

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA

DEDICATION OF THE  
JUDGE MYRON H. THOMPSON  
COURTROOM

SEPTEMBER 17, 2025

10:00 A.M.

ONE CHURCH STREET  
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

JUDGE MARKS: Good morning. My name is Emily Marks, and I am the Chief U.S. District Judge for the Middle District of Alabama. With me on the bench are my colleagues, Judge Austin Huffaker, Judge Harold Albritton, and Judge Keith Watkins.

We are thrilled to have so many of our federal colleagues here with us this morning, and I would like to recognize from the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Joel Dubina and Judge Ed Carnes; District Judges, Judge Corey Maze, Judge Anna Manasco, and Judge Sharon Blackburn. Our Chief Bankruptcy Judge, Judge Bess Creswell, is here with us today, and Magistrate Judges Chief Judge Stephen Doyle, Judge Jerusha Adams, Judge Kelly Pate, Judge Chad Bryan, Judge Sonja Bivins, Chief Judge John England, and Judge Nick Danella. Thank you all so much for being here.

We also have many of our colleagues from the state and local bench with us this morning. Would all of our state and local judges please stand to be recognized.

(Applause.)

JUDGE MARKS: I would also like to recognize our special guest and one of Judge Thompson's first employers, Former Alabama Lieutenant Governor and Former Alabama Attorney General, Mr. Bill Baxley.

(Applause.)

JUDGE MARKS: We are so very honored to have all of you

with us this morning to celebrate the dedication of this courtroom in honor of Judge Myron H. Thompson.

This courthouse, as you know, is named for Frank M. Johnson, Jr., the judge who occupied this courtroom before Judge Thompson. And now this courtroom will bear the name of its current occupant, Judge Myron Thompson.

Now, I have been thinking a lot about how this dedication of this courtroom is a lot like the dedication of Saban Field at Bryant-Denny Stadium. Because as you all know, Judge Thompson loves a good football analogy.

To start this proceeding, we will hear from the Tuskegee University Concert Choir under the direction of Dr. Wayne Barr.

(Vocal performances of *The Star Spangled Banner*, *Ain'-a That Good News*, and *Ezekiel Saw De Wheel*.)

JUDGE MARKS: Thank you all so much. That was absolutely amazing. You're all obviously individually talented, but putting you all together as a whole is stunning. So thank you all very much for that.

We will now hear from Judge Thompson's brother, Mr. Lawrence J. Thompson.

(Applause.)

MR. LAWRENCE J. THOMPSON: Good morning. I will be brief. That's for sure.

As just announced, I am Myron's older brother.

When Myron called me and informed me of this momentous dedication, how could I say no? He said, "Would you say a few words?" I said, "Yes." Under no circumstances could I miss the opportunity to tell Myron how proud I am of him and his work in the courtroom and his life as a whole.

Right now I'd like to mention a few -- at least two people who were very, very instrumental in Myron getting to where he is right now. The first one is our mother, Lillian Buford. Without her, he wouldn't be here. She was the one that stood next to Myron during his dedication for judge for the first time back in -- whenever.

But anyway, also there is a person that all of us, as far as family, looked up to, and that was Mr. John Henry Glanton. That was the other one. And also Nickie. Ann. The backbone. Without these individuals, Myron wouldn't be here today.

Also I'd like to say from this day on, when anyone walks into this courtroom, they will be where? In Judge Myron Thompson's courtroom. So right now, I would like to say congratulations, and I love you, Brother.

(Applause.)

JUDGE MARKS: Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

It is always such a thrill for me to sit on this judicial bench in this historic courtroom. This judicial bench has been occupied by only two presiding judges over the course

of 70 years: Judge Frank Johnson, for whom this courthouse is named, and Judge Myron Thompson, for whom this courtroom is being dedicated today.

Judge Thompson has occupied the federal bench for 45 years.

Now, Judge Thompson, to put that in perspective, when you became a federal judge, I was seven years old.

That is uproarious laughter. Are you saying I look very old?

In order for me to occupy the federal bench for 45 years, I would have to serve until the year 2063. I would be 90 years old.

Judge Thompson, you had set a very high bar, and I had better eat my Wheaties.

I appeared before Judge Thompson in this courtroom when I was a lawyer. Judge Thompson had a calm demeanor but left no doubt that he had high expectations. He was always prepared. He had a deep understanding of the law and was consistent in his requirements that lawyers capably fulfill their weighty responsibilities. Judge Thompson was aided in communicating those expectations by this environment in which he presided. Many of us have become so accustomed to being in a courtroom that we don't really pause to think about the elements of the room and the reasons why it is constructed and oriented the way that it is.

It is like looking at a painting, thinking it looks lovely, and then just moving on. But to truly appreciate and be moved by a work of art, knowing details about the deeper meaning behind the design leads to a fuller appreciation.

This bench, for example, is elevated. The practical reason for placing the judge at an elevated position is so that he or she can see the entire room and that all participants and spectators can see the judge. The elevated bench also quietly communicates the judge's position of authority over the proceedings and the import of the decisions and rulings being made.

The bronze lamps illuminating the right and left ends of the bench have been here since Judge Johnson presided over matters in this courtroom. Of course, the practical effect is that the judge is able to see better in a well-lit space, but lamplight often symbolizes knowledge and enlightenment, bringing calm by cutting through the uncertainty of darkness.

The unique star field behind the bench has 48 stars, representing the number of states in the union at the time of the courthouse's construction, which was completed in 1933. This feature evokes thoughts of the section of the American flag representing the individual states. The color blue also often symbolizes calm, stability, trust, and wisdom. And stars, while representing those separate states, within the whole of our great country are also figures which carry representative

meaning. Remember, historically navigators relied on stars to guide them, to set them in the right direction, to be beacons of light.

This star field is framed by a limestone arch. The arch is a beautiful feature, to be sure, but think about the structure of an arch. In order for it to stand and not collapse under its own weight, it needs the strength of its many parts being compressed tightly together. If any particular stone were to collapse, the arch would fail. The overall stability of the arch depends on each individual stone doing its part, and then the collective action of the whole of the arch keeping those individual stones in place and together. In other words, the individual needs the whole, and the whole needs the individual.

The limestone clock behind me, which I suspect is the only courtroom clock in the entire courthouse that keeps accurate time, is original to this room. Of course it, too, has practical and symbolic features. The practical is, obviously, that people can tell the time. I do wonder how many times lawyers in this very courtroom have silently willed that clock to speed up while under relentless questioning from the bench, but even something as ubiquitous as a timepiece has a deeper meaning. This clock represents precision and the unyielding and inevitable passage of time; that our time here is limited, and we must make the most of it.

Each of these courtroom elements separately has its own

practical use and deeper meaning, but the true beauty of this courtroom is that these elements combine in a unity that communicates the wisdom, calm, authority, and clarity of the rule of law, and there is no more fitting name for this room than the Judge Myron H. Thompson Courtroom.

The beauty of the ceiling cannot be overlooked, and to talk about this feature is Judge Huffaker.

JUDGE HUFFAKER: Well, good morning. I'm Austin Huffaker. I'm a District Judge here, and it's my pleasure to speak with you a little bit about the ceiling.

So first, everyone, just look up. Look up and just take a moment. So look at the beams, look at the squares, and take a moment and just look at the colors, the patterns, and the beams again. It's interesting to note that in this setting, the stars in this courtroom are not aloft in the ceiling, but are instead incorporated into the niche behind me.

The patterns above us are measured, diverse, and well designed. One could argue that the geometry in the ceiling represents our federal judiciary: Ninety-four districts, eleven circuits, and one supreme court, all uniquely integrated into our American jurisprudence. That is the many shapes, the many colors, and many patterns, all intertwine to create one system of justice: The rule of law.

We often refer to this space as America's Courtroom. And if there was ever an example of a space being graced with an

elegant canopy such as this, this is it. As you take a moment to explore the design of this grand canopy, I would suggest that it is befitting as this canopy of a space in which Judge Frank Johnson presided, and for the last 45 years has been the canopy for the work of our dear friend and colleague, Judge Thompson.

While the room is filled with many original finishes, as you can see, the ceiling has a seemingly infinite floral and geometric motif that is stunning to most all who enter this very sacred place. In fact, the beauty and splendor of this motif was replicated in part in the lobby area of the courthouse annex next door.

In the art and design world, this design exemplifies the concept called *horror vacui*, also known as kenophobia. *Horror vacui* means the fear of empty space. It is not to be confused with what a young lawyer might feel and experience when he or she appears before Judge Thompson for the very first time.

Indeed, the term represents a befitting mantra that Judge Thompson addressed firsthand when he assumed the bench. Originally this ceiling was distorted and somewhat blocked by fluorescent lighting and other materials that obstructed the view of this magnificent ceiling. Early in his tenure, Judge Thompson oversaw the efforts to restore this ceiling to her original beauty and design. Scaffolding was erected, and the students enrolled in the art department from Auburn University were among the artists and designers that used the original

stencils from the 1930s to restore the design as we see it today.

The ceiling in so many ways provides this room with a special sense of place; a sense of dignity, honor, and reverence. It stands out in the American landscape as a special place, special in much the same way that a church, synagogue, or house of worship presents itself to those that find a kinship with the particular structure; structures that transcend time, generations, and individual philosophies or bias. One might describe his or her experience in this courtroom as moving and emotional. A religious experience of sort.

Several of my colleagues, our clerk of court, and I were recently invited to a dinner at the United States Supreme Court honoring Judge Thompson. The pageantry of that evening was memorable, as were the words of Justice Anthony Kennedy, who was present for the occasion. You'll hear from him in a moment in our program.

Justice Kennedy reminded us all that evening of the solemnity and road less traveled that a federal trial judge often finds himself during his tenure on the bench. In fact, the quote is noted on the front of our printed program today. Justice Kennedy reminded us that while the journey of a federal trial judge might be viewed as compartmentalized or lonely, the truth of the matter is that the trial judge has the law, equality, and the support of a nation as his traveling

companions.

Judge Thompson, we're all humbled and honored to be with you today under this beautifully designed canopy of color, one might say a symphony of color. We look up to you as a friend, a colleague, and a mentor. It is befitting to know that for generations and generations to come, this canopy will cloister the space that appropriately bears your name.

We're often in spaces that draw our attention upward. We are often in churches, synagogues, and houses of worship, and find ourselves looking up for a myriad of reasons. But if we look upward, we're often greeted with the beauty and promise of a lovely design, a design that makes us hopeful and inspired to serve the greater good.

Two weeks ago my wife, Suzi, and I visited Notre Dame in Paris to tour the recently restored cathedral. As we were inside the cathedral, I found myself drawn to the ceilings aloft. Oddly, it reminded me of this space. The beauty of a space that has been impacted on so many levels, but also a space that moves forward with the ages, often in a stately posture, but often impacted subtly and sometimes by unexpected threats and circumstances.

I find it ironic that our courthouse address is One Church Street, because on this very site stood one of Montgomery's first houses of worship, First United Methodist Church. If a sister ceiling to this one above us today exists

in this region or state, it is the stenciled, tiled ceiling that adorns First Methodist in the Cloverdale area.

Regardless of where your personal or professional journey may take you, I encourage you to look up, keep the faith, and take inspiration from what you see and observe when you look up. Like this ceiling and the canopies you encounter along life's pathway, always be reminded of our dear friend and colleague, Judge Myron Thompson, a Renaissance man who exemplifies the benefit and virtue of looking up to seek the good and benefit in all things and remaining true and faithful to the inspiration of our Constitution and the rule of law.

Judge Thompson, our dearest appreciation is yours. May God bless you and always.

(Applause.)

JUDGE MARKS: Now to discuss the balcony, Judge Keith Watkins.

JUDGE WATKINS: Good morning. I'm honored to speak about a significant but more sober feature of America's courtroom here. Early warning: This road is a little bumpy, but I hope the destination is worth it.

I speak not for the court or its judges. For a couple of moments, I speak for myself as a witness. And as I look out in the audience today, I see so many actors in the history of this court and in the history of this state, particularly in the civil rights movement. The room is full of people who had parts

in some of the things that I'm about to talk about briefly.

History, rightly understood, is a long and deep conversation with the past. When Judge Thompson speaks in here, he often talks about the importance of place in our collective history and conscience. This place has a strong symbol of dark times past, a symbol I want to explore just a bit. It's the balcony. Judge Thompson opposed the idea of having it removed during our renovation several years ago, because it's a reminder of where we were and a marker of where we are. It's a metaphor for Jim Crow's idea of place.

For the last 70 years, this place has been a haven of justice. The one place in Alabama, as Dr. King said, where you could go to get justice.

Contrast that with the ruling culture here in the 1950s when many of the judges in the house were growing up in one stage or another. Alabama was unreconstructed. We took *Plessy versus Ferguson* very seriously, notwithstanding *Brown versus Board* in 1954. As the prophet said, justice had stumbled in the street.

Think of the scene in *To Kill A Mockingbird* when Scout was in the courtroom balcony with the people of color, looking through those spindles that symbolized bars. That was their place in that balcony. And what Jim Crow wanted more than anything was for people to know their place and to be found there. Ask Rosa Parks. Scout was learning that dogma is what

you have to believe, even if you don't believe it.

Or you could ask my father-in-law. In 1959 he moved his family from Minnesota to Montgomery to teach English to foreign officers studying at Maxwell Air Force Base.

Necessarily there were a number of people of color from all over the world in every class, all officers specially chosen for their respective nation to study here at the Air War College. Interestingly, Alabama's Jim Crow culture was rejected on the base.

At the end of every semester, Bob would invite all the foreign officers in his classes to a dinner at his house, with each officer to bring a dish from his or her native land. During that very first such dinner in 1959, there was a knock on the door with Montgomery police standing there. The neighbors had called the police to complain that there were Black people socializing at the Madigan residence. Bob replied, yes, that's true. There are Black majors and colonels from all over Africa and other places around the world who are studying with me at Maxwell, and they are my invited guests. After a few more such exchanges, the police announced, well, okay, so long as they are not locals.

Or ask Mark Gilmore. He was 15 years old in 1957 when he was caught by a white police officer taking a shortcut to his after-school job through Oak Park, then a beautiful park behind Jackson Hospital, about a mile from here. The problem, by

ordinance, the park was designated white only. That was the law.

In fact, I'm going to read you the law: "Section 1. It shall be unlawful for white or colored persons to enter upon, visit, use, or in any way occupy public parks or other public houses or public places, swimming pools, wading pools, beaches, lakes, or ponds, except those assigned to their respective races. Any person, firm, corporation, or association violating any of the provisions of this ordinance shall be guilty of a misdemeanor against the City of Montgomery and, upon conviction, shall be subject to a fine of not more than \$100 and imprisonment for not more than six months, one or both, at the discretion of the city recorder."

See, that park was not Mark's place. He was out of place. The solution? First, a beating from the officer, and second, two weeks in jail while things got sorted out.

The balcony is just wood, plaster, and I think it's got cork on the floor, but it stands as a witness to Judge Johnson taking care of the problem of place in Mark Gilmore's case.

By the way, afterwards the city closed all public parks and pools for almost nine years to avoid having them enjoyed by all the populous.

Or ask any Black person traveling as a stranger to Alabama and the larger Deep South in those days. I have a copy here of the 1940 edition of the Negro Motorist Green Book. And

to those of you who don't know what this is, this is a guide for people of color traveling in the Deep South in those days, in days past.

So I've looked at Alabama. Out of our 63 counties, there were only 28 places listed in the entire state that a Black family could spend the night safely, and of those, it's only seven hotels. None in Montgomery. There were two tourist homes in Troy. There was a beauty parlor in Mobile. There were several restaurants. But only 28 in the entire state of Alabama where people of color could enjoy a night safely.

You get the point here in this place. But unless you study the history or you lived it like so many people in the room did, you don't get the whole spear. You just get the point. History is more than ideology, for it explains the source of ideas that result in ideologies.

Jim Crow was at bottom a legal construct, and thus it took law to deconstruct it. This place is the single most significant point of the spear, but there's a whole lot more to the story. To you younger people, you have to walk a long way in life to be able to look back with perspective.

Today in Alabama, while Black lawyers make up about eight percent of the Alabama Bar, at last count they were elected to almost one-third of the elected judgeships in this state. Alabama is a different place. We can argue about how far we have to go, but we have come a long way, and it's because

of this room and the people who have occupied it for the last 70 years, including Myron Thompson.

It's appropriate on this of all days, Constitution Day of 2025, that we honor the occupant of this place for the last 45 years by permanently attaching his name and legacy to it.

In view of that thought, I have one final observation. History, that long conversation, teaches that social change is accompanied sometimes by conflict and even violence, and that this reflects that conflict is oftentimes intramural in nature; that is, between the brothers, or in this case, I would say siblings. It was so between King Saul and the shepherd boy David 3,000 years ago; between Julius Caesar and the Roman Senate 2,000 years ago; between Ulysses Grant and Robert E. Lee 165 years ago; and even between Judge Frank Johnson and Governor George C. Wallace 60 years ago. They were former classmates, good friends and colleagues, but bitter adversaries for most of the rest of the 30 years of their lives.

On the other hand, this court family of siblings is unusual in that we have never really had a fight. Think about it. In just the last 20 years, Judges Marks, Huffaker, Albritton, Brasher, Doyle, Adams, Pate, Bryan, Coody, Moorner, Capell, McPherson, Boyd, Walker, Creswell, and Hawkins, Sawyer and Williams and others I've probably left out, all these judicial siblings owe our civility and friendship to Judge Myron H. Thompson.

We complain that he calls us a lot on the phone. But I've reflected on that a bit, Myron. And besides Judge Terry Moorer's changing his -- I don't think he's here today, so I can say it. I think he changed his personal phone number when he left out of here, but I'm not sure.

Fully one-third to one-half the time Judge Myron Thompson calls you, it's to say, How are you? And that's all. Just, How are you doing? And that's the atmosphere he has created here in this court and nurtured for 45 years.

All of these judicial siblings, we owe our civility and friendship to Judge Myron H. Thompson, who has been a good brother to all of us. So we honor our brother today.

(Applause.)

JUDGE MARKS: Another feature or features of this room are the windows and doors. The windows and doors provide access and insight into this special venue. We will now hear from nine special guests who have prepared comments by video.

JUDGE W. HAROLD ALBRITTON

MR. TREY GRANGER

MR. GRANGER: It's a real pleasure to be in the chambers of our dear friend and beloved judge, Judge Harold Albritton.

Judge, you and I have been asked to begin a conversation about how windows, the windows in the courtroom of our historic courthouse, are a metaphor for the life and the

career of Judge Myron Thompson.

Let's begin, Judge, by talking about before you became a federal judge, but when you were a practitioner from Andalusia. You have some insight about Judge Thompson as a judge and you as a practitioner.

JUDGE ALBRITTON: I do. I do. I was a trial lawyer, and I tried cases all over the state of Alabama. And I still remember the first case I tried here in federal court was before Judge Thompson in his courtroom. And he was the most calm, accommodating person to the lawyers, to the jurors, to everybody else. There are a lot of federal judges that are not like that, but that's the kind of federal judge I would like to be, because he's just the -- that was just the best experience I've ever had before a federal judge.

MR. GRANGER: And then, Judge, your life journey took you to the bench yourself, and you became that same type judge.

You know, it's amazing to think about then the partnership that you and Judge Thompson forged. When you came to the bench, if my arithmetic is correct, you came about ten years after judge -- 11 years after Judge Thompson.

JUDGE ALBRITTON: Right.

MR. GRANGER: And when you came to the bench, you and he were really responsible for the design and the construction of this building and the renovation of our historic courthouse. Can you tell us a little bit about that partnership.

JUDGE ALBRITTON: Yes. That was quite an experience. Judge Thompson and I traveled all over the country, looking at different courthouses in different states and talking to different architects and trying to decide just what we thought would be the best thing for our courthouse. There were all kinds of designs that people wanted to do. They wanted to just make it real tall or whatever. And when we got our architect, Lee Sims, and we talked about it, he suggested the curvilinear approach we have here. And it's a -- he won an architectural award for the design of this courthouse.

MR. GRANGER: Yes, he did.

JUDGE ALBRITTON: And it's really special. Every time I walk up to it, I think about how special it is. From out front, there's a lot of stories from out there with the fountain and the -- everything else. But it's -- I think it's the best federal courthouse in the whole country.

MR. GRANGER: I agree with you, Judge. I do.

So to say that you know a few things about windows would be an understatement, you and Judge Thompson.

JUDGE ALBRITTON: Yes.

MR. GRANGER: So, Judge, we've heard the quote -- I think it's got Biblical roots, but many people attribute the quote to William Shakespeare, that the eyes are the windows to the soul.

JUDGE ALBRITTON: Yes.

MR. GRANGER: And I suspect, over all these years that you and Judge Thompson had served on this bench in this historic court here in the Middle District of Alabama, that you have been able to look into his eyes on good days and bad days, happy days, and otherwise. Can you describe what you saw when you've looked into the eyes of Judge Myron Thompson.

JUDGE ALBRITTON: Well, he's -- when I look into his eyes, I see compassion. I see understanding. And it's just -- it's just always been a pleasure to look into his eyes and to talk with him.

A lot of people, when you think of judges, you can't say that about, but he's one of a kind. He's special.

MR. GRANGER: Well, I would never want to argue with you, Judge, but I would say that you're two of a kind because you -- that same description fits you.

Thank you, Judge Albritton. It's been a real pleasure.

JUDGE ALBRITTON: Thank you. My pleasure.

MR. GRANGER: Yes, sir.

JUSTICE ANTHONY M. KENNEDY

JUSTICE KENNEDY: ...set of chief justices. The second set is in the other room.

John Jay was the first chief justice and soon resigned on the ground that the office was a sinecure lacking in dignity and weight.

And then Judge Rutledge was not confirmed, but we have

his picture up anyway.

And then there's the great Judge John Marshall, who served for 35 years. That frame was given to us by the American Bar Association, because Abraham Lincoln owned that frame. And of course, John Marshall's portrait is in it. And originally it was sold to people in London. And we said, Well, what was John Marshall doing in London? So we were able to get it back.

And then there's Roger Taney, who was in a corner of history and in a corner of the room.

And so we could go on and on. And in the other room there is --

You know, being surrounded by district judges, you sometime have to control district judges. Judges, they say, that's not the law. And the people, they say, well, it was before you just spoke.

But Charles Evans Hughes is in the other room. He once received a letter saying --

And they had just moved in the building. This was in 1937.

He received a letter saying that the Chief Justice should be indicted for bad grammar because Equal -- it says "Equal Justice Under Law" is the phrase on the top of the pediment of the building. And he said, This is redundant. Justice is always equal.

So Hughes -- typically, Hughes wrote him back in just a

few days, saying, Motion denied. The indictment quashed. And he explained that we must remember that justice is equal. And judges need reminding of this.

And, Judge Thompson, you remind us of this. You took a seat, and it was very clear that there was inequality that you helped resolve.

When *Brown versus Board of Education* came out --

You know, I was a judge just right after John Marshall. I've been a judge a long time.

When *Brown versus Board of Education* came out, I was in high school. My father brought it home for me to read. And I said, Well, it's done now. We've desegregated the schools. There's nothing more to worry about. Well, inequality is something, lack of equal justice is something that you often can see, but something often you cannot. You cannot see. And there -- our trial judges are wonderful examples of this.

And we as judges, and all of you, in all of your professions, were on the front line in an age when the lack of civility, a hostile, fractious discourse, is giving an image of our country, of our nation, of our people, of our society, that is not pleasing to the rest of the world. The rest of the world may wonder whether they should have free speech when they see what has happened in this country; when they see elected candidates on national television screeching out four-letter vulgarities. We must as judges, and in all of our professions,

in all of our lives, bring this country to a new realization that civility, rational, thoughtful, respectful discourse on issues where we may disagree is elevating, is elevating the disagreement in which we can discuss with each other what our views are, whatever that issue be. And that reminds us of what our judges do every day. They must -- the trial judge -- as an appellate judge, if I have an evidence question, I'll take a half a day to read about it. The trial judge has to rule on it in 30 seconds. And he or she is all alone. All alone except that he or she has the law, equality, and the pride of the nation behind him, behind her.

Judge Thompson, you illustrate that. Thank you so much for being the guest of honor here.

(Applause.)

DEAN HEATHER GERKEN

DEAN GERKEN: It is such an honor to join all of you to celebrate Judge Myron Thompson. He deserves this moment more than anyone else I can imagine. He is the finest of human beings and the finest of judges. I feel honored to have led the law school that he once attended.

Now, none of us at the law school have mistaken the education that we provided to Judge Thompson for the reason he is the person he is, because his education began so long before that. He suffered from polio early in his childhood and was paralyzed from the neck down. He was the stepson of an

important leader of the NAACP, which meant that names like Judge Frank Johnson and Martin Luther King were on their tongue every day. He lived across the street from Dr. Gomillion, who, of course, was the lead plaintiff in the famous redistricting case called *Gomillion versus Lightfoot*. Those were the formative experiences that made him the person that he was, and we were just lucky to have been there along the way.

I will always be forever grateful to the random young law student who happened to meet the judge when he was 15 years old and told him that Yale Law School was a place that people who cared about public service should attend. And that is exactly what he did.

The judge attended Yale Law School during a very challenging moment. It was that period in the late sixties, early seventies, when the world was upended. The dean at the time called it the dark ages. And to be sympathetic to that dean, it was a period in which -- when people complain about student protests these days, it was a period in which the students actually burned a faculty member in effigy; in which the students had a strike because they were so outraged that the law school was trying to give them grades. It was a period in which there were literally I think hippies living in the courtyard, smoking pot every day with the students. They did not attend the law school, but they just didn't believe in property and had decided to take over the place. So it was a

challenging time for the school. It was a challenging time for the country.

And Judge Thompson, while he was here, he learned from the great ones: Professor Bittker, Professor Black, Professor Johnstone. You name it, he was there.

He also had a chance, though, later to learn from his extraordinary classmates, including Hillary Clinton, who was here during the same period. And all of that, again, is amazing. We were so glad to have had him there with some of the great ones walking the halls.

But I just want to note how much, during that period, we learned from students like Judge Thompson. People look back and say these were the dark ages. I think of that period as the most important period in our history, because it was because of activism and work by students like Judge Thompson that the law school changed. It became a more diverse place, which was extraordinarily important. It changed its grading system to make it one that fed into cooperation and camaraderie rather than competition. And most importantly, that was the period in which student activism led us to create our clinics, which have become an extraordinary part of our school and that have allowed us to train generation after generation to serve.

Now, and we did not need to provide that training to Judge Thompson. He was going to do this no matter what. But we are very glad that we gave him some of the tools that he has

used in his wonderful career to do good for everyone.

I'll just note that the law school and the University have given our favorite son every honor that we can. He received the Award of Merit, which is the highest award that can be given at the law school. I was honored to be the dean at that moment. And I was even more honored to march alongside Judge Thompson as he received an honorary degree from the University.

Judge, you are a remarkable human being. You do us so much honor in being one of our graduates. I hope that every single one of our students look to your legacy and look to your example, because that is the kind of education that we've always wanted to provide.

Sending all my love your way. Take care. Bye-bye.

(Applause.)

MR. PETER CANFIELD

MR. CANFIELD: Good morning. My name is Peter Canfield. I want to thank Chief Judge Marks and Trey Granger and all the Court for arranging this dedication and for inviting me to join in the program.

Forty-five years ago today, in this courtroom, I officially began my service as Judge Thompson's first law clerk. I did so at the end of a year as a law clerk for Judge Frank Johnson. My assignment today is to briefly open a courtroom window onto both.

You might think that would be a tough task. Together their combined judicial service is nearing the 90-year mark. And in many ways, the two could not be considered more different.

In upbringing, Judge Johnson probably would not be entirely displeased to be called a hillbilly, but that's not a label anyone would put on Judge Thompson; in education, Birmingham Business College was certainly a long way from the Ivy League; and, of course, in race at a time when that officially mattered.

That's a whole lot of history and difference to try to reconcile in one window, but the task is really quite simple because the window is so clear. As judges, Frank Johnson and Myron Thompson could not be more alike.

Law clerks quickly learn that different judges approach cases in different ways. Some judges see themselves as kind of performers. They bring to their decision making a bag of rhetorical tricks that they wield on the arguments before them like magicians and, *voila*, produce what are often predictable results. Others see themselves as referees on a kind of legal sports field, calling cases based on their take of the jurisprudential pedigree of the arguments that the lawyers are pitching them.

Judge Johnson's and Judge Thompson's clerks know that they never judge cases like that. They taught us to approach

cases, not to show off legal acumen or burnish their reputations. Certainly not to promote a particular judicial philosophy or partisan cause or to address some personal grievance. They taught us to see cases as they are: As real-life disputes, rooted in particular places and times and of import to the parties, particularly individuals, all worthy of understanding and respect.

In other words, what both judges taught us was to be good listeners in the fullest sense of the term. Certainly they are the best listeners I have ever encountered, and they employed that talent with remarkable intelligence, humanity, and sensitivity to appreciate the world as the litigants, no matter how different from themselves, experience it.

They also taught us that where there is an injustice proven, it was essential to ensure that that injustice is not just noted and declared -- in a manner, by the way, that even nonlawyers can understand -- but also effectively redressed to the fullest extent consistent with the rule of law.

That is the window of true justice Judge Johnson and Judge Thompson have opened in this courtroom to their law clerks and the country. Both judges have had more than their share of brutal judicial battles. They did not pick those fights any more than they picked their cases. But when they encountered resistance, as they so often have, they have not backed down.

As law clerks, we learned that they could not have done

all this without the support of Ruth and Ann. Like their spouses, each very different, yet both so strong and true. I know that I speak for all of Judge Johnson's and Judge Thompson's clerks in expressing our thanks for all that the four have taught us over the years, for welcoming us into their families, and for the opportunity to try to lighten their load along the way.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

JUDGE JOEL F. DUBINA

JUDGE DUBINA: It is a real honor and privilege for me to say a few words at this ceremony naming the ceremonial courtroom in the Frank M Johnson, Jr., Courthouse for my former colleague and friend, United States District Judge Myron Thompson.

When Trey asked me if I would be willing to speak, it caused me to think back to when I first met Judge Thompson.

Myron, I don't know if you remember this case, but I do. In the mid 1970s, as a practicing attorney, I was contacted by the mother of a young man who was tragically killed while working as a parking attendant at the then Whitley Hotel.

At that time, the garage had a lift that was activated by pulling a cord as it took attendants up and down the lift to either park or retrieve people's automobiles from the upper decks. At the bottom of the garage was a hole in the concrete

that went down approximately six feet into the ground where the belt then rotated around before coming back up.

On the day of the accident, there was a malfunction with the belt that caused the young man to be crushed to death. After being contacted by the young man's mother, I went to the garage and took some pictures of the belt with the hole in the concrete, which shockingly, several days later, someone filled in with concrete and disassembled the belt, in effect altering and destroying the evidence.

Shortly thereafter I filed suit in Montgomery County Circuit Court. And you contacted me, advising that you were representing the deceased's grandmother who was willing to assist with expenses. My recollection is from that point on, we worked the case together until the hotel's insurer paid us the policy limits.

In my first association with you, I found you pleasant and easy to work with and a worthy advocate for the young man's grandmother. It was enjoyable being on the same side of the case with you.

In 1978 Former Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court Howell Heflin was elected to the United States Senate from Alabama. As you know, I served as Senator Heflin's Montgomery County campaign chairman, and my friend Mike House served as his state campaign chairman. We operated our campaigns out of the same headquarters.

Mike became Senator Heflin's first administrative assistant, and at some point in late 1979 or early 1980, he called me and asked me if I knew you. He advised me that you were being considered for a district judgeship in the Middle District of Alabama. I told him about our case and that not only were you smart, but pleasant to deal with and helpful as we worked together on our lawsuit.

The next thing I know, you were appointed by President Carter as one of the youngest federal judges ever appointed in the history of our country. Not only that, but you also filled the vacancy of my mentor and future colleague, the late Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr., for whom we both had great respect.

Since your appointment, you have been a credit to the Bench and Bar of our community, state, and nation for many years. Of course, you could not have achieved your many successes in life on your own. Your lovely wife, Ann, has been beside you every step of the way.

As an aside, you, along with Judges Hobbs and Varner, started me on my own judicial career when you appointed me a United States Magistrate Judge on November 15, 1983. I will always be grateful to the three of you for that appointment and want you to know what a joy it was working with you, both as a magistrate judge and later as a district judge.

Today is a great day in the history of the Middle District of Alabama. I can think of no one more deserving than

you to have this historic courtroom, which you have occupied for 45 years, named in your honor. Beth joins me in thanking you for your honorable service, and we wish for you many more years of distinguished service on the federal bench.

(Applause.)

JUDGE RUSTY JOHNSON

JUDGE JOHNSON: Greetings, Judge, Ann, and all who have gathered in Montgomery for such a momentous occasion. Tamara and I would certainly be there with you if not for another important occasion in our lives: Moving our daughter into her dorm to start freshman year.

But presence with family actually reflects one aspect of clerking for Judge Thompson that I wish to share with you. As the Court names this historic courtroom for Judge Thompson, I am honored to share a window into clerking for a judge whose legacy reaches far beyond his rulings; to describe the extraordinary bond he cultivated with his clerks over 45 remarkable years.

Certain aspects of the clerkship experience with Judge manifest so clearly. The clerks who served for Judge have portrayed a dedication to justice in their courses of life, and it was a distinct privilege to serve for a judge who exemplified the utmost dedication to the notions of justice. His numerous rulings over the years on constitutional issues, his institutional reform adjudications, and his creative approaches

in criminal adjudication guide us all in our varied endeavors.

Among the examples Judge set for me, I constantly heed his practice of treating everyone who appeared before him with dignity, which itself is a measure of justice. Judge treats all litigants before him with the utmost respect and consideration, and I humbly attempt to model that same approach when undertaking my duties and responsibilities.

So Judge Thompson didn't just teach us how to interpret and convey the law. He taught us how to live with integrity. His rulings shape justice in this country, but his example in according dignity shaped us. We left our clerkships not only better lawyers but better citizens, carrying his example into courtrooms, classrooms, and communities across the nation.

Yet clerking for Judge Thompson didn't just represent a professional experience. It occasioned a personal journey. We clerks came from schools far and wide across the nation to embark upon our chosen paths in Montgomery. Judge and his family didn't just welcome us into chambers. They welcomed us into their home.

Early on, within the first week, Judge and Ann hosted us for dinner at their home, and at that time they told us we were always welcome to drop in and hang out, and hang I did. I spent many Saturdays and Sundays at the Thompsons', several times throughout any given day, first to play basketball or other games with Miles, Jason, and Jaylen, and then to pick up

Miles for one of our rib dinners, and then to return afterwards and hang out with the family. As Judge and Ann will attest, those times with the boys back then were so lively and spirited, along with the friends who frequently visited the home, and of course, played with Max and Coco. There was never a dull moment.

Those times crystallize another crucial aspect of the clerkship experience. There's a kinship among us Thompson clerks, because Judge and Ann welcomed and included us into their family. We all became part of an extended family centering on the Thompson home, and I deeply appreciate experiencing that home away from home while I was in Montgomery. It's the part of the clerkship I cherish most fondly.

So to have a courtroom bear Judge Thompson's name is fitting, but we clerks know his true legacy lies in the lives he touched. Thank you, Judge and Ann, for opening your home and your heart to us. We carry your love with us always.

(Applause.)

PROFESSOR JUDITH RESNIK

PROFESSOR RESNIK: Good morning. I'm delighted to participate in honoring Judge Thompson. Of course, I wish I could be there in person, but I'm very grateful for the technology that lets me be participatory from afar. Because I teach at Yale Law School, I've been asked to offer a vantage point from here.

A lot of us, both faculty and students, know Judge Thompson because we read him. As is familiar, he has written on scores of important issues, and his opinions are a mixture of fact and law that is more than admirable. Therefore, it intersects with many classes.

A few years ago I asked Judge Thompson to come to New Haven to speak to the class I teach which I call Federal and State Courts in the Federal System. That name makes it plain why I asked him to come. He served in Alabama, as you all know, in the Attorney General's Office, and as a jurist he's regularly heard cases involving the State, its officials, and therefore he can speak to the challenges federal judges encounter when states and their officials are defendants, just as he can speak to the complexity that state defendants experience.

Moreover, Judge Thompson's opinions are textbook examples of various topics of this class. Some of you may know standing, the Tenth Amendment, commandeering immunity doctrines, rights to travel, and other, so anyone teaching constitutional law can have a field day by reading Judge Thompson.

Now, of course, we couldn't discuss any pending cases, so we chose to focus on a high-profile decision replete with many of those issues from several years earlier, which was about the constitutionality of the installation of a two-and-a-half-ton monument in the rotunda of the Alabama State Judicial Building. Inscribed there was the King James version

of the Ten Commandments. As you know, there are other versions.

At Judge Thompson's behest, I assigned the hundred plus students his opinion finding that the expressly religious purpose of the placement in the judicial building violated the First Amendment's establishment clause. I also assigned the affirmance by the Appellate Court of the Circuit and the decision thereafter by the Alabama Supreme Court.

As Judge Thompson's original opinion recounts, during the several days of trial he listened to testimony from many, including Alabama's then Chief Justice who had put the commandments in place. Ordered that they be put in place. Nobody could pick up the tons, of course.

With the parties' encouragement, Judge Thompson also went personally and visited the monument, and he wrote about the emotive power of the placement that he felt did invite what the justice had wanted, which was to think about the meaning of the commandments, but also their Christian origins.

Judge Thompson provided a fulsome account of the facts, nuanced discussions of the legal issues, and held unconstitutional the placement. He declared that it not stay in place. The Circuit affirmed and later, by the way, the U.S. Supreme Court denied certiorari, yet Alabama's Chief Justice did not order the removal of the commandments.

Judge Thompson told the class that what he decided to do thereafter was serve that decision, his ruling, on all the

justices of the Alabama Supreme Court. And that Court, in a unanimous decision by eight justices, explained that while they didn't agree with Judge Thompson on the merits, they were committed to the rule of law and, therefore, the monument had to be removed. Judge Thompson thus gave the students insights into how to be careful, loyal to the rule of law, respectful of other people's views, and effective in protecting constitutional rights.

In that class Judge Thompson also told the story about his origins and his -- the origins of his relationship to Yale. And I will not do it in any way as well as he did, but at least give you a glimpse of what I learned and all of us learned.

As he explained, his life has been profoundly affected by coming to Yale College and then Yale Law School. But he said that what really has made a difference to him was that when he was a kid in high school in the 1960s in his hometown, students, college students, came down as part of Freedom Summer, and he was one of those kids sitting on the lawn, taking classes. And it was through sitting in those classes that some of those students, those encounters, brought him literally to Yale College.

By telling that story, Judge Thompson helped current law students see their own potential; their ability to contribute to shaping and reshaping lives and opportunities in hard times. When Yale University bestowed its highest degree

and highest honor, the Honorary Doctorate, on Judge Thompson, he came to the graduation of the law school and, again, made the point: Take and make opportunities to contribute.

Judge Thompson has consistently focused on individuals, and that brings me to another important facet of his contributions. In addition to being very famous for a string of high-profile decisions, Judge Thompson's brilliant engagement in fact and law and his commitment to humanity can be found in decisions with much lower profiles. And here I'm going to give but one example which involved a man named Shedrick Mosley, who the judge had sentenced in 2010 as a felon in possession of a firearm related to a fight about what the judge called was a box of cocaine.

After Mr. Mosley left prison, he then in 2015 admitted to abusing illegal drugs. More opportunities for sobriety outside of prison did not last. But instead of putting Mr. Mosley back, Judge Thompson allowed him to attend a long-term residential treatment program. Once again, substance abuse followed.

In 2017, Mr. Mosley was again before Judge Thompson. This time the judge asked for the Federal Bureau of Prisons to provide a presentence mental health evaluation. The result was that Judge Thompson learned of trauma, of illness that began at age nine, and which had contributed to severe addiction intersecting with other mental health issues.

Rather than disrupt the progress that had begun with Mr. Mosley, the judge did not send him back to prison. Rather, he wrote, "The disease of addiction included relapses, and rather to think of them as failure, one has to just understand them as steps in a treatment program."

I teach this decision in another class I teach which is called Imprisoned, and I last spring asked the judge for an update from the 2017 opinion. He told me that Mr. Mosley had gained employment, had a stable residence, and that in 2020 the judge ended his period -- this period of supervised release that had been imposed.

So I've just given you a couple of glimpses of the way that Judge Thompson is regularly present, sometimes physically, sometimes virtually, and sometimes through his written decisions. And so as we're zooming in, as I understand it, coming by way of windows, linking our virtual presence to the amazing courtroom for the judge in which he sits, I want to close by describing one other window that Judge Thompson opened for me.

Last April I was invited to join him at the U.S. Supreme Court where a dinner was held in his honor hosted by Justices Barrett, Jackson, and Sotomayor. The surprise entertainment came from a New Orleans musician named Jon Batiste who played the piano, offering his signature mixture of Beethoven and blues. At the end, Batiste had the room of about

90 of us singing Amen in the court. It was phenomenally moving, and, of course, we all are or became fans.

So just two weeks ago in upstate New York where I live in the summers, I attended the live concert that Jon Batiste gave on the very day his new album, quote, dropped, as I understand that term of art. There I was, sitting in upstate New York, with the most intergenerational, interracial, interpolitical 10,000 people as we all were standing up, singing, as Batiste led the way.

And so I was moved by and saw the parallels between Batiste's literacy in language and love and music and the judge, and I thought that reading a couple of words that are inscribed on the album that just came out are appropriate for Judge Thompson. Batiste wrote that his songs came from and were sparked through a vessel of a southerner. Batiste explained that, quote, "Layers of rhythmical communion were in revelation of our collective intelligence."

That's a pretty way -- pretty good way to describe and a pretty way to describe Judge Thompson. A southerner who also has deep ties to the Northeast, who has helped to reveal our collective intelligence through his fierce commitment to understanding legal obligations governments have to their residents, their obligations of equal and fair treatment, and the need for justice through the rule of law.

So virtual hugs is what I can offer, looking forward to

virtual hugs in person in the not too distant future. And many thanks.

(Applause.)

JUDGE VANZETTA MCPHERSON

JUDGE MCPHERSON: Fifty-eight years ago, at the beginning of my sophomore year at Howard, a shy young girl from Queens became my roommate. After a few weeks, I learned that she was not necessarily shy. Instead, unlike most Howard students, regrettably, including me, she spoke only when she had something to say. I suspect that the cacophony of antiwar protests, Black Power, occupancy of campus buildings, and bra burning motivated her to seek the calmer ambiance of Hofstra University, her alma mater. Frankly, I never expected to see her or, in the vacuum of social media, hear of her again.

By 1975, I had swindled Columbia out of a law degree and returned to Montgomery. Four years later, I was buoyed by the congressional enactment of the Omnibus Judgeship Act and by President Jimmy Carter's pronounced intention to appoint African Americans to the federal bench. As president of the Alabama Black Lawyers Association, I was busy helping to shepherd two lawyers, U.W. Clemon and Myron Thompson, to their deserved seats on the federal bench where they could apply their formidable skills to issue resolution.

For weeks I met and talked with now Judges Clemon and Thompson, exploring their readiness to join the ranks of Article

III judges. During my conversations with Judge Thompson, he made frequent references, which I now regard as cryptic, to a woman named Nickie, his girlfriend, who later became his wife. Only later did I learn that Nickie was Ann Nichelle Oldham, that shy girl from Queens whom I hadn't seen in over 20 years.

Federal judicial spousality is a fine art. In her 45 years of joy and challenges, Ann has become a master. To acknowledge her as Myron's cushion and his rock is an understatement. She has maintained a simple but exquisite presence in his and their children's lives; an oft unseen but influential spirit in the adjustments of his many law clerks to life in Montgomery. And she has cultivated a remarkable bond with other judicial spouses, some of whom are not nearly as adept at "don't ask, don't tell" as Ann is.

Through it all, she has presided over a busy household of four children: Miles, Lilly, Jason, and Jaylen, and two dogs: Max, who was certifiably ADHD, and Charlie, an affectionate sweetheart.

As we all know and lament, Ann and Myron have coped with the unspeakable losses of Lilly and Miles. She emerges today, not beyond understandable grief, but on a plane of hopeful futurism, demonstrating to the rest of us how faith and personal strength can facilitate survival.

Not content to shine at home, Ann established an independent public identity by joining the Montgomery chapter of

the American Association of University Women and the boards of the Capri Theater, the Friends of the Freedom Riders Museum, and Aid to Inmate Mothers. She expressed her faith at Community Congregational Church, helping to establish its food and diaper pantries, and she nurtured Miles and Lilly in Jack and Jill. Ann was also instrumental in developing policies to protect the children at Thelma Smiley Morris Elementary School from the serious traffic risks they encountered daily.

Of course, many will remember that Ann earned the status of master gardener and used those skills to establish Lilly's garden, a memorial to Lilly Thompson at Forest Avenue Magnet School.

Bottom line, the portrait being unveiled today is of a man who has been blessed with loving undergirding from a remarkable spouse. In so very many ways, we pay tribute to Myron's judicial success and to Ann's exemplary support.

(Applause.)

JUDGE MARKS: And now in this, the Myron H. Thompson courtroom, the man of the hour, our honoree, Judge Myron Thompson.

(Applause.)

JUDGE THOMPSON: May it please the Court, since we're in court.

I have my remarks here, but as is always true when I prepare remarks, and I sit through an event and someone says

something that brings to mind a memory that is so moving, I have to say it first because if I get into my remarks, I'll forget it. And so this is not in sync with my remarks.

My brother talked about my mother, who raised us. And for a good bit of her early years was a mother who raised a child with polio by herself. But the story I like to tell is a story actually about my brother.

My brother thought my mother was the most beautiful woman in the world. Unlike a lot of other kids, he was never -- Look. He's saying yes. He agrees.

And he would brag about it all the time. And this is actually a true story.

And he told his friends at school that his mother was the most beautiful woman in the world. The kids at school, of course, did not believe him. So my mother, who picked us up at school, came to school one day, and he had all of his male boys lined up outside in front of the school so they could see his beautiful mother.

True? Right. True.

And I think we all came to the conclusion, at least they did -- and, of course, I knew it already -- that she was the most beautiful woman in the world.

I just want to make a few remarks before I actually thank everyone. The first one is to the Tuskegee choir.

(Applause.)

JUDGE THOMPSON: You are here at my behest. I have a relationship with you. My mother sang in the Tuskegee choir, and the two spirituals that you sang were spirituals that my mother sang.

And I want to give a little bit of background about the Tuskegee choir. During the early 1930s, the director of the Tuskegee choir was William Dawson.

You're saying amen, so you do know. And amen is the exact answer you should give.

Dr. Dawson lived just a few houses down from me. Many of you don't know that Dr. Dawson, during the first half of the last century, was probably the most famous Black composer in this country, the United States, and he arranged pretty much all of the Negro spirituals. In fact, if you will get a collection of Negro spirituals, you'll look down at the bottom, and it will say, arranger, Dr. William Dawson.

He wrote a symphony called the Negro Folk Symphony, which was performed in 1934 at Carnegie Hall. That was actually its premiere performance. And it was directed by Leopold Stokowski, one of probably the most famous composer -- symphony director at that time.

And in Tuskegee, he was almost like just a walking god. The idea that he lived down the street from me was just awesome. I could say hello to him. I could talk to him. And the songs which you sang this morning, *Ain'-a That Good News* and *Ezekiel*

*Saw De Wheel* -- I actually like *Ezekiel Saw De Wheel*. I have to admit, I do a little dance when I hear that. But they were just incredible. The man was a total and complete genius.

The Negro Folk Symphony Ann and I went to hear in Atlanta. I think it was about a year or two ago. And it is considered part of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's collection, staple collection. They periodically perform it in Atlanta. So if you ever want to hear just an incredible symphony, go to the Atlanta Symphony. They do a very, very good rendition of the Negro Folk Symphony.

But anyway, I welcome you. And you are the legacy of Dr. Dawson and the legacy of what I consider, actually, today -- I know we have pop culture, but when we talk about spiritual culture, about our own culture, Dr. Dawson clearly is the most famous composer and, obviously, the one who arranged the two songs you sang today. Thank you.

(Applause.)

JUDGE THOMPSON: The next thing I'd like to talk about is a picture. You may wonder, who in the heck are these kids? I want to tell you who they are before I tell you why I'm showing them. These are kids I grew up with.

The young lady with the hat on the back row to the far left, sort of looking directly at us, is a young lady named Patricia Jones. Now, who is Patricia Jones? Patty Jones and I went to school together in elementary school. And one of my

favorite stories about Patty is, you know, what do they do? A gaggle of girls. There's nothing more ferocious than a gaggle of girls out for prey. Maybe a gaggle of boys.

Anyway, Patty was walking down the hall. We must have been 10 or 11 years old. And she had her gang, her flight of girls, and I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. And Patty saw -- now, the girls were taller than the boys. And she's looking down. And she said, Myron, you are the most conceited boy I've ever met. I looked at her and I said, What? And then she said, Yes, you are. And then she looked for another prey after that with her girlfriends.

Well, the problem was I had no idea what conceited meant. So I had to go look it up in the dictionary and then realized that it definitely -- I didn't think I was conceited in anything. And I'm sure that Patty had just learned that word ten minutes before, and I was in the wrong place, the wrong time, and she had to use it. But I'll tell you one thing, she increased my word vocabulary single handedly.

Another person in this picture is Ellen Henderson, who's right -- first row to the far right. And she lived across the street from me. Her dad was Dr. Jimmy Henderson, who taught at Tuskegee. And until recently, people did not know that when Dr. Salk discovered the polio vaccine, Dr. Henderson led the development and distribution at Tuskegee. There were only two or three places in the United States that were doing -- working

with the Salk vaccine. And Dr. Salk actually was on the board of Tuskegee, and Dr. Henderson was head of the department and basically led the development and distribution at Tuskegee. Unfortunately, it's an untold story about the development of the polio vaccine, and particularly about Tuskegee's involvement in it and probably -- not probably -- and Dr. Henderson's leadership in it. But that's his daughter standing right there. Just an amazing scientist who was at Tuskegee.

I'm just going to mention the names of the others. You have, bottom row, Carmen Judkins, Lois Billes, Harvey Lynn Jackson, Janis Carter, and, of course, Ellen Henderson, whom I've talked about. The next row, you have Anthony Lee, Patricia Jones, Shirley Chambliss, Willie B. Wyatt, Wilma Jones, Marsha Sullins, and Robert Judkins.

By the way, I also played marbles, I think, with Willie B. Wyatt. I learned from him the importance of the redistribution of wealth. Let me tell you how. My brother had a bucket of marbles which he had won. He was always winning. And I was always going in there and getting them and losing them. And I just thought to myself, no one person should have that many marbles. I redistributed my brother's marbles to me. But anyway, I played marbles with Willie B. Wyatt.

Now, who are they, and why are they in this courtroom? These are the plaintiffs in *Lee versus Macon County Board of Education*. Where was that case decided? Here.

Patty, who expanded my vocabulary, testified at this bench, and it became literally the template for all desegregation cases in the United States. And it was all decided here before Judge Johnson and two other judges. It later became the desegregation for the entire Alabama, but it really was a template for pretty much all the cases from there on. And these are the plaintiffs.

Now, the real point I want to make is these were kids. I played marbles with them. Patty harassed me as a girl. Willie B. took marbles from me. Ellen's dad, who was that famous Dr. Henderson, when I would go to their house and I would do something wrong, he would definitely dress me down, but I preferred the dressing down from my mother later, because he was a lot harsher on me before I went home. He would definitely call my mother and tell her what I was up to.

But they were kids, and they had to grow up fast. Because what happened was -- and I think, if you'll notice, they're in their Sunday dress, and my guess is they were coming to this courthouse to testify.

They grew up super fast. I won't mention names, but some of them did not fare very well. The scars remained. The wounds never healed. The mental problems that many of them suffered, they just literally carried the rest of their lives. These kids did not get to enjoy childhood and grow up into adults and have children the way the other kids, who did not do

what they did, did.

You know, I sometimes hear people say we stand on the shoulders of giants. We also stand on the shoulders of friends. We also stand on the shoulders of the wounded and the unhealed.

When I came back here in 1972, Alabama was a different place. It was no longer the Jim Crow that I had grown up with. I was able to work. Bill Baxley hired the first Black person in the state of Alabama who was not a janitor or a teacher. In other words, the first Black person ever to work for the state of Alabama.

Bill, stand up.

(Applause.)

JUDGE THOMPSON: So when I came back here, this state was so different, but it was different because of these 12 kids. I got to enjoy a rather normal childhood. I did not have to go to a school like they did on a bus with the military guarding me. I did not have to go to a school where the governor of the state prohibited your entrance. I did not have to go to a school where people would not sit next to you simply because of the color of your skin.

Eight girls and four boys. What danger could they have posed to the kids in Macon County schools?

Eventually they were able to go to the school, but all the white kids withdrew, so they had to be alone. And that type of humiliation and struggle and personal insult I think did a

lot of damage to them. I do know that. As I said, I'm not going to talk about which ones. Some of them survived. Some of them wrote about their experiences. But some of them weren't so lucky in the loss of that childhood.

So when I look at them here, these wonderful 12 friends, looking out over this courtroom where they got justice and they laid the path for me to become a federal judge, these are the shoulders that I stood on. And I honor them today.

I'll end by offering thanks, obviously, first to you judges in attendance; my fellow judges on the bench. I now know why those cell phone numbers in my phone don't work all the time. Judge Marks and Judge Huffaker, Judge Albritton, Judge Watkins, you know, it's just such a delight to have you as judges, but even more importantly as friends. Thank you so much for this day and for doing this. It's just remarkable.

Trey Granger put it all together. You know, I don't think Trey sleeps.

Do you sleep, Trey? It's debatable.

You know, he -- now, you think I call you all a lot. You should see how much Trey calls me. And we talk.

I want to thank my law clerks, current and former. You know, you made me who I am. I tell the story that if a law clerk is not smarter than me, I don't really need them. So my clerks are all smarter than me, or than I, I guess, grammatically speaking.

I want to also thank just the many friends who have been through some rough times for me and Ann and who have been there for our support.

To my brother, those remarks were really wonderful. And I know our mother is very, very proud of both of us.

To my sons, Jaylen and Jason, you're there with us all the time, and the world is just so much better with you in it. You are just wonderful. You're our pride. Thank you so much.

And, of course, there's Ann. As Judge McPherson talked about, people talked about yesterday, and I think Maggie Stringer aptly put it: She's the wind beneath my wings.

Isn't that right, Maggie?

And I cannot sit down without Ann standing up. Stand up.

(Applause.)

JUDGE THOMPSON: Thank you all very much. Thank you.

JUDGE MARKS: Thank you so much, Judge Thompson.

And once again, the Tuskegee University concert choir.

(Vocal performance of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*.)

(Applause.)

JUDGE MARKS: I think one of Judge Thompson's best decisions has been to invite the Tuskegee choir today. We're going to add that to the list. Thank you all very much.

I would like to invite you all to join us for a luncheon honoring Judge Thompson and his family immediately

following the ceremony on the second floor atrium of the court annex building.

This concludes our ceremony. Thank you all for being here. We are adjourned.

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## REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Patricia G. Starkie, Registered Diplomate Reporter and Official Court Reporter for the United States District Court for the Middle District of Alabama, do hereby certify that the foregoing 53 pages contain a true and correct transcript of the proceedings held in the City of Montgomery, Alabama, on September 17, 2025.

In testimony whereof, I hereunto set my hand this 4th day of February, 2026.

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PATRICIA G. STARKIE, RDR, CRR  
Official Court Reporter