



The Hillsboro Story – Excerpts

Style

Gertrude Clemons arrived in court in a white shirtwaist dress with a v-neck cut and a wide collar, white earrings, black heels, and white purse. Her daughter, Joyce, the Plaintiff, wore a yellow dress with black patent leather shoes. They looked like models from *Ebony Magazine*.

Gertrude watched her attorney go to battle. The presiding Judge, Florence Allen, appointed to the federal bench by Franklin Roosevelt, wore silver earrings that accented her black robes with a touch of feminine elegance. She hit the gavel with a light, crisp confidence.

James Hapner, the light skinned, city solicitor with dark framed glasses, represented the Hillsboro Board of Education and walked into court in stylish black Florsheims, and a gray pin striped suit. He remembers his opponent arriving on the scene: "When it¹ got to the Court of Appeals, they had an attorney from Justice Thurgood Marshall's office—he wasn't on the Supreme Court at that time—they sent out a lady—I don't recall her name—yes, that's who it was-- Constance Baker Motley. She was tall and slender and well spoken, a good attorney."

Constance Baker Motley's signature courtroom style was to indulge witnesses, appearing to believe their testimony. Then she "suddenly threw a curve ball with so much skill and power, it would knock them off their chair."² The legal powerhouse went on to win nine of the ten cases she argued before the Supreme Court. But her style seasoned over time. Then, in 1955, the young attorney with cropped hair swept to one side, skin the color of West Indies Mahogany, wearing a tailored black dress, white pearls, and black high heels, was just hitting her stride.

¹*Clemons v. Board of Education of Hillsboro*, No. 12494

² *In My Place*, Charlayne Hunter-Gault