

Mrs. Burney – Dedicated and Beloved



Nigel Alston

Motivational Moments

When we do the best we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another.
— Helen Keller

"Our minds were together," she said when I called her late one evening. "I was just writing you a note." She is working on a fundraiser for small A.M.E. Zion churches and I have an assignment I can't turn down, to help her. Marie Burney, my former high school counselor, loves to help people, it is her way of life and she would not have it any other way. She has always been on my team, even when I didn't know it.

"My life has been spent helping teenagers," she told me as we talked late that evening. I know that firsthand. Her greatest accomplishment she told me is "seeing the children I've helped accomplish goals, working with them and guiding them in the right direction." The older I get, the more I find out how she has helped. She has a list of students she calls her children. I am one of them.

Mrs. Burney was the first African American counselor at R. J. Reynolds High School, the place I



Marie Burney

graduated from in 1970 before heading to Livingstone College. She was a home economics teacher prior to stepping into the role of counselor; a natural fit for a person who loves to help people. I have benefited from her help without knowing it on more than one occasion.

I attended Livingstone College in 1974 on a full four-year football scholarship that arrived in the mail one day. Unknown to me, the coaches had reviewed some of the tapes from several games I played in and invited me to join the "fighting blue bears." Not a year would pass without Mrs. Burney asking about my well-being and at the same time knowing the answer. She seemed to know all about what I was doing and the company I kept, includ-

ing the young woman I was dating, now my wife, Sarah. I could not figure out how she knew so much and didn't find out until well after I had graduated. One day she let me in on the secret, or secrets. Her sister worked at the school and kept an eye on me and reported to her. That was also the connection that landed me at Livingstone and how I received my scholarship without being recruited too. Her sister's husband was an A.M.E. Zion Bishop and chair of the board at the school. She convinced him that I was a good student and a good athlete.

My team was working for me and I didn't know it. It is good to have people like her on your side, helping you out in life. Later, in 2002, I was asked to be the Founders Day speaker at my alma mater, where two people I knew and respected, City Council Member Vivian Burke and the late Ben Ruffin were being honored with Honorary Doctorate degrees. I would be joining them to receive that honor as well. Of course, I would call her first to inform her of the honor. She would be proud, I thought. However, I should have known that she already knew and had her fingerprints all over it to begin with. It left me wondering what else I didn't know that she had done.

So, it is no surprise that she has called for help with


a special project she is now working on, raising money to help small A.M.E. Zion churches through her work as President of the Winston Salem District of Home Missions of the Western North Carolina of the A.M.E. Zion church. Her goal is to raise \$12,000. She is well on her way with \$7,000 raised to-date.

On June 3 at Goler Memorial A.M.E. Zion church, the Twin City Choristers will be performing a concert, open and free to the public. Donations will be accepted. The group, which includes her husband, Herman, has been together for 50 years. This is one of a series of efforts to raise money for those small churches in need. Several men in the group are also members of the A.M.E. Zion church.

This is just another way she is helping others and now she needs some help from her team, former students and others she has helped along the way. She has had great rewards in helping others, she told me. That's her "joy" she says with conviction. "I don't know what I would do if I could not help someone."

Nigel Alston is a radio talk-show host, columnist and motivational speaker. He is a member of the Winston-Salem State University Board of Trustees. Visit his Web site at www.motivationalmoments.com.

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Unmasking Clarence Thomas



George Curry

Guest Columnist

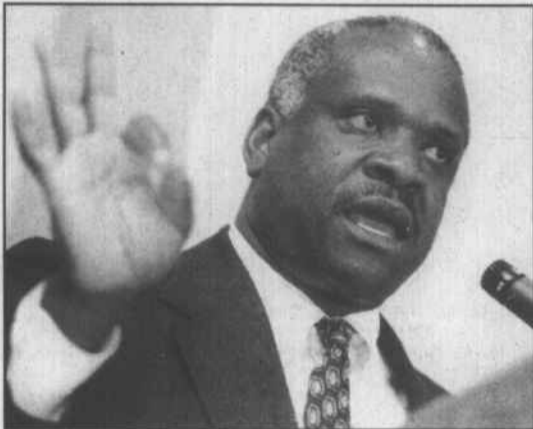
Anyone who has followed my career knows how I feel about Clarence Thomas. In fact, Jack E. White, writing in Time magazine, said, "No matter what George Curry accomplishes during the remainder of his journalistic career, he will be remembered for one thing: he was the editor who slapped a portrait of Clarence Thomas wearing an Aunt Jemima-style handkerchief on a 1993 cover of Emerge magazine."

White continued, "That shocking image outraged Thomas supporters, of course, but it crystallized the disgust that many African-Americans had begun to feel about the ultra-conservative legal philosophy of the U.S. Supreme Court's only black member."

Given my view of Thomas, I never thought I'd want to read a book on the supreme prick from Pinpoint, Ga. However, I resisted the urge and this week read "Supreme Discomfort: The Divided Soul of Clarence Thomas." The only reason I read the book was because it was written by Kevin Merida and Michael A. Fletcher, two friends who work at the Washington Post. They have done a superb job describing the many contradictions of Clarence Thomas.

After reading the book, I have one regret about that famous Emerge cover. If I had an opportunity to do it over, I would tie the Aunt Jemima knot tighter.

While criticizing African-Americans for embracing



Justice Clarence Thomas speaks.

"victimhood," the book portrays Thomas as the ultimate professional victim, at every turn claiming that people didn't like him because of his dark skin, his broad lips, or his conservative ideology. Recounting a 1998 speech before the National Bar Association, the authors note, "In remarks that veered from self-pity to combative, he maintained that the 'principal problem' he faces could be summed up in one succinct sentence: 'I have no right to think the way I do because I am black.'"

As the late Appeals Court Justice A. Leon Higginbotham pointed out at the time, "He's got a right to think whatever he wants to, but he does not have a right to be free of critique."

And a critique of Thomas shows that while professing to oppose special treatment because of his race, every job he has held, including his appointment to the Supreme Court, was obtained, in part, because of his race.

"Every Thomas employer, from Danforth, who gave him his first job, to President George H.W. Bush, who nomi-

inated him to the Supreme Court, chose Thomas at least partly because he is black. Race is a central fact of his meteoric rise, and Thomas has alternately denied it and resented it – all the way to the top," the book states.

To get to the top, to the Supreme Court, Thomas allowed his Right-wing handlers to misrepresent his past.

"The Pin Point strategy," some advisers dubbed it: file down the sharp ideological edges and keep emphasizing Thomas' personal story of triumph over adversity," the authors wrote.

"...What the White House advisers didn't know – or, perhaps, just ignored – was that Thomas' connection to his birthplace was tenuous at best. His family's house had burned down when he was six, and for most of his young life he was raised comfortably in Savannah by his grandfather, Myers Anderson, one of the black community's leading businessmen."

Although Thomas' affection for pornography was disclosed during his confirmation hearings, the books details Thomas' long and deep attrac-

tion to pornography. He told Dan Johnson, a Yale classmate, "My favorite movie of all time is Deep Throat. I've seen that [MF] six times."

In the public arena, Thomas appears only before friendly audiences; he rarely speaks to Black organizations. He saw nothing wrong with officiating the wedding of conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh while sitting on the Supreme Court.

The most incredible assertion made by Thomas was that his actions benefit African-Americans. He told a visitor to the Supreme Court, "It's unfair how black America criticizes me. I'm trying to help black America."

Help us to do what? Return to slavery?

African-Americans are not fooled. According to a study by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, cited in the book, a 1998 poll showed that Thomas had a favorable rating of just 32 percent, the worst numbers of any prominent African-American.

Judge Higginbotham said, "I have often pondered how it is that Justice Thomas, an African-American, could be so insensitive to the plight of the powerless. Why is he no different, or probably worse, than many of the most conservative Supreme Court justices of the century? I can only think of one Supreme Court justice during the century who was worse than Justice Clarence Thomas: James McReynolds, a white supremacist who referred to blacks as 'niggers.'"

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