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Ex-judge ditches trademark bow tie for Alabama trial

ASSOCIATED PRESS • OCTOBER 12, 2009

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MOBILE - A former judge known for wearing colorful bow ties when he presided over trials has switched to dull neckties for his own trial on charges of sexually abusing male inmates.

The switch in attire, which surprised prosecutors, was a strategic move by the defense to create a new image for former Circuit Judge Herman Thomas.

"We want him tried as Herman Thomas, not Judge Thomas," defense attorney Jeff Deen said.

Thomas, 48, served as a judge for 17 years and was a memorable figure on the Mobile bench with his clean-shaven head, thick mustache and colorful bow tie — usually red or yellow — perched over the neck of his black judicial robe.

At his trial, which began last week and resumes Tuesday with expected testimony from the first inmate, the change in attire was not overlooked by prosecutors.

"The bow tie was his absolute symbol," said Chief Assistant District Attorney Nicki Patterson.

Bennett Gershman, a former prosecutor who teaches at Pace Law School in New York, said jurors tend to focus on intangibles such as a person's attire, and ditching the bow tie makes sense for Thomas.

"Sometimes these intangibles loom larger than the proof and affect credibility," he said Monday.

Gershman said some people link bow ties to clownish behavior, and others consider them frivolous and flamboyant. He said the switch by Thomas to a conservative necktie shows jurors that he understands the significance of the charges against him.

"You want to project a serious demeanor. A bow tie is not seen as serious. It's a little bit showing off," he said.

Thomas resigned in 2007, before a judicial ethics trial, when he was accused of making young male inmates drop their underwear and submit to severe paddlings in his private courthouse office. Accusations of sexual abuse came later, leading to his trial on charges of kidnapping, sodomy and extortion.

Chief defense attorney Robert "Cowboy Bob" Clark said he told Thomas to switch to neckties.

"I'm the lead dog and I don't like bow ties," Clark said.

"It's a real smart move on many levels," said Rachel Weingarten, author of "Career and Corporate Cool," a 2007 book about the messages sent by clothing choices. At the request of The Associated Press, she reviewed Internet photos of Thomas from his judicial career and said the bow tie created "a personal brand" that helped the elected official stand out.

Since his resignation, he has been bombarded with negative accounts accusing him of getting male inmates ages 18 to 24 to swap sex for leniency.

Weingarten, a style and personal brand consultant in New York City, said the change to a necktie is designed to combat that.

"It's a visual clue for people to change their impression of him," she said.



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eyeonyou1 wrote:

"We want him tried as Herman Thomas, not Judge Thomas," defense attorney Jeff Deen said. THAT is the problem Mr. Defense Lawyer. This scumbag SHOULD be tried as being a corrupt Judge, otherwise, you aren't representing this man for who he really is. That's my ultimate problem with lying defense lawyers. They never want to tell the truth and try the case for what it really is without smoke and mirrors to badazzle the court. He wore it everyday when being a scumbag, so let him wear it in court for a fair trial.
10/13/2009 11:36:58 AM

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Squirk wrote:

Years ago I learned never to trust anyone that wore a bow tie. Guess he thinks he will look more sanctimonious with a regular tie.

If he is found guilty, what a perverted piece of scum this man has turned out to be.
10/13/2009 9:56:02 AM

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tcmc13 wrote:

Oh they should make him wear the bow tie, so he does stand out and reminds us what a pervert he is.
10/12/2009 3:29:40 PM

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