

Clarence Thomas’s Deep-Seated Jealousy

NNPA COLUMNIST

Lee A. Daniels

For someone who seems to revel in being silent during the Supreme Court’s traditionally lively oral arguments – when a public display of his professional competence would be appropriate – Clarence Thomas’s out-of-court comments are extraordinarily revealing. They show a man whose exalted position has brought him no inner peace, a man who continues to see himself as being victimized by this or that person or cabal.

Last week, it came to light that during an early-April interview with C-SPAN, Thomas tried to diminish President Obama’s achievements. Asked about Obama’s being the nation’s first Black president, Thomas said, “I always knew that it would have to be a Black president who was approved by the elites and the media because anybody that they didn’t agree with, they would take apart.”

He went on to say “that will happen with virtually, you pick your person, any Black person who says something that is not the prescribed things that they expect from a Black person will be picked apart. You can pick anybody, don’t pick me, pick anyone who has decided not to go along with it. There’s a price to pay. So I always assumed it would be somebody the media had to agree with.”

Thomas didn’t identify which

“elites” and which “media” he was referring to.

But presumably the latter doesn’t include Fox News or the Wall Street Journal and other conservative-leaning newspapers and publications nor the innumerable conservative pundits and talk-show jockeys that have been hammering Obama since he won the Democratic nomination in 2008.

And presumably the elites don’t include the long-list of wealthy conservative elites who’ve spent millions upon millions opposing the president’s initiatives and his re-election. But then, Clarence Thomas has never been one to let facts undermine his raging self-pity.

We’ve seen this facet of Thomas’s character ever since he used that ugly phrase, “high tech lynching,” during his 1991 Senate confirmation hearings. That phrase came from a man who had become a conservative favorite by asserting that Black liberals always unjustifiably blamed racism for Black Americans’ troubles.

We later learned by his own words that that self-pity had long been a part of his character, when he revealed that all through col-

lege and law school he never voluntarily spoke up in class because he felt classmates would make fun of his deep Southern accent.

One need not have gone to an elite college and law school, as Thomas did, nor be a psychiatrist, to have immediately considered that Thomas neither got over his embarrassment about his accent nor sought out a language specialist to help him get rid of it precisely because he wanted to hold onto it – the better to feed his

ident.

Clarence Thomas drew no job offers from law firms when he graduated in 1974. He’s claimed this was the result of the “taint” of affirmative action. But numerous articles over the years have shown that Thomas’s Black Yale Law peers have a decidedly different view of their experience.

One such article, in The American Lawyer, of June 2, 2008, “Did Affirmative Action Really Hinder Clarence Thomas?,” available on

Personal and professional jealousy is always unseemly – the more so in a Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

seeing himself as a victim.

In fact, Thomas’s attempt to diminish the president just underscores what they have – and don’t have – in common.

Both men are products of elite colleges and law schools. But while Thomas hid behind a self-perceived “defect,” Barack Obama took an active role in the life of the institutions he attended. At Harvard, he sought and won membership on the law review, and then, the approval of the review’s members to be their pres-

the web site Law.com, should be required reading. It found “in interviews with a dozen African-American lawyers who attended Yale in the same years” that they described their Yale experience “in largely positive – even glowing – terms.”

The most striking contrast between Clarence Thomas and Barack Obama, of course, is what they’ve done after law school.

Thomas, taken up by then-Senator John Danforth, a Missouri Republican, shortly after gradua-

tion, has been a government appointee his entire adult career – while declaring that Blacks as a group are too dependent on the government. With, at best, minimal qualifications he was appointed to the two most prestigious positions in the federal judiciary, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, and less than two years later, the Supreme Court.

Barack Obama, on the other hand, spurned lucrative offers from law firms and potential federal court clerkships, to become a community organizer in Chicago. There, he began his career of standing for elective office at the local, statewide, and national level. His galvanic speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention instantly made him a future presidential contender. He won the presidency twice in the toughest kind of combat outside of actual warfare by out-thinking and out-organizing his Republican opposition to garner the approval of millions of voters.

Personal and professional jealousy is always unseemly – the more so in a Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

Lee A. Daniels is a longtime journalist based in New York City. His most recent book is Last Chance: The Political Threat to Black America.

Blacks Underrepresented in Immigration Debate

The Senate’s Gang of Eight have put together an 844-page monstrosity known as the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act, legislation that President Obama says he “basically approves” of. The crafters of this essentially unreadable bill was put together by Senators Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), Michael Bennett (D-Col.), Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Lindsay Graham (R-S.C.).

On its surface, the bill provides much-needed relief to many of the 11 million undocumented people who live in our country. The challenge is that it disadvantages some immigrants, especially African and Caribbean immigrants, while helping others.

Further, the Senators crafting the bill put goodies into the bill that only serve to advantage themselves or their states. Senator Lindsay Graham wants more visas for the meat packing industry. Senator Charles Schumer provided special provisions for Irish people with a high school diploma (why?), Senator Marco Rubio, the much touted possible presidential candidate in 2016, asked for more visas for the cruise ship industry, and Senators Michael Bennett wants more visas for workers in ski resorts.

Meanwhile, the legislation would eliminate the Diversity Visa Program, which allows a visa lottery for countries that have low levels (less than 50,000 people) of



BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

immigration to the United States. Many African immigrants come here through this program (Ghana and Nigeria each had 6,000 immigrants through this program in 2011; African immigrants are 36 percent of those receiving diversity visas). Thus, while Senator Schumer pushes for special provisions for Irish immigrants, there is no one on the Senate side pushing for special provisions for African and Caribbean immigrants.

Instead of the Diversity Visa

to provide fewer opportunities for those from Africa and the Caribbean. Senator Schumer’s special provision for the Irish carries no stipulation that these people be employed, essentially granting them a pass from the merit-based point system.

Many hi-tech companies use the H-1B visa program on the grounds that there is a shortage of skilled workers in the United States. There is evidence that this claim is specious and that employers prefer foreign workers who they can pay less and control more. The new legislation will prevent employers from holding workers hostage because their continuing employment is necessary in order to keep their visa. The new legislation gives H-1B 60 days to find a new job. But why do we have H-1B visas at all. With unemploy-

while, African and Caribbean immigrants get just a small percentage of H-1B visas.

The Immigration Modernization bill will spend \$4.5 billion in an attempt to secure the southern border, which will “secure” our country from Mexican immi-

President Obama has had a bad year, so far. He didn’t get his way on gun control, and he’s been kicked around by an obstructionist House of Representatives. He needs immigration reform to fulfill promises he made to the Latino community during his campaign.

... there is no one on the Senate side pushing for special provisions for African and Caribbean immigrants.

grants, but ignores the northern border, which makes our country more open to Canadian immigration. Of course, Canadian immigrants are more likely to be White, and thus less feared, than Mexican immigrants. The Congressional Black Caucus is one of many groups that suggest that this \$4.5 billion could be more effectively spent, perhaps on STEM education.

The immigration bill is by no means final. The House of Representatives still has to vote on it, and many of them will add amendments and exceptions to take care of their “pet” causes. Meanwhile, President Obama has been urging Democrats to accept the immigration bill as it is, because too many amendments may jeopardize the bill. For example, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) would like to propose an amendment that would allow gay Americans to sponsor their partners for green cards. The Judiciary Committee is likely to pass this amendment, but the whole Senate might not pass it.

But the unwieldy 844-page piece of legislation contains lots of provisions that don’t pass the smell test. It makes it more difficult for African and Caribbean immigrants to become citizens of the United States.

The African American community must take a closer look at this legislation. If Senator Schumer can give 10,000 Irish immigrants the open door, how many Africans and Caribbeans will he make exceptions for? At the very minimum, Congress should restore the Diversity Visa program. The bill is called the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act. Exactly who will have more economic opportunity? And is immigration really being modernized when it locks foreign-born Black people out of the process?

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington, D.C.-based economist and writer. She is President Emerita of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, N.C.

Exactly who will have more economic opportunity? And is immigration really being modernized when it locks foreign-born Black people out of the process?

Program, the Senate Bill 744 creates between 120,000 and 200,000 visas on a “merit based” system, which gives highest priority to those who have future employment opportunities. Because employers do not seek out African and Caribbean immigrants for employees (as they seek out Indian and Chinese employees), the merit-based point system is likely

ment over 7 percent, and Black unemployment over 13 percent, surely there are unemployed people who could work effectively in technology companies. Howard University economist Bill Sprigs has written that there are proportionately more African American students majoring in computer science than White. Many of these graduates cannot find jobs. Mean-