- you know, the  
11 clerk's office grew --

12 MS. McPHERSON: Sure.

13 MS. THURMAN: -- each year and grew and grew. There  
14 were more judges.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Had the bankruptcy court branched off  
16 by then to itself?

17 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Now, in 1971, Judge Robert Varner  
19 joined the Court as its second district judge.

20 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

21 MS. McPHERSON: What differences did that make in the  
22 way the clerk's office operated?

23 MS. THURMAN: Well, that meant other people had to be  
24 hired, because he needed a courtroom deputy. And he -- so that  
25 was -- that was basically. We just had to have more employees,

1 and there were more filings in the court.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Of course, at that time and for most of  
3 the time that you were here, the system was entirely paper?

4 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely.

5 MS. McPHERSON: As opposed to automated.

6 MS. THURMAN: Right.

7 MS. McPHERSON: And you used a typewriter.

8 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely.

9 MS. McPHERSON: And correct type and Wite-Out.

10 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

11 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

12 VIDEOGRAPHER: Can we stop for one second?

13 (Brief pause)

14 MS. McPHERSON: You had an eight-month teaching career.

15 MS. THURMAN: I did (laughter).

16 MS. McPHERSON: Have you encountered any of your  
17 students anywhere, anytime?

18 MS. THURMAN: There was a young lady that I became very  
19 close with. And after I left there, I did. I haven't recently  
20 seen her. It's been years.

21 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

22 MS. THURMAN: But I did.

23 MS. McPHERSON: I had forgotten to ask you that  
24 question. And I thought I'd go back, because teachers always  
25 revel in their relationships --

1 MS. THURMAN: Right.

2 MS. McPHERSON: -- with students.

3 MS. THURMAN: And then with it being in Sparta --

4 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

5 MS. THURMAN: -- and me back here in Montgomery.

6 MS. McPHERSON: Certainly.

7 Let me ask you this. In so many instances when the  
8 first black is hired in an institution that was previously all  
9 white, some may assume that there is a high level of affirmative  
10 action going on and that the African-American who is hired may  
11 not quite measure up but that race played at least as much of a  
12 role in the hiring as ability. Did you ever feel that your  
13 coworkers made that assumption about you?

14 MS. THURMAN: No. I may have been naive about it, but  
15 no.

16 MS. McPHERSON: And so your -- your opinion or your  
17 characterization of your initial years at work would be that you  
18 were treated fairly and honestly by all with whom you worked?

19 MS. THURMAN: I do believe I was.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. How were promotions and raises  
21 determined in the office at the time?

22 MS. THURMAN: You would be given at different times --  
23 and I'm trying to remember what it was called, but it was like a  
24 certificate or an award that would be given. And then you would  
25 get more money --



1 MS. McPHERSON: As a result of that?

2 MS. THURMAN: -- as a result of that. And even though  
3 I didn't do any furthering my education going to college, I did  
4 go to seminars and things that were concerning the Court in  
5 different areas.

6 MS. McPHERSON: Seminars, not independent, but seminars  
7 sponsored by the court system?

8 MS. THURMAN: Sponsored by the court system and  
9 learning --

10 MS. McPHERSON: Was there an Administrative Office of  
11 Courts at the time?

12 MS. THURMAN: At that time, yes.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Did you travel to take these seminars?

14 MS. THURMAN: I did. I went to different places.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Where were some of the places you went  
16 during your first years?

17 MS. THURMAN: Well, now, during my first years, I did  
18 not. That was after I started learning different -- because I  
19 wanted to learn all areas of the clerk's office. And, you know,  
20 that's how you move up.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Sure.

22 MS. THURMAN: And --

23 MS. McPHERSON: What were your working hours? Not  
24 assigned, actual working hours.

25 MS. THURMAN: Well, when I first started, they were

1 like eight till five Monday through Friday. And we worked on  
2 Saturdays. We worked until noon on Saturday.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Eight to noon?

4 MS. THURMAN: Eight until noon. But one person would  
5 work. And, of course, when I came on, it was during the  
6 desegregation time, so someone else had to work with me. I  
7 think they were a little afraid to let me come up here and work  
8 alone. So --

9 MS. McPHERSON: Afraid of what?

10 MS. THURMAN: Well, I guess they didn't want anybody to  
11 harm me.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Were you afraid at the time to be  
13 alone?

14 MS. THURMAN: Well, it was a little strange. I -- I  
15 enjoyed having somebody, because I didn't really want to be in  
16 the office by myself, even though we had to do it only once a  
17 month.

18 MS. McPHERSON: So it was on a rotating basis?

19 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely.

20 MS. McPHERSON: I see. Well, what about the person who  
21 was with you? Did that person have to do double duty, or were  
22 there just two people assigned together?

23 MS. THURMAN: It was just two people assigned to that  
24 particular Saturday.

25 MS. McPHERSON: It's not unusual for African-Americans,

1 especially women, securing employment in a previously all-white  
2 environment, to be mistaken for something other than what they  
3 are. Did that ever happen to you?

4 MS. THURMAN: No.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did you have any incidents  
6 during your first years or later years that you would  
7 characterize as racial?

8 MS. THURMAN: I had one that really bothered me. One  
9 of the attorneys came in to file something. And, of course,  
10 when they brought their complaints or whatever it was, you had  
11 to make sure they were signed. And most of the time the  
12 attorneys would have their names typed and then they would sign  
13 above it, but this particular one did not. And I asked him what  
14 was his name. And he said to me, "Can't you read?" And that  
15 really bothered me a lot.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Your response?

17 MS. THURMAN: My response was, "Yes, I can read. But I  
18 don't -- I can't understand your signature." And so after it  
19 happened, of course, I went in and told the clerk. And then I  
20 also told Judge Johnson.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Why did you tell Judge Johnson?

22 MS. THURMAN: Because he was the person, to me, at that  
23 time, was in charge of everything. And so --

24 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

25 MS. THURMAN: -- I did.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. So you did not consider telling  
2 Judge Johnson as going over Mr. Dobson's head?

3 MS. THURMAN: No. I think he knew that I was going  
4 in --

5 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Was the matter remedied?

6 MS. THURMAN: -- that I didn't appreciate -- it was.  
7 Because Judge called him in and, you know, told him if he ever  
8 did that again, he would be disbarred. And I don't think he was  
9 telling him just to me, but to anybody in the clerk's office.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Oh, certainly. Certainly. He was  
11 dealing with the conduct.

12 MS. THURMAN: Right.

13 MS. McPHERSON: How did your being a deputy clerk -- or  
14 what impact did your being a deputy clerk have on your relating  
15 to the African-American society that you were in at the time?  
16 You left teaching; and I assume that many, if not most, of your  
17 colleagues, black colleagues, stayed in teaching.

18 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

19 MS. McPHERSON: And teaching at that time was the  
20 universe. It was the professional universe --

21 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely.

22 MS. McPHERSON: -- of African-Americans -- of  
23 professional African-Americans, and certainly professional  
24 African-American women. And you stuck out. So what were the  
25 ramifications of your doing something entirely different from

1 your friends?

2 MS. THURMAN: Well, as I said before, I never wanted to  
3 really teach. But it was like I had that to fall back on. And  
4 at the time, that's all I could find. But even though that job  
5 came up that particular year, the first year, I really had  
6 planned to look further for some administrative work. I didn't  
7 want to teach forever.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Well, did any of your friends or  
9 colleagues regard you with curiosity? Did anyone -- was anyone  
10 interested in what you did?

11 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah. They were interested. And  
12 they were all proud of me and -- you know.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Proud of you for what? You had a job.

14 MS. THURMAN: For being selected --

15 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

16 MS. THURMAN: -- as the first black --

17 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

18 MS. THURMAN: -- in that office.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. What about your mother?

20 MS. THURMAN: Oh, my mother was always proud of me, no  
21 matter what I did.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Did the work that you began doing in  
23 the clerk's office match your expectations or fulfill your  
24 expectations?

25 MS. THURMAN: I guess it did at the beginning, you

1 know. But I always said that I wanted to learn every phase in  
2 the office, because I didn't want to just stay and do  
3 bankruptcy. Even bankruptcy faded out and went on -- you know,  
4 had an office of its own. But to learn civil, criminal -- and  
5 that's the only way you could move up, is to learn all phases of  
6 the office.

7 MS. McPHERSON: So Ernestine Lewis preceded you in this  
8 office. Jane Gordon preceded you in this office. And it is  
9 possible that Ridge Lent may have preceded you, but you're not  
10 certain.

11 MS. THURMAN: I'm not certain.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. How was the -- and Ridge was  
13 Judge Johnson's courtroom deputy.

14 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

15 MS. McPHERSON: How was the selection of Judge Varner's  
16 courtroom deputy made?

17 MS. THURMAN: Well, the judges made their own  
18 selection.

19 MS. McPHERSON: I see. Okay.

20 MS. THURMAN: So he chose Ernestine.

21 MS. McPHERSON: What difference did it make and did it  
22 continue to make in your job responsibilities once you became a  
23 courtroom deputy?

24 MS. THURMAN: Would you repeat that?

25 MS. McPHERSON: What is the difference between the job

1 responsibility in the clerk's office, seated in your chair in  
2 the clerk's office, between being a full-time deputy clerk and  
3 being a deputy clerk who is also a courtroom deputy?

4           And here's why I'm asking you that question. And  
5 please correct me if I'm incorrect in my assumption. My  
6 assumption is that the job title is deputy clerk and that  
7 courtroom deputy is an assignment, but that a courtroom deputy  
8 is a deputy clerk, and a deputy clerk who isn't a courtroom  
9 deputy is a deputy clerk. Am I correct in that?

10           MS. THURMAN: That's correct. But as you moved up in  
11 the different phases, you were paid more.

12           MS. McPHERSON: Yes. Yes. So here is what I'm asking  
13 you. I think I understand that a deputy clerk is a clerical.  
14 Am I correct?

15           MS. THURMAN: Correct.

16           MS. McPHERSON: A professional clerical, obviously.

17           MS. THURMAN: Uh-huh.

18           MS. McPHERSON: Is a -- did the courtroom deputy retain  
19 some clerical duties as well as the duties of being in court  
20 with the judge when proceedings were being held?

21           MS. THURMAN: Yes.

22           MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Were they the same duties as the  
23 other deputy clerks, or were the courtroom deputies' clerical  
24 duties pertaining only to that judge?

25           MS. THURMAN: Only to that judge and in the criminal

1 cases, because you usually didn't go to courtroom deputy unless  
2 you had been criminal.

3 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

4 MS. THURMAN: Unless you've done criminal work.

5 MS. McPHERSON: I see. So knowing something about or  
6 mastering the criminal clerk procedures was a prerequisite to  
7 being appointed or selected as a courtroom deputy.

8 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

9 MS. McPHERSON: Tell us about the responsibilities of a  
10 courtroom deputy.

11 MS. THURMAN: You are responsible to the judge for all  
12 of his cases that he's trying in the courtroom. And even  
13 though -- whether it's civil or criminal, you are responsible  
14 for his work.

15 MS. McPHERSON: And what does being responsible for his  
16 work mean?

17 MS. THURMAN: In the criminal, basically it was making  
18 sure the file was in order, that -- the courtroom deputies had  
19 to notify attorneys at different times about things the judge  
20 would ask them to do.

21 MS. McPHERSON: And these were telephones calls at the  
22 time?

23 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did the courtroom deputy sit in  
25 on proceedings in chambers?



1 MS. THURMAN: Eventually they did.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

3 MS. THURMAN: Especially when a court reporter was in  
4 there.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Now, during my service here on this  
6 Court, the Court was a family in some particular ways. And I  
7 want to ask you whether or not that atmosphere was here in your  
8 first five to ten years as a clerk. There was a softball team.  
9 There was a Christmas party. There were various other things  
10 that brought everybody in the courthouse who worked for the  
11 federal court system together. Did that happen in the first  
12 five to ten years of your work here?

13 MS. THURMAN: It did. It did.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Did you participate in any of those  
15 activities?

16 MS. THURMAN: I don't know whether I participated in  
17 the first five or ten years. I don't even know whether they had  
18 like the softball team. But I did participate.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

20 MS. THURMAN: Uh-huh.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Also during my tenure there was pretty  
22 free access by law clerks and judicial assistants and judges'  
23 secretaries to the clerk's office. Did that happen in your  
24 first five to ten years? Were people in and out of the clerk's  
25 office on a regular basis?

1 MS. THURMAN: No. Because there were not -- you know,  
2 Judge Johnson was the only judge when I came. And so I think it  
3 gradually happened. After several years, we had more than one  
4 judge.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Now, we should note that the space in  
6 which we are now sitting, the Frank M. Johnson Jr. Library, was,  
7 in fact, the clerk's office --

8 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

9 MS. McPHERSON: -- when you were hired.

10 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

11 MS. McPHERSON: So you are now sitting in the space  
12 where you initially started working in 1966.

13 MS. THURMAN: That's correct.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Judge Johnson had very accessible  
15 contact with the clerk's office at the time, because there was a  
16 door from the clerk's office to his chambers --

17 MS. THURMAN: That's correct.

18 MS. McPHERSON: -- that meant that he did not even have  
19 to go out into the hall to come to the clerk's office. Did he  
20 use that access regularly?

21 MS. THURMAN: Seldom.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Seldom. And what about his law clerk?

23 MS. THURMAN: His law clerks would use it.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

25 MS. THURMAN: They would come when they had questions

1 or files that they needed or something that they needed us to  
2 do.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Now, during this time while you  
4 were working and learning and trying to get ahead and making  
5 sure you mastered criminal and civil, you managed to get  
6 married?

7 MS. THURMAN: I did.

8 MS. McPHERSON: What year was that?

9 MS. THURMAN: I got married in 1971.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Five years after -- six years  
11 after -- no. Five years after college.

12 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Yes. And you also managed shortly  
14 thereafter to have a wonderful little boy.

15 MS. THURMAN: I did (laughter).

16 MS. McPHERSON: Tell us about the birth of your son.

17 MS. THURMAN: I had a very hard pregnancy. I was sick  
18 the whole nine months. And, of course, my son was born in  
19 January of '74 and, actually, on the exact date that the doctor  
20 said he would be born, which was --

21 MS. McPHERSON: Score one for the doctor.

22 MS. THURMAN: -- quite unusual. Yes. And I think  
23 because I had such a hard time -- I stayed in labor almost 24  
24 hours -- that's probably why I didn't have any more children.

25 MS. McPHERSON: How did your illness, temporary as it

1 was, affect your work?

2 MS. THURMAN: Well, I was not a person who took off  
3 work. I would come to work every day.

4 MS. McPHERSON: And just be sick.

5 MS. THURMAN: Very seldom I was ill. And so when I had  
6 my baby, I had so much leave. I had really planned to stay off  
7 for six months. And I did stay off five, and they called and  
8 asked me to come back because, you know, things were hectic.

9 MS. McPHERSON: Had you observed anyone else take  
10 maternity leave before you did?

11 MS. THURMAN: No.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Was it officially maternity leave, or  
13 did you just use the vacation time that you had accumulated?

14 MS. THURMAN: No. It wasn't considered maternity  
15 leave. It was just leave I had earned.

16 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

17 MS. THURMAN: Because I never took off.

18 MS. McPHERSON: So in -- before your son was born --  
19 and let's identify him.

20 MS. THURMAN: Bwana Thurman.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Before Bwana was born, you  
22 hadn't taken any vacations?

23 MS. THURMAN: Very little. We would go maybe weekends,  
24 a few days here and there, but not much time off. I did not  
25 take --

1 MS. McPHERSON: Honeymoon?

2 MS. THURMAN: Actually, I did. But it was just for --  
3 to Florida, and it was not a very long honeymoon. You know, we  
4 took a few days, but --

5 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did you have what I will call  
6 and what you can interpret as a public wedding or a private  
7 wedding?

8 MS. THURMAN: It was public, but it was very small.

9 MS. McPHERSON: Did any one of your colleagues or  
10 anyone from the courthouse attend?

11 MS. THURMAN: Yes, they did.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Who did?

13 MS. THURMAN: I remember Ernestine being there and --  
14 Ernestine Lewis. And I want to say Mrs. Gordon was there.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Did you have lunch with your colleagues  
16 in those first five to ten years? Or did people go out to  
17 lunch? Perhaps that's the threshold question.

18 MS. THURMAN: Most of the time I brought my lunch. And  
19 Ernestine, once we got to know each other, we occasionally went  
20 out to -- to eat together.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did you socialize with any of  
22 your working colleagues after hours or on weekends?

23 MS. THURMAN: No.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Which prompts the question, was anyone  
25 else in the office Catholic?

1 MS. THURMAN: No.

2 MS. McPHERSON: How did your -- you've told me about  
3 how your pregnancy affected your work. And I think basically  
4 you've said it didn't, really. But now Bwana is here and he's  
5 eating and he's not sleeping all night and he's a baby. So how  
6 did the maternal responsibilities for this child affect your  
7 work --

8 MS. THURMAN: Once --

9 MS. McPHERSON: -- or your attendance?

10 MS. THURMAN: Once I went back to work, my husband and  
11 I would take turns getting up at night. And that's how we  
12 worked it.

13 MS. McPHERSON: What about child care during the day?

14 MS. THURMAN: I was so fortunate. The -- it was a  
15 family that I knew. And this young lady came to my home and  
16 took care of my child every day.

17 MS. McPHERSON: For how long?

18 MS. THURMAN: Until he became around two and a half. I  
19 decided I wanted to put him in nursery.

20 MS. McPHERSON: The same person?

21 MS. THURMAN: The same person.

22 MS. McPHERSON: You were fortunate.

23 MS. THURMAN: Yes. So he could learn how to play with  
24 children, since he was an only child.

25 MS. McPHERSON: When did you decide that he would

1 remain one?

2 MS. THURMAN: Well, I actually had planned to be a  
3 career wife. I really hadn't planned to have children.

4 MS. McPHERSON: Really?

5 MS. THURMAN: No.

6 MS. McPHERSON: What changed your mind?

7 MS. THURMAN: It happened. It just happened.

8 MS. McPHERSON: There are a lot of negative  
9 connotations to calling a child an accident. But for the narrow  
10 purpose of this conversation, was Bwana an accident?

11 MS. THURMAN: I wouldn't say he was an accident, but  
12 yes. But I would not give him up for anything.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Or change anything.

14 MS. THURMAN: Or change anything. No. But since I had  
15 such a hard pregnancy, I decided not to have any more children.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Would it be fair to say that you  
17 could stand another child but not another pregnancy?

18 MS. THURMAN: I love children.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

20 MS. THURMAN: Always have. My friends' children, I  
21 used to have them all the time.

22 MS. McPHERSON: And nieces and nephews?

23 MS. THURMAN: Yes. I had a bunch of nieces and  
24 nephews.

25 MS. McPHERSON: What's your favorite thing about being

1 a mother other than Mother's Day gifts?

2 MS. THURMAN: Just having the -- the love and being  
3 able to talk to him just about daily and being included in  
4 things with him.

5 MS. McPHERSON: And he is where now?

6 MS. THURMAN: He is now in Charleston, South Carolina.

7 MS. McPHERSON: What does he do?

8 MS. THURMAN: He owns a lawn business and he also does  
9 marketing.

10 MS. McPHERSON: And he just turned 43?

11 MS. THURMAN: He did.

12 MS. McPHERSON: How has it been watching him mature?

13 MS. THURMAN: He's such a loving, kind person. He's  
14 generous, yet he's very frugal. And so he just has such loving  
15 ways.

16 MS. McPHERSON: When you married, you also became a  
17 stepmother.

18 MS. THURMAN: I did.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Tell me about that experience.

20 MS. THURMAN: My husband had been married before. And  
21 they had one son, Terrall Thurman. And, of course, at the time  
22 we married, his mother was still living, but she died when he  
23 was young. So it was -- it was an experience.

24 MS. McPHERSON: What were its challenges?

25 MS. THURMAN: Him wanting and getting just about



1 anything he wanted.

2 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

3 MS. THURMAN: Which I didn't think was very good.

4 MS. McPHERSON: What we call spoiled.

5 MS. THURMAN: Spoiled. Very spoiled. And that, I  
6 think, was the most challenging.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Do you believe that your husband's son,  
8 Terrall, and yours and your husband's son, Bwana, relate to each  
9 other as brothers?

10 MS. THURMAN: They do. Oh, yeah.

11 MS. McPHERSON: Do they look alike?

12 MS. THURMAN: I think they favor.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Everybody else thinks they do.

14 MS. THURMAN: Yeah.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Is Terrall an older brother to Bwana?

16 MS. THURMAN: He is. He is.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Is Terrall married, or does he have  
18 children?

19 MS. THURMAN: Terrall is not married at this time, but  
20 he does have children. He has two boys and a girl.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Have you been a grandmother to those  
22 children?

23 MS. THURMAN: I have.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Have you?

25 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Have you enjoyed that?

2 MS. THURMAN: I have. I have.

3 MS. McPHERSON: What do they call you? I'm sure they  
4 don't call you "Grandmother." You wouldn't allow that for  
5 anything.

6 MS. THURMAN: No. I would, but they call me -- well,  
7 some of them say "Grandma."

8 MS. McPHERSON: Do they?

9 MS. THURMAN: Yeah. And, of course, they're grown now,  
10 so it's okay. But they'll say "Nana" sometimes, you know.

11 MS. McPHERSON: Uh-huh. Okay. And they are here in  
12 Montgomery?

13 MS. THURMAN: No.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Where are they?

15 MS. THURMAN: Two of them are in Dallas, Texas.

16 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

17 MS. THURMAN: And one is in Virginia right now.

18 MS. McPHERSON: And where is Terrall?

19 MS. THURMAN: Terrall is here in Montgomery. Well,  
20 he's between Montgomery and Birmingham.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. What was your relationship at  
22 the time -- and when I say "at the time," we're still in that  
23 early seventies, your marriage, your having a child, becoming a  
24 mother. What was your relationship with other courthouse  
25 employees? Because it was not just the clerk's office. It was

1 the probation office. It was the U.S. Attorney's Office. How  
2 did you relate to those employees? And when I say "relate," I  
3 don't mean personally. I mean what was the professional  
4 relationship among all of you at the time.

5 MS. THURMAN: Well, we were all considered court  
6 family.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Uh-huh.

8 MS. THURMAN: And we were all in the same building at  
9 that time. And so I thought the relationship was very good.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Did you know the U.S. Attorney  
11 personnel?

12 MS. THURMAN: No. I learned them.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Same with the probation office?

14 MS. THURMAN: Same. At that time -- at the time I came  
15 on.

16 MS. McPHERSON: And, of course, at that time -- that is  
17 to say until 19 -- through 1975 -- we'll get beyond that  
18 later -- there was no public defender service.

19 MS. THURMAN: No.

20 MS. McPHERSON: How did you handle -- "you" meaning the  
21 clerk's office -- how did you handle the assignment of counsel  
22 for indigent defendants?

23 MS. THURMAN: I believe when I first came on the judges  
24 were appointing them.

25 MS. McPHERSON: And was it your responsibility to get

1 in touch with them, make sure they had access to the file --

2 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

3 MS. McPHERSON: -- and other necessities?

4 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Was it also your specific  
6 responsibility to make sure they got paid?

7 MS. THURMAN: To make sure the attorneys --

8 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

9 MS. THURMAN: -- were paid. The criminal --

10 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

11 MS. THURMAN: -- docket clerks would --

12 MS. McPHERSON: Would do that?

13 MS. THURMAN: Uh-huh. Would see to that.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. What was your first promotion in  
15 the clerk's office and when did it occur?

16 MS. THURMAN: The first was from doing bankruptcy to  
17 civil.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Did you get a pay raise?

19 MS. THURMAN: I think slightly.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. You ultimately became a  
21 courtroom deputy yourself.

22 MS. THURMAN: I did.

23 MS. McPHERSON: In 1980.

24 MS. THURMAN: (Nods head)

25 MS. McPHERSON: So let's start with 1966 when you came

1 at 5,000-plus up to 1980, just before you became a courtroom  
2 deputy. By the time you became a courtroom deputy, what had  
3 your salary become?

4 MS. THURMAN: Wow. I don't remember right off, but it  
5 was -- I mean, it was certainly much, much more. Thirty-five,  
6 40 -- 30, 40,000.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

8 MS. THURMAN: You know.

9 MS. McPHERSON: All right. Did you apply to become  
10 Judge Thompson's courtroom deputy or did you go the Judge  
11 Johnson plucking route?

12 MS. THURMAN: No. I -- actually, Judge had spoken to  
13 me about being his secretary.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Judge Thompson, that is.

15 MS. THURMAN: Judge Thompson. And when I decided that  
16 maybe I would try that and went back to talk to him, of course,  
17 he had hired Lillian. And so he asked me to be his courtroom  
18 deputy.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Was the job of Judge's secretary at all  
20 appealing to you?

21 MS. THURMAN: Not really.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. You preferred to remain in the  
23 clerk's office at the time.

24 MS. THURMAN: I did.

25 MS. McPHERSON: So your interest in it was more or less

1 responsive to his request.

2 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. But you were too professional to  
4 tell him that.

5 MS. THURMAN: Well --

6 MS. McPHERSON: I mean that sincerely.

7 How did you find the responsibilities of courtroom  
8 deputy? Were they difficult? Were they challenging? Was it  
9 more than you thought or just what you expected?

10 MS. THURMAN: It was challenging at times. But in  
11 order to move up, you had to learn all phases.

12 MS. McPHERSON: So Ernestine Lewis was the first female  
13 courtroom deputy in this court.

14 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

15 MS. McPHERSON: And you were the second?

16 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Did you speak with Ernestine about it  
18 and get any tips from her?

19 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah. We talked about it.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

21 MS. THURMAN: Sure.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Now, this is a Marie question. When  
23 you got the position of courtroom deputy, how many new dresses  
24 did you buy?

25 MS. THURMAN: I don't think I bought any. I don't

1 recall.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Did you have a sense of being on  
3 display in the -- in the courtroom inasmuch as the courtroom  
4 deputy in Judge Thompson's courtroom sat right in front of him?  
5 Were you conscious of your appearance as courtroom deputy?

6 MS. THURMAN: Well, I think I've always been conscious  
7 of my appearance.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Well, we know that. (Laughter) I  
9 mean --

10 MS. THURMAN: But --

11 MS. McPHERSON: -- did you have any extraordinary  
12 consciousness?

13 MS. THURMAN: No.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Okay. So let's ask what some  
15 would consider a women's lib question. When did you first start  
16 wearing pants to work?

17 MS. THURMAN: I don't recall, because I know at first I  
18 didn't, just like I don't wear pants to church on Sunday. And I  
19 haven't gotten to that point yet in my life. If I go to a  
20 weekday mass, I'll wear pants, but -- but I don't recall.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Were they prohibited?

22 MS. THURMAN: In the courts? Is that --

23 MS. McPHERSON: Yes. Was there a time when wearing  
24 pants for women was prohibited in the clerk's office?

25 MS. THURMAN: I don't think so.

1 MS. McPHERSON: So your beginning to wear pants was  
2 voluntary activity for you that got no objection from your  
3 supervisors, whenever it happened.

4 MS. THURMAN: No. I don't recall --

5 MS. McPHERSON: You don't recall anyone objecting to  
6 it.

7 MS. THURMAN: I don't recall anybody objecting to it.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Including Mrs. Gordon?

9 MS. THURMAN: No.

10 MS. McPHERSON: What year did Mrs. Gordon become the  
11 clerk?

12 MS. THURMAN: Wow.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Were you a courtroom deputy at the time  
14 or not?

15 MS. THURMAN: I just don't recall the year.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. So you have no recollection as  
17 to when you began wearing pants.

18 MS. THURMAN: I really don't.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

20 MS. THURMAN: And I don't recall it being a problem of  
21 wearing them in the clerk's office.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Nor do you recall it being an issue.

23 MS. THURMAN: No, I don't.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Just as you said you talked with  
25 Ernestine and shared information back and forth when you were



1 appointed as a courtroom deputy, when you came aboard in 1966,  
2 did you talk with Elaine Wright or Carolyn Wright, who is the  
3 same person as Elaine Wright, about being an African-American in  
4 this environment?

5 MS. THURMAN: I did not, because when I first came to  
6 the clerk's office, you know, I was more or less focused on  
7 learning. And it was a while before we met and became friends.

8 MS. McPHERSON: I see. So you really did not know her  
9 when you came.

10 MS. THURMAN: No.

11 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. So you become a courtroom  
12 deputy; and you are a supervisor by that time, are you not?  
13 1980?

14 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

15 MS. McPHERSON: So actually, you have three identities,  
16 unless you tell me differently. You're a court -- you are a  
17 deputy clerk, you're a courtroom deputy, and you're also a civil  
18 supervisor.

19 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

20 MS. McPHERSON: How many people were working under you?

21 MS. THURMAN: When I was supervisor or when I  
22 was courtroom -- I mean, when I was chief deputy?

23 MS. McPHERSON: No. When you were a supervisor.

24 MS. THURMAN: Maybe seven, eight.

25 MS. McPHERSON: When you came to work for the clerk's

1 office in 1966, was it a first-name environment?

2 MS. THURMAN: It was.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Did it remain that way?

4 MS. THURMAN: It did.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Even people whom you supervised?

6 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did you have any  
8 responsibilities when you became a courtroom deputy that were  
9 deleted from your job description? In other words, were you  
10 doing anything as a deputy clerk that you stopped doing once you  
11 became a courtroom deputy?

12 MS. THURMAN: I don't recall anything. But when I was  
13 courtroom deputy, it was like when I was not in the courtroom, I  
14 was just doing duties of the clerk's office.

15 MS. McPHERSON: I see. So really, you retained those  
16 duties. You just did less of it because you had to spend some  
17 time in the courtroom.

18 MS. THURMAN: Right. Right.

19 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

20 MS. THURMAN: When you were not in the courtroom, you  
21 did duties.

22 MS. McPHERSON: All right.

23 MS. THURMAN: You had duties in the clerk's office.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Did you ever have any jury duty? Were  
25 you ever assigned a jury coordinator?

1 MS. THURMAN: No.

2 MS. McPHERSON: When did jury coordinator become a part  
3 of the clerk's office as it is now?

4 MS. THURMAN: I don't remember the -- I don't recall  
5 the first -- the year that it happened.

6 MS. McPHERSON: When did intake become a specific duty  
7 in the clerk's office as it is now and as it was before you  
8 left?

9 MS. THURMAN: It had to be in the eighties.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Do you recall being part of any  
11 discussions about restructuring or reorganizing the clerk's  
12 office to make it function more efficiently?

13 MS. THURMAN: I was certainly included when I was civil  
14 supervisor and, of course, when I was chief deputy. Uh-huh.

15 MS. McPHERSON: I can recall two or three things during  
16 my tenure that I'm proud that I recommended to the Court -- to  
17 the Court. What do you recall that you're really proud that you  
18 recommended that was ultimately implemented?

19 MS. THURMAN: I actually don't recall.

20 MS. McPHERSON: There has to be something.

21 MS. THURMAN: Something that was implemented?

22 MS. McPHERSON: Yes. Either involving personnel or  
23 procedures or filing or custodianship of records or chain of  
24 command. I ask that question not just because of your 32 years  
25 and the likelihood that there were a few of those things, but I

1 also ask that question, quite frankly, because during your  
2 tenure, you were a highly respected chief deputy clerk. And my  
3 sense is that there were recommendations that you made that  
4 stuck.

5 Nothing comes to mind right now?

6 MS. THURMAN: Nothing comes to mind right now.

7 MS. McPHERSON: What about the physical organization of  
8 the office? Whose idea was that? When you were chief deputy  
9 clerk, you had your own office. Did the chief deputy clerk have  
10 his own office when you came aboard?

11 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

12 MS. McPHERSON: He did?

13 MS. THURMAN: They always had their own office.

14 MS. McPHERSON: They did. Okay.

15 MS. THURMAN: The chief deputy and the clerk.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Well, assuming that you'll swirl  
17 around in your head and we can back to it later, let's move on.

18 What role did you play in personnel management in the  
19 clerk's office, and when did that role begin?

20 MS. THURMAN: It began when I became chief deputy. And  
21 I would help in the interviewing and actually making the  
22 decision as to who would be hired.

23 MS. McPHERSON: I assume that the clerk's office  
24 took --

25 MS. THURMAN: Or give my recommendations.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Yes. Yes. I assume that the clerk's  
2 office took direction from the Administrative Office of Courts  
3 in Washington as to how many slots were available to be filled;  
4 is that correct?

5 MS. THURMAN: Correct. Uh-huh.

6 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And did you, meaning the clerk's  
7 office, have ultimate authority to fill that slot and advertise  
8 it?

9 MS. THURMAN: We did.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. What were some of the methods,  
11 early methods, used to advertise positions?

12 MS. THURMAN: We would post them on the board, bulletin  
13 boards, outside of the clerk's office.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

15 MS. THURMAN: And that was probably basically it.

16 MS. McPHERSON: And they were written applications?

17 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Was -- were, I should say, these jobs  
19 popular? In other words, did they generate many, many  
20 applications?

21 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yes. We would have a lot of people  
22 to apply for positions.

23 MS. McPHERSON: And generally speaking, did the  
24 applicants have backgrounds and training that were suitable to  
25 the job? Or did you have a few people at the top and the rest

1 were just not suitable?

2 MS. THURMAN: Well, we had people who maybe were not in  
3 the business area who would apply. But to me, it was easy to  
4 learn the jobs.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Well, I'm assuming that if you  
6 advertised a job and let's say 25 to 30 people applied for the  
7 job -- is that reasonable? Sometimes you had 25 or 30 people?

8 MS. THURMAN: Maybe.

9 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. I'm assuming that there was some  
10 screening going on, that is, you could look at three or four  
11 resumes and tell immediately that those were not people you'd  
12 want to hire. What were the considerations that constituted  
13 that benchmark below which you just simply wouldn't hire? Was  
14 it high school diploma, college degree? What was it?

15 MS. THURMAN: Well, as far as that was, the clerk  
16 would -- if any of those were taken off for any reason, the  
17 clerk would do that.

18 MS. McPHERSON: I see. Okay. So you were not able to  
19 discern any pattern that constituted a cutoff below which a  
20 person would not be considered for the position?

21 MS. THURMAN: Well, they had to be high school  
22 graduates.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

24 MS. THURMAN: I do know that.

25 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

1 MS. THURMAN: And if they had had some type of clerical  
2 work, it certainly helped.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Why were positions with the clerk's  
4 office appealing?

5 MS. THURMAN: Because of the money.

6 MS. McPHERSON: The salary.

7 MS. THURMAN: Yeah.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Did benefits have anything to do with  
9 it?

10 MS. THURMAN: Oh, definitely.

11 MS. McPHERSON: How so?

12 MS. THURMAN: Well, insurance was paid. You  
13 accumulated leave. So I think those were --

14 MS. McPHERSON: Retirement?

15 MS. THURMAN: Retirement.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Was retirement available from the very  
17 beginning of your tenure?

18 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Were those things very important to  
20 you?

21 MS. THURMAN: They were.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Your husband, at one point, was  
23 an entrepreneur. So did you carry him on your insurance?

24 MS. THURMAN: I did.

25 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Now, in addition to the marriage

1 and the child and AKA and the Catholic church, there's one other  
2 thing we haven't talked about that's central to the identity of  
3 Marie Thurman. Can you guess what that is?

4 MS. THURMAN: No.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Bridge.

6 MS. THURMAN: Oh, I did play bridge.

7 MS. McPHERSON: You played a lot of bridge.

8 MS. THURMAN: I did.

9 MS. McPHERSON: How did that happen? Bridge was not  
10 the card game of choice at HBCUs in the 1960s, as I recall. It  
11 was Bid Whist.

12 MS. THURMAN: That's true. Dr. Ralph Bryson was an  
13 avid bridge player and was very good.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Who is Dr. Bryson?

15 MS. THURMAN: Ralph Bryson, a professor at ASU for  
16 many, many years. And actually, one of my church members,  
17 Leonard Burke, played bridge with them. And he asked me about  
18 playing. And -- because a group, they used to get together and  
19 learn how to play, people who didn't know how. And I was  
20 interested in learning, and so I did learn how. And we played  
21 together once a week in the city, and then we traveled all over.

22 MS. McPHERSON: All over.

23 MS. THURMAN: All over the United States --

24 MS. McPHERSON: Like where?

25 MS. THURMAN: -- and some abroad.



1 MS. McPHERSON: Tell me about that travel. Where did  
2 you go?

3 MS. THURMAN: Oh, we would go to Georgia, to Texas,  
4 to -- I mean, just all over the U.S.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Where did you go abroad?

6 MS. THURMAN: To Florida. Pardon me?

7 MS. McPHERSON: Where did you go abroad?

8 MS. THURMAN: We went to the Bahamas. And so it was --  
9 it was a lot of fun playing bridge.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Did you take annual leave to go play  
11 bridge?

12 MS. THURMAN: Well, the tournaments were mostly on the  
13 weekends.

14 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

15 MS. THURMAN: So no, I didn't -- I didn't take off to  
16 play bridge.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Were you good?

18 MS. THURMAN: I was pretty good.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Why did you stop?

20 MS. THURMAN: I stopped because one of my sisters took  
21 ill, and I brought her from New York to live with me. And so  
22 she took up a lot of my time. I could not travel and do. And  
23 in bridge, you have partners. And so I didn't, you know, want  
24 to stop my partner from playing.

25 MS. McPHERSON: What was it about the game that

1 intrigued you?

2 MS. THURMAN: It was just trying to master certain  
3 plays. And then as you play, you went up the ladder. And, you  
4 know, you start off as just a player and then you become master,  
5 and then you become senior master --

6 MS. McPHERSON: Oh, okay.

7 MS. THURMAN: -- and go on up in playing bridge.

8 MS. McPHERSON: I don't know anything about it. So  
9 really, when you say master and senior master, you're talking  
10 about actual titles --

11 MS. THURMAN: Right.

12 MS. McPHERSON: I see.

13 MS. THURMAN: In bridge. And so --

14 MS. McPHERSON: When did you last play bridge?

15 MS. THURMAN: Wow. Probably early nineties or late  
16 eighties I stopped.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Do you miss it?

18 MS. THURMAN: No, I really don't. After you've not  
19 played something for a long while -- and I often used to say I  
20 was going to start back playing. I used to say when I retired,  
21 I was going to start back. But I just never did.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

23 MS. THURMAN: And they do have bridge clubs in  
24 Montgomery.

25 MS. McPHERSON: And you haven't been asked?

1 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yes. I've been asked, but I just --

2 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

3 MS. THURMAN: -- haven't wanted to.

4 MS. McPHERSON: So you've become a courtroom deputy to  
5 Judge Myron Thompson. Judge Thompson is now a senior judge on  
6 this Court.

7 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

8 MS. McPHERSON: And I believe when he became a judge in  
9 1980, he was 33 and at one time was the youngest federal judge  
10 in America.

11 MS. THURMAN: (Nods head)

12 MS. McPHERSON: What was your response to an  
13 African-American judge joining this Court?

14 MS. THURMAN: I was elated. I was happy. And I knew  
15 he would do a good job.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Did you have a special pride?

17 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. So how did you know he'd do a  
19 good job?

20 MS. THURMAN: Because I knew he wouldn't have gotten  
21 the job had he not been very intelligent, smart, you know.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Did you have any experience with him as  
23 a practicing attorney?

24 MS. THURMAN: I did.

25 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

1 MS. THURMAN: He would come in and file things.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. So you knew who he was --

3 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

4 MS. McPHERSON: -- before he was nominated --

5 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

6 MS. McPHERSON: -- to the position. How was your  
7 relationship with him?

8 MS. THURMAN: Great. Because we'd have to travel, you  
9 know --

10 MS. McPHERSON: To other district courts?

11 MS. THURMAN: Right.

12 MS. McPHERSON: To the courthouses; right?

13 MS. THURMAN: Right. In the Middle District. Because  
14 we covered, what, 23 counties?

15 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

16 MS. THURMAN: And so we would have court in Dothan and  
17 in Opelika. And so we would have to travel.

18 MS. McPHERSON: So don't be bashful. What did you  
19 teach him?

20 MS. THURMAN: (Laughter)

21 MS. McPHERSON: You, by the time Judge Thompson joined  
22 the Court in 1980, had been here 14 years. You knew things,  
23 procedures, places, people, bars, namely, the professional legal  
24 bar. You knew the Bar. You knew the lawyers. By that time,  
25 you may even have known jurors. So what did you teach him?

1 MS. THURMAN: Well, I mean, with him being an attorney,  
2 he knew a lot of the same people.

3 MS. McPHERSON: When I came to this Court, you taught  
4 me several things. So I know you taught Judge Thompson some  
5 things. What did you teach Judge Thompson? Jury selection?

6 MS. THURMAN: I think he already knew about those  
7 things. You know, I don't consider my --

8 MS. McPHERSON: You're being awfully modest. What did  
9 you help him understand?

10 MS. THURMAN: Well, actually, the courtroom procedures  
11 as far as when you go in and what's done and maybe how some  
12 things are done, but --

13 MS. McPHERSON: And I assume he was a willing student?

14 MS. THURMAN: He was.

15 MS. McPHERSON: Why did you seek the position of  
16 deputy -- chief deputy clerk?

17 MS. THURMAN: You know, I used to say that I would  
18 never apply to become chief deputy. So that's why you never  
19 should say never. Because when it became available, I did  
20 apply. And it was more or less I felt like I knew the position.  
21 I had worked here for so many years. And the pay was more, and  
22 I went for it.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Were you still learning?

24 MS. THURMAN: To me, I was always learning in the  
25 clerk's office.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. To whom did you apply for the  
2 position?

3 MS. THURMAN: The clerk.

4 MS. McPHERSON: Who was at the time?

5 MS. THURMAN: Jane Gordon.

6 MS. McPHERSON: Did you compete with any colleagues for  
7 the position?

8 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

9 MS. McPHERSON: Did you compete with outsiders for the  
10 position?

11 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Quite often when one assumes a  
13 supervisory position, especially second in command in an  
14 office of colleagues with whom that person has worked alongside  
15 for many years, there are challenges in supervision. What were  
16 yours?

17 MS. THURMAN: Mostly getting the clerks to stay at  
18 their desk and do their work.

19 MS. McPHERSON: As opposed to?

20 MS. THURMAN: Going outside smoking, you know. And you  
21 had breaks, but some would abuse the breaks. And so I just --  
22 and then if things were not -- if you were working on something  
23 and didn't finish it, you know, getting someone to stay a little  
24 while after work without being angry. You know, just wanting to  
25 stay and help.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Uh-huh. Those were your challenges?

2 MS. THURMAN: Those were some of the challenges.

3 MS. McPHERSON: How do you feel that your own  
4 performance, work performance, before you became chief deputy  
5 facilitated your ability to make demands on those below you? A  
6 very polite way of asking did anyone ever throw up in your face  
7 after you became chief deputy clerk that you used to do the same  
8 thing?

9 MS. THURMAN: No.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. So do you think your own  
11 exemplary performance helped you become an effective supervisor?

12 MS. THURMAN: I think so.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Now, another "quite often".  
14 Quite often, though you were the second woman, women incur some  
15 challenges supervising men. Were there any?

16 MS. THURMAN: There were.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Tell me about them, the nature of the  
18 challenge, that is.

19 MS. THURMAN: I think it was mostly that they just  
20 didn't want a woman telling them what to do or how to do it.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Uh-huh.

22 MS. THURMAN: And it may have been that, too, I was a  
23 black woman.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Uh-huh.

25 MS. THURMAN: But that's --

1 MS. McPHERSON: How did you overcome that -- those  
2 challenges? Did you ever have, for example, any specific  
3 conversations with either men or women beneath you about  
4 supervision by a woman or supervision by an African-American?

5 MS. THURMAN: Well, I wouldn't say that I had any  
6 conversations with them. But, you know, you would hear from  
7 other people in the office that it had been talked about.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Uh-huh. Did you ever believe that  
9 people -- that anyone in the clerk's office assumed that your  
10 promotion to chief deputy clerk was an affirmative action  
11 promotion?

12 MS. THURMAN: No.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

14 MS. THURMAN: I earned that.

15 MS. McPHERSON: (Laughter) Blood, sweat, and tears?

16 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

17 MS. McPHERSON: What was the work life like in the  
18 clerk's office? There were times when I would go to the clerk's  
19 office, and people would have radios on. What -- so what was  
20 the work life like in the clerk's office? What was absolutely  
21 forbidden other than smoking? And I assume that there was a  
22 time when that wasn't forbidden.

23 MS. THURMAN: Eating at your desk.

24 MS. McPHERSON: That rule was broken a lot.

25 MS. THURMAN: Yes. Not getting to work on time.



1 MS. McPHERSON: Uh-huh.

2 MS. THURMAN: Extended lunch hours.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Uh-huh. Would it be fair to say that  
4 as deputy -- that as chief deputy clerk, you were essentially  
5 the personnel manager for the office?

6 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

7 MS. McPHERSON: How did you enforce decorum? You  
8 couldn't take anyone's pay away. This is the government.

9 MS. THURMAN: No.

10 MS. McPHERSON: So how did you enforce decorum?

11 MS. THURMAN: You would just call them to your office  
12 and have a talk with them.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did your observation of  
14 noncompliance with expectations affect your evaluation of  
15 employees?

16 MS. THURMAN: It did.

17 MS. McPHERSON: And your recommendations for promotion?  
18 Did it affect that as well?

19 MS. THURMAN: I guess in some way it did.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Were you responsible for evaluating  
21 employees as chief deputy clerk?

22 MS. THURMAN: I was.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Were they in writing?

24 MS. THURMAN: They were.

25 MS. McPHERSON: Did you have occasion to sit down with

1 employees working in your chain of command and explain to them  
2 why you might not have graded them at the highest level?

3 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely.

4 MS. McPHERSON: What was the general response of your  
5 staff to those discussions?

6 MS. THURMAN: Most of them, they were -- they were okay  
7 with it, because -- and you had a few who were not. You had  
8 some people that were very negative. But you -- most of them  
9 took it as -- not as criticisms but, you know, I guess helpful  
10 hints.

11 MS. McPHERSON: So in those cases, it resulted in  
12 improved performance.

13 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did you ever have any employee  
15 come and thank you?

16 MS. THURMAN: Not that I recall (laughter).

17 (Brief pause)

18 MS. McPHERSON: Let's digress a little bit and talk  
19 about the progressive homes that you purchased, because you  
20 moved out of your mother's home, obviously, when you got  
21 married. And where did you go?

22 MS. THURMAN: I went to an apartment.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

24 MS. THURMAN: After I came back from Georgia.

25 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And from then you moved to a

1 first house?

2 MS. THURMAN: I did.

3 MS. McPHERSON: And then a second home?

4 MS. THURMAN: I did.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Are you still in that second  
6 home?

7 MS. THURMAN: I am.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did you have an opportunity to  
9 do much traveling while you were in the clerk's office other  
10 than for bridge?

11 MS. THURMAN: Not a whole lot other than visiting  
12 family, you know.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Now, let's talk a little bit about a  
14 subject that I apologize in advance for bringing up, but it's  
15 part of your life, and that's your care for Florence. How long  
16 did that last? Florence was your oldest sister, the AKA whom  
17 you revered, your soul mate --

18 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

19 MS. McPHERSON: -- and a person to whom you devoted  
20 countless time and effort to keep alive.

21 MS. THURMAN: I did. She was living in New York. And  
22 she had multiple myeloma. And I think the doctors had sort of  
23 given her up, up there in New York. And I asked her to move to  
24 Montgomery and let me find a doctor for her and help her, and  
25 she did. And, of course, before she moved here, she had had

1 quite a bit of chemo and radiation. But the cancer doctor here  
2 said that if she had a bone marrow transplant, it would  
3 certainly help her to live a little longer. And so she did  
4 that.

5 MS. McPHERSON: You did that.

6 MS. THURMAN: I was actually her donor.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

8 MS. THURMAN: And we went to Arkansas and had the  
9 transplant done. And --

10 MS. McPHERSON: Did she have a family at the time?

11 MS. THURMAN: She did. She's -- you know, she had two  
12 children.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

14 MS. THURMAN: And, of course, she was divorced at that  
15 time.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Where were her children when she came  
17 to live with you?

18 MS. THURMAN: Her son was in New York and her daughter  
19 was in school at Spelman.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Spelman College in Atlanta?

21 MS. THURMAN: In Atlanta. Correct.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Did you have to match to become a  
23 donor?

24 MS. THURMAN: Yes. And, of course, other siblings were  
25 tested, but I was the only one that matched her.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Fortuitous for her.

2 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

3 MS. McPHERSON: What was that procedure like?

4 MS. THURMAN: It was very painful, the test was.

5 Because they don't give you anything to test you. And, of  
6 course, they -- you know, the needle goes in your bone to draw  
7 the marrow. But when it was done, we went to Arkansas. I was  
8 put to sleep, but I was so sore after it happened for a very --

9 MS. McPHERSON: How long was the procedure?

10 MS. THURMAN: Oh, wow. It lasted several hours because  
11 they, I think, had to draw blood -- I mean draw the marrow out.  
12 And I think I was stuck maybe 80 to a hundred times to get the  
13 amount she needed.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

15 MS. THURMAN: And so I was very sore for a while, for  
16 about a week or so.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Why Arkansas?

18 MS. THURMAN: That was the place that the doctor  
19 recommended. And I think they did a lot of transplants in  
20 Arkansas, Pine Bluff.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Do you believe that it extended her  
22 life?

23 MS. THURMAN: It did. And the doctor said if she had  
24 not had that much chemo and radiation, she would have lived even  
25 longer. But she lived I think approximately six years after the

1 transplant.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And that was longer than she was  
3 expected to live?

4 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

5 MS. McPHERSON: How old was she when she passed away?

6 MS. THURMAN: She was fifty -- I want to say 57, 58.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Was that the only time that you  
8 contributed marrow to her?

9 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Did the idea of contributing again ever  
11 come up?

12 MS. THURMAN: It did not.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Was she --

14 MS. THURMAN: And I don't know that it could have  
15 happened again. I don't know.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Was she mentally active during  
17 that entire period?

18 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Very active.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Was she physically active?

20 MS. THURMAN: Yes. I mean, she was, at one point,  
21 wheelchair bound.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

23 MS. THURMAN: But that didn't stop her. She was an  
24 inspiration to me because she never -- she never stopped.

25 MS. McPHERSON: (Nods head). And she had a dedicated

1 room in your home?

2 MS. THURMAN: She did. I actually -- all my bedrooms  
3 were upstairs. And I had my garage made into a bedroom for her.

4 MS. McPHERSON: What did caring for Florence teach you  
5 about death and dying?

6 MS. THURMAN: As I said, she was so upbeat about it.  
7 She was not down at any time. She always smiled. And she  
8 wanted to go. She never wanted to stop going. And that just  
9 kept me going, actually.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Uh-huh. And what were your physical  
11 responsibilities for her? Did you administer medicine? Did --  
12 were you involved personally with her --

13 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yes.

14 MS. McPHERSON: -- custodial care?

15 MS. THURMAN: I was when I was home. But actually, I  
16 had to get someone to come in and stay with her during the day  
17 while I was at work. But I had a -- a bell put in her room, and  
18 it rang up in our room. And if she needed something, she would  
19 ring the bell if we had gone to bed.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Was Florence's residency at your  
21 house -- did Florence's residency at your house overlap Bwana's  
22 residency at your house, your son's?

23 MS. THURMAN: I think Bwana had gone to -- gone away to  
24 school. And so he was very helpful when he would come home in  
25 moving her around, you know, in the wheelchair and all and

1 taking her places that she needed to go.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Do you think you could face death or  
3 decline in the way that she did?

4 MS. THURMAN: I would hope so.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Was observing her do it helpful to you?

6 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yes. It was.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did your care for her affect  
8 your work at all?

9 MS. THURMAN: It did not.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

11 MS. THURMAN: And, of course, you know, my husband was  
12 a lot of help to us too.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. You ultimately became a kind of  
14 surrogate mother to her children.

15 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

16 MS. McPHERSON: So, really, you do have more than one  
17 child.

18 MS. THURMAN: I do (laughter). I do. Yeah. And  
19 actually, her grandchild -- or her grandchildren, actually. But  
20 the grandchild that -- my namesake has -- I was like her  
21 grandmother, you know. Even though they lived in Atlanta, on  
22 Grandparents Day and whatever they had where the grandparent  
23 needed to be there, I was there.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And you're talking about Marie.

25 MS. THURMAN: Yes.



1 MS. McPHERSON: And she was named for you certainly  
2 well before Florence became ill.

3 MS. THURMAN: Right.

4 MS. McPHERSON: Now, one of the biggies in the clerk's  
5 office, one of the biggies the world over, is automation. When  
6 did it happen in your tenure?

7 MS. THURMAN: Actually -- and I knew nothing about  
8 automation. I didn't even own a computer (laughter). But --

9 MS. McPHERSON: Were you chief deputy clerk by that  
10 time?

11 MS. THURMAN: Yes, I was.

12 MS. McPHERSON: All right. So that means you had some  
13 responsibility for introducing automation to the office.

14 MS. THURMAN: Or seeing that it was introduced to the  
15 office (laughter). Yes.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Did the office immediately hire what we  
17 now call an IT person?

18 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yes. We had to have someone.

19 MS. McPHERSON: How were you trained? Here in  
20 Montgomery or did AO sponsor seminars for clerks?

21 MS. THURMAN: I was actually trained here in  
22 Montgomery.

23 MS. McPHERSON: What was your attitude about it?

24 MS. THURMAN: It was another thing I had to learn, you  
25 know, and I was willing to do it.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Did you see it as a benefit?

2 MS. THURMAN: Eventually.

3 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

4 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

5 MS. McPHERSON: And -- and for the period that you  
6 didn't see it as a benefit, I take it that was tied to your  
7 inability to master it.

8 MS. THURMAN: Right. Trying to learn.

9 MS. McPHERSON: But once you mastered it -- okay. You  
10 didn't have any real objection to it.

11 MS. THURMAN: No, not at all.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. So how did that come about?  
13 Were computers just dispatched to various clerks all at the same  
14 time, or was there a gradual introduction?

15 MS. THURMAN: It was gradual. And it was -- I believe  
16 the criminal deputies were the first ones to get them.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Before then, what had been the storage  
18 arrangement for files?

19 MS. THURMAN: They were filed by cases, case numbers.

20 MS. McPHERSON: And where were they maintained?

21 MS. THURMAN: In the clerk's office --

22 MS. McPHERSON: And if I came --

23 MS. THURMAN: -- in the back.

24 MS. McPHERSON: In the back?

25 MS. THURMAN: In the back.

1 MS. McPHERSON: If I came to the clerk's office the  
2 year you were appointed chief deputy -- and we agree that that  
3 was sometime in the late eighties or early nineties -- and I  
4 wanted to see a file for 1965, where would I have to go?

5 MS. THURMAN: Before 1965 -- I'm trying to remember if  
6 we had taken some to the basement, files. But they were  
7 probably in the back office back there that -- the little area  
8 where you'd come from the Judge's office into the clerk's  
9 office.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Into the clerk's office?

11 MS. THURMAN: There was a big office back there. And  
12 that's where all of the files were kept.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Were they at any time -- that is, the  
14 files -- were they at any time warehoused in another location?

15 MS. THURMAN: No.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Because of space?

17 MS. THURMAN: Not while I was here.

18 MS. McPHERSON: So you retired in 1998?

19 MS. THURMAN: I did.

20 MS. McPHERSON: So in 1998, someone could come into the  
21 clerk's office and retrieve an actual file from a case in 1965?

22 MS. THURMAN: Sure.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Goodness. Who knew about that system  
24 other than you and maybe Ernestine?

25 MS. THURMAN: Well, I mean, they eventually -- you

1 know, if you worked there, you learned about where the records  
2 were kept and how to retrieve them.

3 MS. McPHERSON: The clerk's office also had a procedure  
4 for placing opinions in a box that the press and lawyers could  
5 come in and look at. Am I correct?

6 MS. THURMAN: You mean on the counter, on the table.

7 MS. McPHERSON: Yes.

8 MS. THURMAN: Yes. Orders.

9 MS. McPHERSON: What was that for, to apprise the  
10 public of what the Court was doing?

11 MS. THURMAN: Yes. People -- you know, news people  
12 could come in and look at the orders and see. And if they were  
13 looking for something special --

14 MS. McPHERSON: Could they get copies?

15 MS. THURMAN: Sure.

16 MS. McPHERSON: How much?

17 MS. THURMAN: How much were the copies? I don't  
18 remember. I vaguely remember something at 50 cents a page, but  
19 I don't remember what they cost.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And lawyers could also come in  
21 and get orders.

22 MS. THURMAN: Correct.

23 MS. McPHERSON: All right.

24 MS. THURMAN: Even though if they were in the case,  
25 they -- it was mailed to them anyway.

1 MS. McPHERSON: I see. Speaking of filing, tell me  
2 about the late-hour filing system that the clerk's office had  
3 that you loved so much.

4 MS. THURMAN: Actually, if an attorney needed to file  
5 something by a specific date and it was after office hours, they  
6 would call the clerk or the chief deputy. They knew they could  
7 do that. And in the little book -- attorney's book that they  
8 had, our names were listed and our phone numbers so they could  
9 call us. And they would come to our homes and file them.

10 MS. McPHERSON: So you had to keep a stamp at home?

11 MS. THURMAN: No. I would actually pen it -- pencil it  
12 in and stamp it the next morning at the office.

13 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And it was deemed filed on that  
14 date --

15 MS. THURMAN: Absolutely.

16 MS. McPHERSON: -- as long as they got it to your  
17 house.

18 MS. THURMAN: Uh-huh.

19 MS. McPHERSON: How many dinners were interrupted for  
20 that?

21 MS. THURMAN: (Laughter) Well, I tried to make it so  
22 it would not, you know. And we would just set up a time they  
23 would be there to file it. They would let us know.

24 MS. McPHERSON: What's the latest time a lawyer ever  
25 filed a document at your house?

1 MS. THURMAN: I want to say nine o'clock, you know.

2 MS. McPHERSON: That's not that late.

3 MS. THURMAN: No.

4 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Were there any people who fell  
5 into the category of what I will call frequent late filers other  
6 than present company?

7 MS. THURMAN: You -- you probably had a few that  
8 would -- that would be -- not have it here by five o'clock.

9 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did you ever refuse such late  
10 filings?

11 MS. THURMAN: No.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. How would you say the clerk's  
13 office itself, if there was a response, adjusted to the growing  
14 number of female attorneys, a clerk's office consisting mainly  
15 of women?

16 MS. THURMAN: I don't think it was --

17 MS. McPHERSON: Remarkable? It wasn't?

18 MS. THURMAN: Repeat your question.

19 MS. McPHERSON: I was just asking whether or not you  
20 observed any response that was notable by the women in the  
21 clerk's office to the growing number of women attorneys.

22 MS. THURMAN: I don't think it was a problem.

23 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. What about the advent of women  
24 judges?

25 MS. THURMAN: Wasn't a problem. Not to me.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Well, I'm asking you about the office,  
2 not just you.

3 MS. THURMAN: I don't recall anything being said about  
4 it.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. All right. So you regard those  
6 two transitions as having been smoothly done.

7 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. So when did you know that it was  
9 time to retire?

10 MS. THURMAN: I just felt that --

11 MS. McPHERSON: No. I'm asking when. You left in '98.  
12 How long before '98 did you know that it was time to go?

13 MS. THURMAN: I know it was at least six months --

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

15 MS. THURMAN: -- before --

16 MS. McPHERSON: So close to retirement. Not years?

17 MS. THURMAN: Oh, no.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And what was it that triggered  
19 that realization?

20 MS. THURMAN: Just, I think, being in -- it may have  
21 been just being in the same place for so many years. And the  
22 work was not getting any easier. The staff was growing. You  
23 know, I was just ready to retire. And when I told my husband,  
24 he, you know, asked me if I was sure. And I said, "Yes, I'm  
25 sure."

1 MS. McPHERSON: Did you have any reasons that you  
2 recounted to yourself as to why you should stay and reasons for  
3 leaving? Did you do what some people do, list the reasons to  
4 stay and list the reasons to go?

5 MS. THURMAN: No.

6 MS. McPHERSON: So you had no reasons to stay.

7 MS. THURMAN: I had no reasons to stay.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Did there ever come a time during your  
9 tenure when you stopped learning, when you felt that you were  
10 just simply not growing professionally anymore? It happens.

11 MS. THURMAN: In my later years as chief -- as chief  
12 deputy. You know, I felt like -- even though I -- it was always  
13 something new happening, but nothing where you had to just learn  
14 new things, new procedures.

15 MS. McPHERSON: The courts -- the clerk's office was  
16 not paperless when you left.

17 MS. THURMAN: No.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Was it on its way to becoming so?

19 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

20 MS. McPHERSON: How did you respond to that?

21 MS. THURMAN: I thought it was great.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. You -- did you enjoy becoming  
23 more tech-savvy in your work?

24 MS. THURMAN: Not really.

25 MS. McPHERSON: Really? What was the -- what were the



1 downsides, in your view?

2 MS. THURMAN: Well, to this day, I'm not really that  
3 tech-savvy.

4 MS. McPHERSON: Well, I mean as it relates to the work  
5 of the clerk's office. What were the downsides or disadvantages  
6 to what I will call comprehensive technology in operations?  
7 Email, for example.

8 MS. THURMAN: Just having to sit there and read, to me.

9 MS. McPHERSON: I don't want to sound --

10 MS. THURMAN: I just prefer -- I preferred the paper,  
11 but I had nothing against them changing.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Did the advent of email, specifically,  
13 affect the way you communicated with employees or affect your  
14 relationship with employees?

15 MS. THURMAN: I don't think so.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Were you embracing of or -- did  
17 you embrace or -- or avoid a formal retirement ceremony since  
18 you've been through so many for other employees?

19 MS. THURMAN: In the end, I did embrace it. I didn't  
20 really have to have it.

21 MS. McPHERSON: Had you planned countless retirement  
22 ceremonies for other people?

23 MS. THURMAN: Yes. But it didn't -- when it comes to  
24 something like that, I'm a little low key on it.

25 MS. McPHERSON: Did the thought of retiring and not

1 coming back to the courthouse every day, either on the day that  
2 you retired or thereafter or before, ever sadden you?

3 MS. THURMAN: It did. Because I knew I would miss the  
4 people.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And it's the people you missed  
6 rather than the work?

7 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Did you ever miss the work?

9 MS. THURMAN: I don't recall missing it.

10 MS. McPHERSON: Have you done any postretirement  
11 mentoring of clerk's office personnel, not necessarily that you  
12 initiated, but that they may have initiated? Has anyone called  
13 you to ask you about procedures, about decorum, or anything  
14 else? Or is there something somebody can't find in the clerk's  
15 office that they know you know the location of?

16 MS. THURMAN: It may have happened a few times after I  
17 left, right after I left, but --

18 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Have you been back to the office  
19 since you left?

20 MS. THURMAN: I have. Only when invited. I didn't  
21 just --

22 MS. McPHERSON: You've never popped in?

23 MS. THURMAN: No.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Have you willfully avoided that?

25 MS. THURMAN: No. I just didn't see a need to pop in.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Have you kept up with your  
2 former colleagues?

3 MS. THURMAN: Some of them.

4 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. In postretirement, what have you  
5 done that you weren't doing already?

6 MS. THURMAN: Well, I have worked -- you know, I've  
7 done civic work, volunteer work.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Have you, like many people, become more  
9 active in your church, or is that possible?

10 MS. THURMAN: I've always been active in my church. So  
11 there are probably a few more responsibilities, but --

12 MS. McPHERSON: What kind of civic work do you do?

13 MS. THURMAN: I'm not doing as much now, but I did work  
14 for Catholic Charities. And, of course, from time to time I  
15 deliver Meals on Wheels through MACOA.

16 MS. McPHERSON: The Montgomery --

17 MS. THURMAN: Area Council on Aging.

18 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

19 MS. THURMAN: And now I have an opportunity to visit  
20 sick people that I know. And sometimes if they need to go  
21 somewhere or do something, I do that.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Are you serving on any boards?

23 MS. THURMAN: I am. I'm on the Montgomery Area Council  
24 on Aging board at this time. And, of course, I'm on the board  
25 at my church.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Are you enjoying this phase of your  
2 life?

3 MS. THURMAN: I am. I am. I stay busy sometimes and  
4 don't know where the hours -- the day went. But I think when  
5 people know that you are available, they call on you more.

6 MS. McPHERSON: Let's spend just a little time on some  
7 reflections. What would you say is the most memorable case you  
8 were involved in as a clerk? And when I say memorable, I don't  
9 mean to the public or the press, but to you. What case or cases  
10 either influenced you, impressed you, intrigued you?

11 MS. THURMAN: There were so many cases.

12 MS. McPHERSON: If you can't remember a specific case,  
13 then what area of the law did the cases occur in that most  
14 grabbed your attention?

15 MS. THURMAN: Mostly desegregation.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Of public facilities? Of schools? Of  
17 transportation? Or just the broad subject of desegregation?

18 MS. THURMAN: Just the broad subject.

19 MS. McPHERSON: Were there lawyers who impressed you  
20 and whom you enjoyed watching in court?

21 MS. THURMAN: I'd say yes, there were.

22 MS. McPHERSON: Why did it take so long to answer that?

23 MS. THURMAN: Because you have some lawyers who  
24 perform, you know, better than others and are more prepared in  
25 what they're presenting than others.

1 MS. McPHERSON: Could you tell?

2 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yeah. If you sat there for a number  
3 of years, you could tell.

4 MS. McPHERSON: What was it about the clerk's office --  
5 what is it about the way the clerk's office was run when you  
6 left or when you retired that you were most proud of?

7 MS. THURMAN: I guess I was most proud of the way  
8 that -- the responsibilities as far as, you know, when you had  
9 intake and -- not just everybody having to go -- you had an  
10 intake section. And --

11 MS. McPHERSON: So you were proud of the division of  
12 labor?

13 MS. THURMAN: Yes. Yes.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. You found that to be efficient?

15 MS. THURMAN: Yes, I did.

16 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. When you became employed in this  
17 courthouse in 1966, there was one judge, I assume one  
18 magistrate --

19 MS. THURMAN: (Nods head)

20 MS. McPHERSON: -- and a clerk's office consisting of  
21 four people or five people?

22 MS. THURMAN: Uh-huh. The clerk, the chief deputy --

23 MS. McPHERSON: And three deputies.

24 MS. THURMAN: -- and three deputies.

25 MS. McPHERSON: When you left, there were three judges,

1 four magistrate judges, all of whom had law clerks, multiple law  
2 clerks, all of whom had secretaries. And how many in the  
3 clerk's office?

4 MS. THURMAN: Wow.

5 MS. McPHERSON: Over 40?

6 MS. THURMAN: I wouldn't say over 40, but at least 35  
7 or 40 people.

8 MS. McPHERSON: How did that growth and the sheer  
9 number of people and personalities in the courthouse all dealing  
10 with court procedures affect the working environment? What were  
11 the upsides and what were the downsides?

12 MS. THURMAN: Well, the upside was having people in  
13 specific areas to take care of what was necessary --

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

15 MS. THURMAN: -- you know, to be done. The downsides,  
16 actually, not enough hours in the day to get the work done.

17 MS. McPHERSON: Because of the need to service so many  
18 areas and judges and what have you.

19 MS. THURMAN: Uh-huh.

20 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Now let's talk about a favorite  
21 subject of yours: pro se litigants.

22 MS. THURMAN: Huh.

23 MS. McPHERSON: How did you draw the line between  
24 legitimate assistance to a pro se litigant -- a pro se litigant  
25 being a person who comes in without an attorney, who will remain

1 without an attorney for the duration of the case, who will  
2 represent himself or herself. How -- what benchmark did you use  
3 to draw a distinction between assistance that was legitimate and  
4 legal advice, which was not?

5 MS. THURMAN: Well, we would tell them that we were not  
6 able to give them any legal advice on what they needed to do.  
7 But as far as showing them proper filing -- you know, the way  
8 you should properly file it, we did help with that. But, oh, we  
9 had so many pro se litigants.

10 MS. McPHERSON: (Laughter) Who were --

11 MS. THURMAN: And most of them were prisoners.

12 MS. McPHERSON: Okay.

13 MS. THURMAN: A lot of them were prisoners.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Did they seek legal advice from you?

15 MS. THURMAN: Oh, you would have some that would come  
16 in and need to know an answer that would be legal. You would  
17 just tell them you just can't --

18 MS. McPHERSON: Would I be --

19 MS. THURMAN: -- we were just not allowed to tell them.

20 MS. McPHERSON: And would I be correct in assuming that  
21 on many occasions you knew the answer, but you just couldn't  
22 tell them?

23 MS. THURMAN: Oh, yes.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Were you ever, ever, in the least bit  
25 tempted to go to law school?

1 MS. THURMAN: No.

2 MS. McPHERSON: Honestly, did you ever look at lawyers  
3 in the courtroom or courthouse and say, "I could do that"?

4 MS. THURMAN: I'm sure I did.

5 MS. McPHERSON: What factors would you say kept you  
6 from going to law school? A lack of interest, lack of money,  
7 lack of time, or all three?

8 MS. THURMAN: Probably all three, because certainly I  
9 didn't have the -- the time, unless I did it after work. And I  
10 wouldn't say it was lack of money, because --

11 MS. McPHERSON: You were making more than 5,000.

12 MS. THURMAN: Of course. At that time (laughter). And  
13 it was mostly just a lack of interest.

14 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Did you anticipate with any  
15 positive feelings the new courthouse? I know you never worked  
16 in it, but did you personally see a need for a new courthouse  
17 before you left?

18 MS. THURMAN: I did, because we were growing so. And  
19 the judges having their own courtrooms certainly helped, because  
20 it was like sometimes they may want to have a hearing, but they  
21 didn't have anywhere to have it.

22 MS. McPHERSON: And whose job was it to coordinate  
23 courtroom use?

24 MS. THURMAN: We had that responsibility.

25 MS. McPHERSON: We, as in Marie Thurman?



1 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

2 MS. McPHERSON: How did working here affect your  
3 respect for the rule of law? Or did it? Do you think that  
4 Citizen Marie has a different brand of respect for the rule of  
5 law than Citizen Marie would have, had she kept teaching?

6 MS. THURMAN: Oh, certainly, because, you know, you  
7 learn a lot about how things are handled, how decisions are  
8 made. And so if I had never worked down here, I probably never  
9 would have --

10 MS. McPHERSON: How would you characterize your career  
11 as a clerk of court? And I use that term generically. How  
12 would you characterize that career? Is it something you would  
13 recommend to others and, if so, why?

14 MS. THURMAN: I would certainly recommend it to someone  
15 who had the admiration -- are you talking about becoming Clerk  
16 of the Court --

17 MS. McPHERSON: No. No.

18 MS. THURMAN: -- or just being chief deputy clerk or  
19 just the clerk -- a clerk in the clerk's office?

20 MS. McPHERSON: Would you recommend to a young woman or  
21 a young man who sought your advice about a career that that  
22 person seek a career in the U.S. District Court Clerk's Office?

23 MS. THURMAN: Sure.

24 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. And then my second question was  
25 why.

1 MS. THURMAN: Well, I personally found it so beneficial  
2 to work here. And, you know, the judges were inspiring. And  
3 the benefits, the money that can be made. And then, you know,  
4 even though it didn't inspire me to want to maybe go to law  
5 school, it may do the same -- do it for someone else.

6 MS. McPHERSON: And you consider that a good thing?

7 MS. THURMAN: Yes.

8 MS. McPHERSON: Okay. Do you have anything you wish to  
9 add?

10 MS. THURMAN: (Laughter) No.

11 MS. McPHERSON: After 32 years?

12 MS. THURMAN: It was an enjoyable -- it was really  
13 enjoyable working in the clerk's office even though I had a lot  
14 of challenges. I had a lot to learn. But it was certainly a  
15 plus in my life.

16 MS. McPHERSON: That's an excellent note to end on.  
17 Thank you, Ms. Marie Thurman.

18 MS. THURMAN: Thank you.

19 \* \* \* - oOo- \* \* \*

20

21

22

23

24

25

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

REPORTERS' CERTIFICATE

We, Risa L. Entrekin and Patricia G. Starkie,  
Registered Diplomate Reporters and Official Court Reporters for  
the United States District Court for the Middle District of  
Alabama, do hereby certify that the foregoing 114 pages contain  
a true and correct transcript of the interview of Marie McMillan  
Thurman in the City of Montgomery, Alabama, on February 2, 2017.

In testimony whereof, we hereunto set our hand  
this 26th day of April, 2018.

/s/ Risa L. Entrekin  
RISA L. ENTREKIN, RDR, CRR  
Official Court Reporter

/s/ Patricia G. Starkie  
PATRICIA G. STARKIE, RDR, CRR  
Official Court Reporter