

Forty Years of Attacks and Slurs Against Justice Thomas | Opinion

Mark Paoletta

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Much of the black Democratic leadership in this country has been on a 40-year crusade to destroy Justice Clarence Thomas, calling him an "Uncle Tom" because his views are supposedly anathema to most black Americans. But in fact, they are the ones out of step with black Americans.

This was on full display when I testified last month before [Congress](#) at a hearing on the [Supreme Court](#). At the hearing, I asserted that "the Left hates Justice Thomas because he is a black conservative who has never bowed to those who demand that he must think a certain way because of the color of his skin." I was surprised when Democrat [Hakeem Jeffries](#), a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, [asked me](#), "What evidence do you have to support that incendiary charge?"

I responded that Democratic congressman Bennie Thompson, chairman of the House Homeland Security and January 6th committees, had called Justice Thomas an "Uncle Tom" in a 2014 [interview](#). If given the time, I could also have pointed out Representative Thompson's assertion in the same interview that Justice Thomas "doesn't like black people, he doesn't like being black."

I noted that Rep. Thompson [defended his use](#) of the "Uncle Tom" slur because Justice Thomas supports voter ID laws and opposes affirmative action, but that polling indicates black Americans agreed with Thomas on these issues. Rep. Jeffries dismissed the

statement, cutting me off to say that Rep. Thompson "is entitled to free speech." When I asked Rep. Jeffries if he wanted another example of the Left's hatred toward Justice Thomas, he chose to quit while he was behind and moved to another witness. Those other witnesses confirmed under questioning from Rep. [Matt Gaetz](#) that "Uncle Tom" is a racial slur in every use.

The examples of attacks on Justice Thomas for daring to think differently—for refusing to assent to the views liberals demand of black Americans—could fill a book. Justice Thomas was excluded completely from the National Museum of African American History and Culture when it was first opened in 2016. The NAACP, a civil rights organization, opposed Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court. In 1991, Juan Williams, a liberal journalist who is the author of a book on Justice Thurgood Marshall, wrote an op-ed titled "Open Season on Clarence Thomas," about the Left's attacks. "Here is indiscriminate, mean-spirited mudslinging supported by the so-called champions of fairness: liberal politicians, unions, civil rights groups and women's organizations," Williams wrote. "They have been mindlessly led into mob action against one man."

In 1998, Judge Leon Higginbotham, a black judge formerly on the Third Circuit, furiously [tried to prevent](#) Justice Thomas from speaking at the National Bar Association, an organization for black lawyers. Perhaps even more egregiously, an issue of *Emerge* magazine published an illustration of Justice Thomas shining the shoes of Justice Antonin Scalia. On the cover, it depicted him as a lawn jockey. Hodding Carter, a white Southerner who served in the [Jimmy Carter](#) White House, wrote in 1986 that, "as a Southerner, Mr. Thomas is surely familiar with those 'chicken-eating preachers' who gladly parroted the segregationists' line in exchange for a few crumbs from the white man's table. He's one of the few left in captivity." As Justice Thomas noted in his memoir, [My Grandfather's Son](#), "Not a single civil rights leader objected to this nakedly racist language."





WASHINGTON, DC - MARCH 30: MoveOn activists call for the impeachment of Justice Clarence Thomas outside of the U.S. Supreme Court on March 30, 2022 in Washington, DC. Paul Morigi/Getty Images

Even more disgusting, during Thomas's 1991 confirmation, significant voices in the black community said that the justice hated black people because he married a white woman. Russell Adams, chairman of Howard University's department of Afro-American studies, said, "His marrying a white woman is a sign of his rejection of the black community." Barbara Reynolds, a *USA Today* columnist, wrote Thomas has "already said no to blacks; he has already said if he can't paint himself white, he'll think white and marry a white woman."

Justice Thurgood Marshall was married to an Asian-American woman. James Earl Jones, [Michael Jordan](#), Sidney Poitier, Richard Pryor and Quincy Jones all married white women, and no civil rights leader said anything remotely similar to this despicable smear. Incoming Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson is married to a white man, and no one would begrudge her for it—nor should they. But for the Left, it's okay to claim that Justice Thomas hates black people because he married a white woman.

The message is clear: Thomas is a traitor to his race because he thinks his own thoughts.

In truth, it's Rep. Thompson and others in black congressional

leadership who are out of step with the black community. Nearly [70 percent of black](#) Americans support voter ID requirements, and [62 percent oppose](#) race being a factor in college admissions. On abortion, only [32 percent of black Americans](#) think the practice should be legal under all circumstances. Only [28 percent](#) of black Americans support Defund the [Police](#). Last but not least, 81 percent of black parents [support](#) school choice. It seems that a lot of the rank-and-file members of the black community also think their own thoughts, rather than those assigned them by the Left's leadership.

Why would the NAACP oppose school choice, depriving so many black families of an option to provide their children a good education? Perhaps because the NAACP received [funding](#) for many years from a [variety of teachers' unions](#), which reject market competition through school choice to protect failing teachers.

Justice Thomas zeroed in on this in his memoir. During his confirmation, he was shown a letter from the AFL-CIO to the NAACP which requested that the NAACP oppose Thomas to give the AFL-CIO cover to oppose him. Thomas wrote, "What saddened me was the fact that an organization whose independence had once been a byword in the Deep South had been reduced to doing the bidding of the AFL-CIO." And adding insult to injury, labor unions have long been [rife](#) with [racism](#) toward rank-and-file black Americans.

Perhaps left-wing leaders need to peddle the false narrative that Justice Thomas is a sell-out because they are [funded](#) by [large majority-white organizations](#) and adopt positions that are more in line with [paternalistic and patronizing white progressives](#). They need to smear Justice Thomas because he represents a threat to the extreme views they advocate.

It is despicable that Black leaders continue to smear Justice Thomas. He was born into poverty under state-enforced segregation in the Deep South and now serves on the Supreme Court. He is our longest-serving black Justice, and he writes more opinions a year than any Justice and stands at the pinnacle of the

legal world. Liberal leadership will continue to smear him because he is a transformational jurist who will never bow to leftism. In truth, it is Justice Thomas who represents the views of average black Americans—and whose jurisprudence aims to defend the liberty and justice of all Americans, despite the Left and much of the black leadership waging war against them.

Mark Paoletta served as a lawyer in the George H.W. Bush White House Counsel's Office and worked on Justice Thomas's confirmation. He most recently served as General Counsel for the Office of Management & Budget in the Trump administration, and he worked on the confirmations for Justices Gorsuch and Kavanaugh. He is a partner at Schaerr Jaffe LLP. He is the co-author of the forthcoming book, [Created Equal: Clarence Thomas in His Own Words](#), which will be published this June. You can follow him on Twitter at @MarkPaoletta

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