

## TOO FEW VOICES HEARD IN CHOICE OF THOMAS

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I oppose the decision to invite Justice Clarence Thomas as the UGA law school graduation speaker on May 17, 2003.

I object to the procedures used to select him. The choice of Thomas was made by a handful of students who share Thomas's politics and who acted stealthily and without meaningful consultation with the graduating class. The choice of Thomas has, I know for a fact, deeply offended some graduating students and their families, and this harm could have been avoided if the entire graduating class had been given an opportunity to participate in the speaker selection process. This is why 11 law professors and 50 law students have now signed a protest letter which states that the selection process "was underinclusive, clandestine, and divisive."

After the controversy over the choosing of Thomas erupted, the law dean announced new, inclusive procedures for future selections of graduation speakers. This, in my mind, is a plain confession of the impropriety of the procedures used to pick Thomas.

Inviting Thomas to be the graduation speaker bestows an honor on him that he does not deserve. Inviting Thomas (or anyone else) simply to speak at the law school is one thing, and I would never object to inviting any speaker of any point of view. But inviting someone to be the graduation speaker is different; being invited to address the graduating class is an honor and implicitly gives the law school's approval to the invitee. Even though he is on the Supreme Court, Thomas's deplorable, relentless anti-human rights voting record on the Court makes him unworthy of being honored; and for the same reason the law school should never appear to be giving even an implied imprimatur to Thomas.

Inviting Thomas to be the graduation ceremony speaker is different from simply inviting him to appear and speak. Student attendance at the graduation is in effect mandatory. Graduating students must listen to Thomas's speech unless they want to miss their own graduation. In contrast, if Thomas were merely invited to speak at the law school, students would be free to attend or not attend.

Objecting to Thomas's invitation therefore in no way impinges upon freedom of speech.

For these reasons, I refuse to attend the graduation ceremony and will exercise my First Amendment rights to protest Thomas's record by speaking at the Justice Thomas Protest Demonstration to be held at the same time Thomas speaks, but on a different part of the campus.