

Testimony
On Behalf of The Nomination of Clarence Thomas
To the U.S. Supreme Court
 by Julius W. Becton, Jr., President
 Prairie View A&M University
 The Senate Judiciary Committee
 Washington, D.C.
 Thursday, September 19, 1991

My name is Julius Becton, and I am president of Prairie View A&M University in Texas--which is my alma mater, I am proud to say. I am speaking to you today to recommend Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Prior to arriving at Prairie View in 1989, I directed the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. ^{Office of} Foreign Disaster Assistance Agency for International Development. Prior to that, I served in the U.S. Army for ^{almost} 40 years.

It was during my time at FEMA that I knew Judge Clarence Thomas, when he was head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. We were among the very few blacks holding key government positions at that time, and we naturally became acquainted.

The value of my testimony today lies in my personal familiarity with Judge Thomas as a man and as a compassionate civil servant.

I recommend Judge Thomas as a Supreme Court Justice for several reasons:

- I know him to be a good man--a man who sincerely wishes to employ his authority as a civil servant for the betterment of society. This includes his desire to promote the advancement of minorities, without infringing on the rights of the majority.

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- This point is particularly critical in order to avoid reverse discrimination, with the resulting backlash that goes with it. Too prolonged, too concentrated an effort to "make up" for past injustices can create new injustices.
- As a footnote, in my judgement, such "making up for the past" can also stifle individual initiative, because we look to somebody else, usually government, to solve issues that are within our own power to solve.
- Equal treatment, not preferential treatment--is what Judge Thomas is about.

• I would like to mention several initiatives and actions of Judge Thomas that recommend him as an effective judge and administrator:

1. As head of the EEOC, Judge Thomas enforced the laws against employment discrimination. The Office went to court 60% more often than it had in previous years.
2. His record on the federal appeals court shows judicial restraint, rather than activism. This merely means that his judgements were based on close readings of the law.
3. His views of Brown vs. the Board of Education indicate that he is not in disagreement with the court's decision but that he finds the "natural law" approach of "inalienable rights" a stronger legal basis for a colorblind society than sociological data.

3.

4. There are two efforts Judge Thomas participated in that illustrate a concern for the advancement of minorities:

a. The Minority Leaders Fellowship Program:

Judge Thomas encouraged the Washington Center to establish a Minority Leaders Fellowship Program in 1989.

- The concept of this program is to identify outstanding minority students who can benefit from an internship in Washington, D.C.
- Home institutions give the students academic credit, waive tuition and grant a \$1,000 living stipend. The Washington Center provides scholarship funding for tuition and housing fees.
- Judge Thomas helped create the program's advisory board, which he served on, and he worked to design the program, identify speakers, and arrange a start-up endowment of \$285,000.
- The first \$200,000 was set aside as an endowment, with \$85,000 providing assistance to students in the 1989 program.
- Mr. Bill Burke, President of the Washington Center, has said, " Mr. Thomas supported our program and encouraged us to do what we could to provide access to these minority students."

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b. The General Motors Agreement:

As Chairman of the EEOC in 1983, Clarence Thomas signed a \$42.5 million, five-year agreement with General Motors Corporation.

- The largest non-litigated settlement in EEOC history, the agreement resolved hundreds of employment discrimination claims against GM.
- In addition, General Motors agreed to provide over \$10 million in endowments and scholarships for educational opportunities for minorities and women--particularly in engineering and technological fields where minorities have been underrepresented.
- Many historically black universities received endowments, and another \$1 million in grants was provided to trade and technical schools.
- Prairie View A&M University was one of these institutions aided through Clarence Thomas' efforts.
- A grant of \$250,000 was given to the university, and the same amount was provided for a total of 39 universities, plus \$50,000 going to Columbia University and \$500,000 to the University of Tulsa's Minority Business Development Center.

It is clear from these and other examples that Clarence Thomas has been concerned about correcting minority injustices by taking positive actions to resolve them

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We can all agree that men and women of good will can agree on the goal of helping minorities yet differ on the means of achieving that goal.

- Their differences may be the result of opposing political philosophies, or based on a preference for alternative strategies.

I sympathize with the committee's responsibility in this hearing.

- You must offer your best advice and consent--not your rubber stamp, in the matter of Clarence Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court.
- Therefore, I would urge that partisan politics be put aside in deciding on this lifetime appointment, just as a justice must put aside merely personal predilections.

Which leaves us with the evidence of the man himself: Clarence Thomas' background, his service to his country, his recorded opinions and actions. (Let me note that a man against the advancement of minorities would not have played the crucial role that Clarence Thomas played in the Washington Center program or the General Motors settlement.)

We all want good men and women on the Supreme Court,

- in the sense that they have the intellectual competence to make crucial judgements on behalf of the nation,
- and in the sense that they have the moral values and conscience to guide them through difficult issues.

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It is appropriate that we demand a high calibre individual for this position. For the justices must distill a lifetime of education and experience and thought into their judgements--yet they must look beyond themselves as individuals to the nation's higher agenda.

In this sense, Clarence Thomas would unquestionably serve our country well on the Supreme Court.

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