

press release

U.S. SUPREME COURT JUSTICE CLARENCE THOMAS MAKES RARE TELEVISED APPEARANCE ON *TONY BROWN'S JOURNAL*, IN FEBRUARY ON PBS

Episode Airs During Black History Month

In an intimate, wide-ranging interview, veteran broadcaster Tony Brown sits down with Associate Justice Clarence Thomas, who came to national prominence during his controversial 1991 confirmation hearings. In the interview, Thomas frankly discusses affirmative action, judicial temperament and his new autobiography, *My Grandfather's Son*. The 30-minute interview between the nation's only African-American Supreme Court justice and the host of the longest-running series on PBS premieres Saturday, February 23 on *TONY BROWN'S JOURNAL* (check local listings).

“Clarence Thomas, whatever his faults, is very, very blunt,” says Brown, an author, educator and TV icon inducted into the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences' Silver Circle. “My purpose in doing this interview was to expose the man, his method of thinking and how he got to be where he is. In my opinion, the most important question I asked him was ‘Are you fair?’ ”

TONY BROWN'S JOURNAL, now in its 40th season, offers commentary, discussion, documentaries and interviews of special interest to the African-American community. Thomas, who rarely gives interviews, last appeared on the program in 1983, when he was the head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Says Brown: “The only national TV series that would give a black government bureaucrat like Clarence Thomas 30 minutes on national television was this one.” A portion of that interview is also seen on the February episode.

Calling Thomas's book "brutally self-critical" and likening the man himself to a "frustrated Catholic priest," Brown asks the associate justice why he revealed so much in the memoir. Thomas says he felt an obligation to his family because much of what had been written about him was "just wrong."

"And the real purpose of the book, other than setting the facts about my life in a more accurate way, is also to leave some hope for young people who are still trying," he says. At age 7, Thomas's mother sent him and his brother to live at her father's home in Savannah, Georgia, where they were raised during the "separate but equal" Jim Crow era. Thomas, now 59, went on to Holy Cross, a Jesuit college in Massachusetts, Yale Law School and, eventually, the highest court in the land.

Brown questions Thomas about his voting record, his reputation among African-Americans and liberals, his personal and professional influences, and his personal discipline. He also asks Thomas about claims he follows the lead of Associate Justice Antonin Scalia, another conservative member of the right-leaning court, so much so that "however he votes, you vote."

"That's just silliness. That's the last resort of scoundrels," Thomas replies. "I agree with him often. But not as often as some of my other colleagues agree with each other...That's just a way to discredit me."

In response to a question about his routine silence during oral arguments, Thomas replies, "All the way through high school, college and law school, I never asked a single question...What is my job as a Supreme Court Justice? Is it to debate? Is it a side show? Is it histrionics? Is it entertainment? Or is it to decide cases?"

Near the end of the interview, Thomas says that he's tried throughout his life to be "honest about all the hard things...The dropout rates among black males. The non-participation of black males in the work force. Black on black crime. We were talking about those things 25 years ago, and then being accused of blaming the victim for talking about something that was honest... You

make the best effort, and you always try to be honest, and always try to be positive. And always try to treat people the way you like to be treated.”

Of the interview, Brown says, “I do respect Clarence Thomas. I don’t agree with all of his views. I don’t know anyone I agree with 100 percent. I’m not prepared to judge him as a Supreme Court justice. I’m not in a position to judge his record or his relationship with Anita Hill. I try and keep myself as objective as possible.”

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