

Remarks by Yvonne Thomas in behalf of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. before the Judiciary Committee Upon the Nomination of Judge Clarence Thomas To Be An Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Good morning, Distinguished Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I am Yvonne Thomas, a lifelong resident of the great State of Alabama. I was born and raised in Mobile, Alabama. I received my undergraduate education at Alabama State in Montgomery and received my masters degree from the University of Alabama in Birmingham. For the past 27 years, I have lived in a place with a name well known to many - Selma, Alabama. As you see, I am truly a product of the state.

I am here today representing Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated, to speak in strong support of the nomination of Judge Clarence Thomas to become an associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority was founded in 1920 on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. The sorority now encompasses over 75,000 Black (African American) women in more than 500 graduate and collegiate chapters across the country. Our members come from various walks of life; we are educators, students, entertainers, corporate executives, entrepreneurs, lawyers and judges.

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority is committed to making a positive impact on the future of our children, and we do this by serving as mentors, assisting in providing educational opportunities, and helping to decrease the effects of the social ills which plague our communities.

Zeta Phi Beta sponsors numerous scholarships through our National Education Foundation. Through our Stork's Nest Program, we provide prenatal care for indigent mothers. As another example of our involvement, we recently initiated a Drug and Substance Abuse Program for collegiate students.

In addition, Zeta Phi Beta has joined with many other African American organizations to address "The Black Male Crisis" and have made this issue our National Project for 1991. Through these and other programs, we are demonstrating our commitment to improve our community.

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., is a member of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. We are, however, on record with the Conference as non-concurring with their position as it relates to the confirmation of Judge Clarence Thomas. We believe that Judge Thomas is qualified to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. As pointed out by the American Bar Association, Judge Thomas has the judicial temperament, the integrity, honesty, intelligence, and independence necessary to serve on our nation's highest court. We agree and urge his confirmation.

We are particularly concerned about the opposition to Judge Thomas. In many instances, there appears to be a double standard being applied to Judge Thomas: in addition, some who oppose him have said they are concerned because they think now that he has made it, he has forgotten from whence he came, and who helped him get there. We believe that in action and word, Judge Thomas has demonstrated over and over again that he has not forgotten. Anyone who makes a statement such as the one made by Judge Thomas when he said that "[he] was raised to survive under the totalitarianism of segregation, not only without the active assistance of government but with its active opposition." Judge Thomas added that he was "raised to survive in spite of the dark oppressive cloud of governmentally sanctioned bigotry." Mr. Chairman, He has not forgotten

Judge Thomas is living proof of the awesome accomplishments of the civil rights movement. Judge Thomas has acknowledged the fact that he is a direct beneficiary of the civil rights movement. Judge Thomas wrote in Integrated Education that "many of us have walked through doors opened by the civil rights leaders, now you must see that others do the same. As individuals who have received the benefit of an education which was probably denied your fathers and mothers, and in some cases sisters and brothers, you must devise a plan for a civil rights movement for the [future]." And in a speech at Savannah State College, Judge Thomas said: " We [cannot] forget the blood of the marchers, the prayers and hope of our race." Mr. Chairman, these are not the words of a person who has forgotten.

Judge Thomas has demonstrated his compassion and deep commitment to the youth of this country. No, he has not called a press conference or issued news releases every time that he has helped a fellow human being. Instead, he has worked quietly and continuously to help those less fortunate, such as his 12 year old pen pal from Georgia. Through his personal interaction, Judge Thomas has inspired both a young black male and his mother to work hard to help the son reach his goal of becoming a doctor. By his example, he has given this young man hope: if Clarence Thomas can rise from the poorest of conditions in Pin Point, Georgia, to graduate from Yale Law School and be nominated for the Supreme Court, this young man can become what he

dreams to be.

Critics seem to believe that just because Judge Thomas has chosen a different road than they, that he must have forgotten where he began. In a speech to Holy Cross College on March 24, 1984, Judge Thomas did not forget when he said, "Through my radical days, through my days at New Haven Legal Assistance, through the summer working under a grant from the Law Student's Civil Rights Research Council, I did not forget. Through Holy Cross and Yale, I did not forget. As Assistant Attorney General and Assistant Secretary, I did not forget. As Chairman of the EEOC, I cannot and will not forget. I can never forget the agony of discrimination – the humiliation of prejudice." In that speech he went on to say, "I am an American – a black American. Nothing hurts me so much as the sufferings of my race. I firmly believe that the sufferings and the problems we face are so great that all who recognize them must look for solutions. We need new ideas in our arsenal of weapons to fight discrimination. At no time must we allow ourselves to believe that we must agree on every issue. We are not robots – we are a creative, resilient race. Just as we are different we have different ideas and different opinions."

Mr. Chairman, he has not forgotten how his grandfather was called boy or that his grandmother could not use certain rest rooms. Let me bring something to the attention

of his critics who say that the judge has stated that the government has no role to play in eliminating discrimination. In a speech at an EEOC seminar on December 6, 1983, in Pittsburgh, Judge Thomas declared that "The Federal government has always had both a profound moral obligation and a constitutional duty to protect individual rights. Increasingly that ideal has gained the force of the law. But, in the words of Frederick Douglas, 'Power concedes nothing without a demand.' And, even the government did not move decisively until the thunderous demand of protest against injustice could, no longer, be ignored."

In these complex and troubled times, no one person or organization can claim to have the only answer to solve our problems. If they did, why are we still in this predicament?

As I mentioned earlier, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority has made the Black Male Crisis our national project in 1991. We can think of no better message to send to our Black youth than Judge Clarence Thomas. He should be the role model for those youth who have lost all hope and have lost the ability to dream dreams. Yes, hard work, integrity, honesty, and intellectual independence are valued in this society. Let Judge Clarence Thomas' appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court show how much.

The women of Zeta Phi Beta, most definitely are in favor of the nomination of Judge Thomas. We know without question that he is exceptionally qualified to serve on the highest court of this nation. We know he will not forget our shared life experience as African Americans in this society. Nor do we fear that he will fail to hear the pleas and cries for fairness by all persons.

Thank you.