

Honorary Degree Citation
January 26, 2012

Clarence Thomas '71
Doctor of Laws

In September 1968, an era of immense turmoil on the campuses of our nation's colleges and universities and just months following the ruthless murder of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., a young, angry, disillusioned transfer student from Pin Point, Georgia, a former seminarian and descendant of American slaves, ascended Linden Lane to pursue a traditional liberal arts education at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Justice Thomas, you soon bonded with an alert, ambitious, determined and feisty group of intellectually remarkable black fellow-students — Stanley Grayson, Gil Hardy, Eddie Jenkins, Ed Jones, Malcolm Joseph, Art Martin, Ted Wells and others.

Working and studying together, your intellectual lives were gradually enriched, nourished and fashioned by means of debate, compelling argumentation and pursuit of justice.

One of your clerks has described you as "a boss who sees us all as family, who not only guides and encourages us in our legal and other professional endeavors, but is always there for us in our personal lives when we need advice or support through illnesses and deaths, births and baptisms, and all the joys and tragedies of life."

These same qualities of mind and heart, Justice Thomas, are among the many reasons we recognize and honor you today.

Putting aside the immense responsibilities of your office, you have generously found time to serve as a Trustee and steward of Holy Cross. You have mentored young men and women seeking admission to Holy Cross, as well as undergraduate students engaged in the College's Washington Semester Program and those who have joined with you in the Black Student Union which you helped to found on campus during your undergraduate years.

Another of your clerks once noted: "[Justice Thomas] reminds us that interpreting the United States Constitution is not a game of cute phrases and glib remarks, but is a deadly serious business. [The Justice] approaches each case with a dogged commitment to get the law right."

Again, your Honor, dedication to the task has been a constant in your every pursuit. From your study of English Literature here at Holy Cross, earning a bachelor of arts degree *cum laude* and membership in Alpha Sigma Nu, the Jesuit Honor Society, you moved on to the Yale University School of Law, the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a Federal judgeship and to the honorable position of an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States of America.

Forty-two years and one month ago, in this very room, you struck a blow for social justice, when, in a decisive moment, you and your fellow students led the College of the Holy Cross to take a role in the American civil rights movement, thereby moving this community toward greater liberty and justice for all.

That all may know of our regard for you, our affection and esteem and lasting gratitude for your service to *Alma Mater*, the College of the Holy Cross confers upon you this day the degree, Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.