



# JUSTICE NEWS

THE BROOKLYN DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE NEWSLETTER

SPECIAL EDITION: IN MEMORIAM

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## IN MEMORIAM



KENNETH P. THOMPSON

1966-2016

## A Message From Acting Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez



On October 9, 2016, the District Attorney's Office, Brooklyn and the entire criminal justice system lost a giant with the untimely passing of our District Attorney, Ken Thompson. I have been tremendously proud to have served as his Chief Assistant for the past several years, but I am more honored to call Ken Thompson my friend and mentor. I now serve as the Acting DA of Brooklyn and I intend to carry through with his legacy for the betterment of all the people of our borough.

This special issue of *Justice News*, the DA's Office newsletter, honors the memory of DA Thompson and celebrates his life and achievements. It includes his obituary, heartfelt eulogies and expressions of sympathy from a host of leaders, from President Barack Obama to Mayor Bill de Blasio.

When Ken Thompson took charge in 2014, he made it his point to recreate the Brooklyn DA's Office. He said to me when I first met him, "Eric, my only goal is for the system to treat everyone fairly and equally, but I want this Office to be the model and gold standard for what a progressive prosecutorial agency could look like."

He wanted to deliver equal justice for all. The promise of fairness was being ignored and the goal of safety was being unfulfilled. He committed his heart and soul to changing that. I have never seen a man more dedicated, more energized.

He was determined to protect the people of Brooklyn, but he was going to do so while adhering to the principles of fairness and justice that his mother Clara – one of the first female NYPD officers – had instilled in him. In a very short period of time, DA Thompson transformed this Office. Together, we created new bureaus and units to better combat crime, and he set a high bar of professionalism and hard work for all of his staff. We instituted groundbreaking policies and launched and expanded programs to inject greater fairness into the system, because we believe in mercy and we believe in second chances.

These past few years have not been without controversy, but DA Thompson never bowed to political expediency. We know he was a man of courage. He truly believed that all of us that worked within the criminal justice system – most especially his prosecutors – needed to recognize the humanity of every person. If we failed to do so, the system loses its legitimacy. DA Thompson personally met with victims of crimes, often going to their homes to visit them. He did so without fanfare and without publicity, just as a human being who wanted to bring comfort and to bring reassurance that his Office recognized a wrong and that we were committed to bringing the offender to justice.

Every time our Conviction Review Unit went to court to vacate a wrongful conviction, as it did for 21 people to date, DA Thompson personally met with that person and their family. He apologized to that person on behalf of the DA's Office and on behalf of the criminal justice system and, most importantly, he listened. That was Ken Thompson. He devoted himself to bringing humanity into the criminal justice system.

All of us at the Brooklyn DA's Office were honored to have a leader like him. We accomplished so much in such a short period of time, and his good work will have a lasting impact well beyond the time he was with us.

A little known fact is how big a fan Ken Thompson was of the musical *Hamilton*. He would sometimes lighten up a moment by busting out a lyric from that Broadway hit. So allow me to close with a line from *Hamilton*: "Legacy. What is a legacy? It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see."

Speaking for myself, the executive team of the Office and the entire staff, we pledge to nurture the garden DA Thompson has planted – the seeds of integrity, fairness and equal justice for all. These will continue to grow in Brooklyn and they will flourish. God bless his memory.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Gonzalez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## Obituary: Ken Thompson, 1966-2016

Kenneth Paul Thompson was born on March 14, 1966 to William and Clara Delores Thompson at Harlem Hospital in New York City.

A graduate of New York City public schools, Ken was a dedicated and hard worker even as a child, serving his neighbors in Co-op City as a paper boy along with his brother, Dean, for several years. A consummate independent thinker and always bent on community service, Ken campaigned on behalf of former New York Governor Mario Cuomo as a teenager. He also worked for Congressman Elliot Engel of the Bronx during those formative years.

His mother, who was one of the first female police officers in the New York City Police Department to patrol the streets in 1973, instilled in her son a passion for fair treatment under the law. Following his mother's excellent example, and with a mindset to pursue a legal career, Ken attended John Jay College in New York City, from which, in 1989, he graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice. After his graduation, Ken attended New York University Law School, where he received his J.D. in 1992 and was awarded the prestigious Arthur T. Vanderbilt Medal for his outstanding contributions to the law school community.

Ken's strategic legal mind offered him the unique opportunity to serve as Special Assistant to the U.S. Treasury Department Undersecretary for Enforcement in Washington, D.C., and in the General Counsel's Office at the Treasury. During his tenure there, he assisted in the investigation and contributed to the report ordered by President Bill Clinton regarding the 1993 raid on David Koresh and the Branch Davidian Compound in Waco, Texas.

Ken later went on to serve as a federal prosecutor in the Eastern District of New York under the leadership of U.S. Attorney Zachary W. Carter. There, he delivered an impassioned and persuasive opening statement that led to the successful prosecution of former New York City Police Officer Justin Volpe for the brutal 1997 beating and torture of Haitian immigrant Abner Louima.

With his career development well underway, he married his college sweetheart Lu-Shawn Thompson in 1999. Their union was blessed with a daughter, Kennedy Olivia, in 2004, and with a son, Kenneth P. Thompson Jr., in 2006.

During his early career, Ken acquired a position at the offices of the prestigious New York law firm Morgan Lewis. He later went on to co-found the law firm Thompson Wigdor with partner Douglas Wigdor, where he represented victims of pregnancy discrimination, as well as those who had been subjected to unlawful prejudice due to their race, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation.

At Thompson Wigdor, Ken's commitment to pursuing justice propelled him to work on behalf of thousands of individuals, including Ms. Nafissatou Diallo, who had been sexually assaulted by Dominique Strauss Kahn; Mr. Gregory McCullough and Ms. Judith Bailey, the victims of the Con Edison steam pipe explosion; and Ms. Sharon Simmons-Thomas, whose lawsuit exposed and put an end to the "shop and frisk" practices at a major department store.

Ken also worked with members of Congress and the clergy to convince the U.S. Department of Justice to reinvestigate the 1955 murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi.

Ken was elected as Brooklyn's first African-American District Attorney in 2013, having campaigned on the promise of restoring confidence in the criminal justice system. Among many innovations and initiatives, District Attorney Thompson established a model Conviction Review Unit, which, in only three years, moved to vacate or support the dismissal of the convictions of 21 people who were wrongfully convicted of murder and other offenses. He also implemented a groundbreaking policy not to prosecute low-level marijuana possession arrests in order to spare young people from the burden of a criminal record.

District Attorney Thompson died on October 9, 2016, at Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital after a hard fought battle with cancer, with his family at his side.



*Photo courtesy of Bryan Pace/New York Daily News*

## Tribute from U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch

*Excerpts from remarks at Thompson's homegoing service:*

"We in law enforcement have lost one of our brightest lights, one of our stars who had such promise for the future. We all know Ken's tour de force as a district attorney, from his historic victory to his ground breaking work, Ken literally changed the face of justice in Brooklyn. He changed what justice looked like. He changed what justice meant for so many people. And for the residents of the County of Kings, justice was more inclusive, it was more responsive and justice was real. He will always be remembered—and rightly so—for that.



I will always remember Ken as he was when I first met him. I met this young, bright-eyed lawyer, barely out of law school who hadn't even turned 30. But I tell you what I really remember, that smile that could light up a room, it could warm your heart.

He had a work ethic—no one could outwork Ken. Now justice

was real for Ken, it was not an abstract principle to be found in a book. Even though he had a brilliant legal mind, he knew that it was more than about what was written down in the law books that we study. It was about the dignity and the well-being of real people, of human beings. It was about making the promise of this country real for everyone in this country. That's what Ken believed and that's how he practiced every day of his career wherever he was. And as he grew in his career and his profession he never lost that spirit, he never lost that enthusiasm that I remember from when I first met him.

Ken is gone far too soon and this loss of this incredibly gifted man is even more difficult because of the promise of what he would have accomplished if he only had the gift of time. We have to carry on because the years that should have been Ken's, he has bequeathed them to us to use on his behalf. He's left us his cause, he's left us his mission, and he left us his time. Let's use that time. Let's honor that memory and let's continue the work that Ken began, the work of his heart: building a more just society, making the promise of justice real for everyone in this great city of ours, in this great country of ours. It was the work of his life it was the love of his life and it has been the honor of my life to have called him my friend."

## Tribute from NY Governor Andrew M. Cuomo

*Excerpts from remarks at Thompson's homegoing service:*

"Ken was born and bred to do what he did. He was the child of a police officer, a resident of public housing and an African-American man who grew up in New York City. His passion for justice did not come from reading a book but from living on the block. Ken surprised no one when he chose public service over private practice.

He was the first African-American District Attorney of Kings County; he made history. There are 62 district attorneys in the State of New York, there have been 32 district attorneys in Brooklyn, 89 borough presidents, 56 governors and 109 mayors. How many are worth remembering? Ken knew that a great title on your door is not important and that what is important is the great things that you do for people. He knew that the problems we face are complex, controversial and deep but he believed as Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "the measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy."



From day one Ken made it clear that he was going to be a different type of prosecutor. Yes, he was part of the justice system, but he would not be complicit with the justice system and in fact was willing to criticize the justice system when he believed that it was wrong. Ken believed that the reality of our criminal justice system did not meet the promise of our criminal justice system. Our system promises justice for all, justice regardless of race, regardless of place of origin, regardless of income, but too often it seems that the powerful and connected and the rich have one system of justice while the poor and the minorities have another system of justice. Ken believed there are systemic injustices within our justice system and he was right. He did not just advocate this belief. He was there to make a difference.

Ken's driving point was that if people don't have faith in the justice system, then all else fails and Ken's work was to restore that faith. That was the legacy of Ken Thompson. I find consolation in the fact that Ken's work was so powerful and so irrefutable that in death his lesson and legacy will only live and grow. Prosecutors around this state and prosecutors around this nation must now answer the question: If you really believe in doing justice and not just getting headlines and not just getting convictions, then why don't you recognize the injustice of the criminal justice system and work for true justice like Ken Thompson did?"

## Statements of Condolence

**President Barack Obama:** Michelle and I were saddened to learn of Ken's passing and we extend our heartfelt condolences as you mourn his loss. Ken dedicated himself to the long and difficult pursuit of justice and, through his commitment to ensuring the words proclaimed in our founding documents were realized in the lives of people across New York, he made a powerful difference - one that will endure in you and in all those who were moved by the spirit that drove him and the example that he set. During this difficult time I will continue holding you in my thoughts.

**U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer:** I express my deepest condolences for the passing of District Attorney Ken Thompson. Ken was a principled, dedicated man that will be greatly missed. I had the privilege of knowing and working with Ken Thompson long before he was an elected official. He struck me then as principled, exceedingly bright, legally astute and utterly committed to justice - no matter what the odds stacked against him. And those were exactly the attributes he put on display to the public when he ran for, and eventually won, the office of the District Attorney from my home of Brooklyn. To that office he brought his legal talent, even-handedness and thirst for justice for all and - in a short time - left indelible marks and set a path forward that others will be compelled to follow. I found that Ken lived his life following the phrase used by Martin Luther King, "The arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice." We mourn the loss of Ken, but we continue his fight.

**U.S. Congressman Hakeem Jeffries:** Ken Thompson was a devoted father and loving husband. He built an incredible civil rights law practice founded on the principle of liberty and justice for all. He served our city and the nation with great distinction, first as a federal prosecutor and then as the dynamic Brooklyn District Attorney. And he was my friend. As District Attorney, Ken Thompson kept us safe, freed the wrongfully convicted, successfully prosecuted gunrunners, reformed the practice of low level marijuana arrests and established groundbreaking, compassionate smart-on-crime policies. In a short time in office, he made a tremendous difference and he will never be forgotten.

**U.S. Attorney Robert L. Capers:** I am profoundly saddened to learn of the sudden and untimely passing of my friend and colleague in law enforcement, Ken Thompson. Ken was a loving husband, father, son, and brother, and a devoted public servant. He was also a great friend to many. Ken did outstanding work as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the office I now serve, and he brought to the Kings County District Attorney's Office that same work ethic and determination to serve the residents of Brooklyn through the fair and impartial administration of justice. In just two and a half short years, he brought tremendous change to the residents of Brooklyn. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Ken's family, friends, and his office. Ken will be greatly missed.



**NY Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman:** I am devastated to learn of the death of my dear friend and colleague, Ken Thompson. Ken was a wonderful and committed public servant. In less than three years as District Attorney, Ken had an indelible impact on Brooklyn, our city, and our criminal justice system. Ken practiced law with a sense of fairness and respect for everyone in the courtroom and cared deeply and fought hard to advance the cause of civil rights. As an elected official, Ken embodied the highest ideals of public service, always doing what he believed was right, not just what was popular. Ken Thompson's time in public office will shine as an example to those of us in law enforcement for years to come. My thoughts and prayers are with his family during this very difficult time.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray:** The thoughts and prayers of our entire city are with District Attorney Ken Thompson, his family and his loved ones tonight. With a life and promise cut far too short, our city was blessed with but a glimpse of Ken's unwavering commitment to justice and his unrivaled pursuit of a more fair system for all those he served. Our courtrooms and our communities have no doubt been dealt a blow with Ken's passing, but I am confident the indelible mark left by his public service will forever be a part of the fabric of our justice system. Tonight we mourn the loss of a champion of reform. Our task now will be to rise each day forward in the spirit Ken lived his life.

## Ken Thompson — The People's Prosecutor



*With his mother at law school graduation*



*At the West Indian Day Parade*



*With his wife and children*



*With his spiritual leader, Rev. A.R. Bernard, Sr.*



*Leading a gun trafficking press conference*

## A Remembrance in Photos



*With Secretary Clinton*



*Speaking to high school interns*



*With Paul Gatling, after his murder conviction was vacated*



*At the NYC Pride Parade*



*Greeting community members at a Begin Again warrants forgiveness event*



*With then-Chief ADA Eric Gonzalez*

# **IMPORTANT NUMBERS**

**In Case of Emergency—Call 911**

**Main Number for NYC: 311 or (212) NEW-YORK**

**DA's Action Center Hotline: (718) 250-2340**

**Victim Services Unit: (718) 250-3820**

**Public Integrity Unit: (718) 250-2747**

**Domestic Violence Bureau: (718) 250-3300**

**Brooklyn Family Justice Center: (718) 250-5111**

**Elder Abuse Unit: (718) 250-5299**

**Immigrant Fraud Hotline: (718) 250-3333**

**Labor Fraud Unit Hotline: (718) 250-3770**

**Human Trafficking Bureau: (718) 250-2770**

**Teen Dating Violence: (718) 250-2463**

**Hate Crimes Hotline: (718) 250-4949**



**“With an unyielding commitment to serve the people of Brooklyn honorably and fairly and to ensure equal justice for all.”**

**Ken Thompson**

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