

Courts of the tampa bay area



This study involved visiting courtrooms and observing the court proceeding. I was to follow several cases and evaluate everyone's behavior in the courtroom. During this period I visited two courtrooms, Criminal Justice Center at 14250 49th Street North Clearwater, FL 33762 and the 501 building in St. Petersburg at 501 1st Avenue North St. Petersburg, FL 33701. I visited the courtrooms on several occasions. Case observations On June 16 2010, I visited the criminal justice center at 14250 49th street North Clearwater, FL 33762, at 2 pm. At the entrance of the courtroom there was screening.

Mobile phones were not allowed in the courtroom so they were to be left at the reception desk. It was not difficult getting into the courtroom as only photo identification was required. The room was half full and so finding a sitting position was easy. It was a criminal case, where Mr. George Warren, the accused, was a suspect in a robbery at the bay harbor pool room. The Judge was Justice Earl Logan. The mood of the court was rather relaxed. The judge was calm and followed keenly. On several occasions the judge was very active, especially where the attorneys had heated arguments.

The judge had to intervene and restore order in the room. As I learnt later that the proceeding was not open to the journalist and this is the reason I attracted some attention from a juror, as I took some notes. The attorneys showed a great deal of respect to their client although the plaintiff's attorney was very intimidating. The judge did not take this lightly and cautioned the attorney against such action. The defendant's attorney defended his client against such intimidation aggressively. He refused to allow his client to be

asked questions revolving around his personal life except where they were relevant .

They attorneys sought the judge's intervention where they felt that their client was being harassed. The judge asked the clients questions where he felt was necessary, or ordered them to answer questions if the chose to remain silent. The defendant and his attorney were active while the plaintiff appeared relaxed. This is because the evidence that was brought before the court was very strong and could earn him more than five years imprisonment. The defendant was a clerk and frequented the pool room. Both of them seemed to follow and understand the proceedings.

The defendant was however very careful when answering the questions because he would take some time before replying. The disposition of the case was that the defendant was not guilty. This is because he was found near the site with some pints of wine and some change in his pocket. The evidence produced was not substantial and enough for the defendant to face any sentence. The witnesses who testified in the case did give any information that linked the defendant to the crime. The plaintiff failed to convince the court that the accused was indeed the thief.

There was no finger print match and the defendant had an evident alibi. During the time of theft the defendant was at another local joint drinking. The time spent on the case was not long but was enough because there was no enough evidence to imprison the defendant. The disposition of the case was fair. There was clear evidence that the defendant was not involved in the crime, and if there was the plaintiff failed to produce it. According to the

law the defendant was supposed to be set free until or unless there was more clear evidence . Analysis The courts precinct was calm.

There was a serious security check for mobile phones, cameras and any form of weapons. This case was not open to the media and this is the reason why they were so strict on the issue of any cameras or recording material. This was also a security to ensure the safety of everyone in the courtroom. Being an afternoon during a working day most people were at their places of work and so most of those in the room were close to the clients. The mood was relaxed. The case had little tension and this is the reason why the judge appeared calm although he was very attentive.

In some instances the clients chose not to answer questions and the judge had to intervene and force them to answer the questions. This is because the evidence tabled was not enough and any information that the judge felt was relevant had to be given . The attorneys were however very aggressive, each trying to defend the evidence produced by their clients. The plaintiff showed no signs of providing more evidence against the defendant and relied solely on the fact that the defendant was found close to the crime scene when the police were called.

The defendant claimed that he had just left another drinking joint and was on his way home. This case was very sensitive and the judge had to take note of all the important details and ask questions where clarification was needed, failure to which a wrong judgment would have been made . He was able to prove his claims to the court. The fingerprints from the crime scene did not match his, clear evidence that he was just a case of mistaken identity. This

made the proceedings very quick and the hearing and the proceedings did not take a long duration.

The evidence produced by the plaintiff did not link directly to the defendant. The could only prove that he was a suspect because he had some pints of wine and also being near the pool room but no proof of his presence in it. The comparison The courtrooms I visited had some differences and similarities. For example in some courtrooms you were allowed to access the room with a mobile phone but it should remain switched off, while in others one was supposed to leave any electronic gadget or anything that could cause harm at the reception.

This is especially in those cases that had restrictions to the media. Search for weapons was inevitable for security reasons. The judges had different reactions and moods depending on the case. If the case had a lot of pressure there were heated arguments and the judge and the judges were very active. They would ask questions in some instances. In other cases the rooms had a bored mood and the judge could even fall asleep. The judge would remain uninvolved in the case. I observed this in a civil case the 501 building in St.

Petersburg at 501 1st Avenue North St. Petersburg, FL 33701 on June 11 2010. The suit was filed woman and her former husband and the dispute involved the sharing of thefamilyproperty. They had recently divorced and the husband decided the wife could only get a third share of the property. Unlike the first case where the judge was actively involved by asking question and seeking clarification, in this case the judge listened quietly without intervention. The judge only took down a few notes and the rest of

the time he just watched and listened . The facts and evidence produced were so obvious.

Those who followed the proceedings were also very bored. The disposition of this case was that the property in question was to be shared equally between the couple. The disposition of this case was so obvious and thus the quiet mood in the room. The attorneys were also very calm and did not show much aggressiveness like in the first criminal case. The only client who appeared active was the plaintiff, who on several instances had to be warned by the judge about her explosive behavior. In other instances accessing a courtroom could be very difficult.

Only those involved in the case are allowed to access them. On the 17th May 2010, I attended the 501 building in St. Petersburg at 501 1st Avenue North St. Petersburg, FL 33701, where the case involved a limited company and a former employee. Only those who were involved in this case were allowed in. I however managed to convince the security team that I was a law student conducting a research and was allowed in. The restrictions were in favor of the company's public image, which was a leading company globally and could not risk the integrity. The judge looked serious and very involved.

The room had very few people and tension was high. The attorneys were very aggressive and the judge was actively involved. The Jury followed the proceedings very attentively. The defendant was accused of violating the rights of the plaintiff a former employee in it, where the plaintiff was forced to work for more hours and was fired without any definite reason. Like in the first case, the judge listened attentively and asked questions during the

proceedings. The questions were to clarify the issues that could be relevant in determining the case .

The reasons stated by the defendants for their action was that the plaintiff was unproductive at work and showed some negative attitude. The defendant managed to convince the court on the negative attitude of the plaintiff but failed to prove his unproductiveness. The defendant claimed that on particular occasion the plaintiff did not report to work and had no reason a claim refuted by the defendant. Some records that showed the employees attendance were missing; they could have been some crucial evidence. The disposition of this case was that the defendant was guilty.

They were to pay the plaintiff an amount that was to be discussed by their attorneys. Unlike the first two cases this case took one month to be decided. The hearing was made on the 25th June 2010. I attended all the three proceedings. The second proceeding was on the 4th June 2010. The fourth case was at the criminal Justice center at 14250 49th street North Clearwater, FL 33762. In this case the plaintiff was a young man who was assaulted by a security guard, the defendant, at a public facility. The hearing was held on July 12 2010. This case proceeding was open to everyone and the courtroom was very crowded.

There was the usual security check but not many restrictions. Security checks are a must at all the court entrances but the restrictions depend on the case and those who are involved. The judge was active. Her name was Justice Rene Raymond. The attorneys were very active with instances of heated arguments like in the first and third case. The security guard claimed that the young man was disturbing the public. The evidence brought before

the court and from the witnesses showed that the plaintiff had actually caused commotion in the public facility.

The issue in this case was the assault. The judge argued that the plaintiff had actually caused disturbance to the people and thus the reason for the assault. Therefore the plaintiff lost the suit. This disposition was fair. There were similarities in these cases in that in most of the criminal cases the judges were very active since the involved so many details that had to be unveiled and clarified so as to make a sound judgment. The crowding of the courtrooms however varied. The dispositions were based on the evidence produced and not just mere claims.

This is because in a law court everything said should be proved and a judge should not base the decision on blank claims. Conclusion The research shows that every case proceeding has its own procedures although others are similar. The issue of security is emphasized in all courts. In some cases members of the public are restricted, while others are open to everyone. The mood and involvement of the judge and the courtroom in general depends on the case. Some cases have so much pressure that the judge is very active and attentive. The decisions are based on the evidence produced before the court.

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