

Bill Walton: [00:00](#) Just a couple evenings ago, I watched an incredible documentary about Clarence Thomas. It's called Created Equal: Clarence Thomas in His Own Words. It's a wonderfully vivid story about his life saga, where he came from in Georgia, the real ordeals he went through to get to where he is. We've all heard about, and I've been there, witnessed the hearings, the Anita Hill famous hearings, but that was just one of the many things that Justice Thomas went through in his life to form a character which I think makes him one of America's greatest heroes.

Bill Walton: [00:42](#) I wanted to learn more about this, and I asked Michael Pack, the director, writer, and producer of the film to join me. Together, we take a look at some of what happened behind the scenes, and we also talked about what it's like to be a conservative filmmaker in today's America. Listen in and join in the conversation. I think you'll find it very interesting.

Speaker 2: [01:07](#) Welcome to The Bill Walton Show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers, fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people, interesting things.

Bill Walton: [01:27](#) Welcome back. One of the many reasons I love producing this show is that I get to spend time with and share conversations with some truly amazing people. Well, today's a twofer, in a sense. One of my guests is here virtually, and that would be Justice Clarence Thomas, who's, in my view, one of the greatest living Americans. The other is Michael Pack, who's the co-founder of Manifold Productions and the producer, writer, and director of Created Equal: Clarence Thomas in His Own Words. Michael has also produced and written and directed 15 other documentaries shown on PBS. I must say, I've admired both men for years, and have followed Michael's career for years, and what he's done over his lifetime has been just simply amazing.

Bill Walton: [02:18](#) Michael, thank you for doing this film.

Michael Pack: [02:20](#) Well, thank you. Thank you for having me on your show, Bill. I'm honored to be put in the same company with Justice Clarence Thomas. Thank you for that too.

Bill Walton: [02:27](#) Well, you acquitted yourself so well in the making of this. What gave you the idea for the film, and how did you get it kicked off?

Michael Pack: [02:36](#) Well, Justice Thomas and I have some mutual friends, and I had heard from those mutual friends that Justice Thomas was getting tired of having his enemies define his life and his legacy. He was tired of the half-truths and untruths that were spread about him in the media, in movies, in cartoons.

Michael Pack: [02:59](#) I didn't know that much about him, I met him, and after meeting with him, it was quickly apparent to me that he had a great story, that his life story was a great story, I read his memoir too, and that he himself was a great storyteller, which also wasn't obvious. He has a great voice. He thinks narratively and anecdotally. So it was just immediately apparent to me it was a great subject for a documentary.

Bill Walton: [03:28](#) Well, you've got a great trailer, as well, for this, and I think it conveys pretty much what's in the film. Why don't we take a look at the trailer? Then we can talk about that after we look at it.

Michael Pack: [03:40](#) Good idea.

Bill Walton: [03:40](#) Here we go.

Clarence Thomas: [03:44](#) Someplace in my life, the roads had split off. I was no longer in the world that was my comfort zone. I was never going to be a part of that world. The problem is I could never go back completely to the world I came from.

Clarence Thomas: [04:06](#) I wandered the streets by myself. I was six. You were hungry and didn't know when you'd eat.

Clarence Thomas: [04:13](#) The note said, "I like Martin Luther King." You open up the inside, and then it just had the word "dead."

Martin Luther K...: [04:20](#) I would rather die on the highways of Alabama than make a butchery of my conscience.

Clarence Thomas: [04:26](#) I prayed for guidance, but instead of comfort, I found only sorrow and confusion.

Clarence Thomas: [04:34](#) He said that I was to leave his house, the only real home I'd ever known. Where could I go? What would I do?

Speaker 6: [04:47](#) So you'd still like to serve on the Supreme Court?

Clarence Thomas: [04:50](#) I'd rather die than withdraw from the process.

Clarence Thomas: [04:58](#) (singing)

Clarence Thomas: [05:02](#) I saw what I had become. I didn't even care about it, didn't care about getting hurt. It was bad. We're supposed to be revolutionaries. I'm just angry, lashing out at every single thing.

Clarence Thomas: [05:15](#) I had decided to vote for Ronald Reagan. It was a giant step for a black man.

George H.W. Bus...: [05:21](#) I will nominate Judge Clarence Thomas to serve as Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

Speaker 8: [05:27](#) Professor, do you swear-

Clarence Thomas: [05:28](#) That's when all heck broke loose.

Speaker 8: [05:30](#) ... so help you God?

Speaker 9: [05:31](#) I do.

Speaker 9: [05:32](#) Judge Thomas began to use work situations to discuss sex.

Speaker 10: [05:37](#) Not at all sure that Clarence Thomas is going to survive this.

Clarence Thomas: [05:40](#) As a black American, as far as I'm concerned, it is a high-tech lynching.

Clarence Thomas: [05:46](#) Come on, we know what this is all about. This is the wrong black guy. He has to be destroyed. Just say it.

Bill Walton: [06:01](#) Wow.

Michael Pack: [06:03](#) And that's just a few minutes. The whole movie, as you know, runs two hours, and I think it's an amazing story.

Bill Walton: [06:10](#) It was first aired on PBS May 18th, 2020. When will it go into rerun? How else can people see it?

Michael Pack: [06:20](#) Even before PBS, we were fortunate to have it in movie theaters. The very end of January, really the beginning of February, we opened in movie theaters. Usually, documentaries air in five or 10 theaters. We were lucky to be picked up by 110 theaters across the country, so a lot of people saw it in its theatrical release and it got a lot of press.

Michael Pack: [06:39](#) Then, you're right, it was premiered on PBS on May 18th. They may or may not rerun it. It's hard to tell. They only really tell you

about the premiere broadcast, but we will stream it eventually on Amazon, Netflix, wherever. People who want to see it that way should go to our website, justicethomasmovie.com, and sign up to be informed when it's streaming. They can also watch the trailer again if they want to see it a second time, and find out more about the film and read about it. We hope that it'll be streaming sometime in the summer.

- Bill Walton: [07:16](#) Well, I don't know what PBS does with its ratings, but that has to be the highest-rated film among conservatives that has been shown on PBS.
- Michael Pack: [07:24](#) Yeah, if they measure that.
- Bill Walton: [07:25](#) Yet it's not red meat. It's a human story. You really, I think, get behind who Clarence Thomas really is. It's striking to see him narrate. You did this with two people talking. It was basically Justice Thomas and his wife, Ginni.
- Michael Pack: [07:43](#) That's right. When you make a film, a documentary or any film, you make a couple of big decisions about how to tell the story. That decision to have the story told by Justice Thomas and Ginni only was our first big decision, really, and I came to it slowly. At first, I was going to make a traditional documentary where we're going to interview 20 or 30 other people across the political spectrum that were experts in parts of his life, on the confirmation, and on the issues he brings up, like busing and affirmative action.
- Michael Pack: [08:16](#) But it quickly became apparent to me when I proceeded down that path that we would lose his voice, that all these other voices would drown his out, and that a lot of the issues he talks about require a lot of commentary. I thought it was better to just have him tell it, not to pretend that it's objective. It's Justice Thomas's view of his own life. It's the way he sees it.
- Michael Pack: [08:40](#) Viewers get to spend two hours with Justice Thomas, and as you said, that is an amazing experience. He is a great man and has profound views about America. To spend two hours with him is a worthwhile experience, whether you agree with him or not. And I am particularly happy that it's on PBS. As you say, like all of my films, but this one especially, I'm happy to have people who don't think they agree with him find out what he thinks and what he's really like.
- Bill Walton: [09:09](#) You're watching The Bill Walton Show. I'm here with Michael Pack, who's the director of Clarence Thomas in His Own Words.

We're talking about Clarence Thomas the man and also Clarence Thomas the movie star. To make this, you interviewed for 30 hours, as I understand it?

- Michael Pack: [09:30](#) Justice Thomas and Ginni together for 30 hours over a six-month period, obviously not in one sitting. I feel really blessed that he gave us that time. It's a lot. It's unprecedented access from any Supreme Court Justice ever, let alone one who has not in the past granted many interviews. He trusted us to tell his story fairly and to be true to his view, and I hope I honor that.
- Bill Walton: [09:58](#) What did you do with the outtakes?
- Michael Pack: [09:58](#) We have the outtakes.
- Bill Walton: [10:01](#) I suspect there's 28 hours of conversations that would be incredibly interesting.
- Michael Pack: [10:06](#) We have great outtakes. It took me a year to edit the film, and myself and the editor and many others have our favorite outtakes that we wished had been in the movie. I don't know what we're going to do with them.
- Michael Pack: [10:20](#) We often think that maybe we'll do specialized pieces. For example, I spent three hours talking to Justice Thomas about his jurisprudence and his life on the court, and it's only like five or 10 minutes of the film. So we thought maybe to do a version for law schools and law students.
- Michael Pack: [10:37](#) I also think it's a great record, a historic record. I'm not sure what he's going to do with his papers, but I think in the long run we'll try to archive it somewhere.
- Bill Walton: [10:46](#) I think you handle the jurisprudence just about right. The thing that's wonderful about this is you really convey who he was growing up. As a filmmaker, it was striking, you didn't have a lot of images to work with. For example, now everybody has digital cameras, and all of us have way too many pictures of our lives. There weren't many. How did you recreate his past visually, which you do vividly?
- Michael Pack: [11:15](#) Well, once you pick this path of one person being interviewed, then you have that challenge. What are the other visual materials that you can cut to? And you're quite right, there are not a lot of photos of Justice Thomas or his grandfather who raised them or any of them. As he likes to say, they were... As you know, his story is coming from dire poverty in the

segregated South to the highest court in the land, an amazing journey, but way there at the beginning, dire poverty, he likes to say, "African-Americans living in the segregated South weren't taking Kodak pictures of themselves and developing them."

- Michael Pack: [11:50](#) There were very few pictures, so we had to use archival footage, archival stills. We tried to get them as close to the time and place that he talks about as we could. And we have expressionistic re-creations, not literal re-creations, but re-creations.
- Bill Walton: [12:09](#) Well, the thing that's striking, and I hope everybody listening or watching this is going to rush right out and take a look at the film, because the thing that's striking is you take on a life journey. He's born in the Tidewater area of South Carolina-
- Michael Pack: [12:26](#) Georgia.
- Bill Walton: [12:26](#) Georgia. And you use the metaphor of a boat or the image of a boat in the bayou at different courses of his life. It's a great image, and it carries you along with the story. How did you come up with that idea?
- Michael Pack: [12:40](#) Well, I did need some kind of metaphor to hang it together. I'm not really sure how I came up with that idea. I have to be honest with you, Bill, I came up with many other ideas. They were not working too well. I tried them. I shot a few. One of the people who work with me was reminiscing recently about all the ideas I had that didn't work out, which was fun for him, but it's tough to live with. But that one did work, and I'm not sure why it worked.
- Michael Pack: [13:05](#) I think it also worked musically. It worked because, A, he talks about The Road Not Taken, the Frost poem, and the journey of a boat in a bayou mirrored his talking about the Frost poem. And we have the theme of Moon River. Johnny Mercer, who wrote Moon River-
- Bill Walton: [13:29](#) Who grew up not too far from us.
- Michael Pack: [13:31](#) And they've named a river in Pin Point, where Clarence Thomas was born, Moon River. So we have the Moon River theme and the journey and the path theme, and I think it did hang the film together.

- Michael Pack: [13:44](#) But you're quite right, it's very remarkable that he came... He was born in Pin Point, a Gullah-speaking area off the coast of Georgia. And you're also right that it's a part... The Gullah-speaking areas go from Northern Florida all the way up to South Carolina. In a way, South Carolina is the heart of the Gullah-Geechee world. English wasn't even his first language.
- Bill Walton: [14:05](#) There's a tough moment in the film where he conveys when one of his... I think he'd gone to the Catholic school, and the teacher there told him there, or maybe it was the... He went somewhere, the seminary, where one of the teachers said to him, "You can't speak black English. You can't speak this. You've got to speak standard English." That comes across very strong in the film. How did that feel when you're sitting there talking with him?
- Michael Pack: [14:36](#) I think today if you said that, you would be branded a racist. This was a white Irish priest telling a black man that he doesn't speak proper English. But for Justice Thomas, at first, he was insulted. He was angry. Then he realized that this man was right. If he didn't speak English, he wouldn't succeed. Imagine, how would he get to the Supreme Court? So he took it seriously, and it was a weakness for him since he began with this Gullah dialect.
- Michael Pack: [15:11](#) Just like Justice Thomas, when he went to college at Holy Cross, he majored in English, because it was his weakest subject. That's the person he was. He says also in the film that when he was born, his mother said he was too stubborn to cry, and that stubbornness is what has pulled him through.
- Bill Walton: [15:30](#) When you're sitting with him for 30 hours, what came across to you most distinctly? What did you feel when you were with him?
- Michael Pack: [15:40](#) He's had a lot of setbacks. We only touched on them, really, and the trailer touches on them. The struggling with poverty, struggling with racism, struggling with financial problems, he had lots of struggles, and he has great resilience. He can come back again and again.
- Michael Pack: [15:59](#) He doesn't choose to define himself as a victim, and his grandfather who raised him doesn't choose to define himself as a victim, even though they are coming from real segregation, the Jim Crow South, real poverty, dire poverty. We have a story in the film where, in Savannah, before he goes to his grandfather, they have an outhouse where it flushes in the neighbor's yard and their outhouse flushes in his yard.

Unsanitary conditions. Hunger. So he could think of himself as a victim, but he refuses-

- Bill Walton: [16:30](#) Those images, those visuals were vivid.
- Michael Pack: [16:31](#) Yeah. It's vivid. Justice Thomas has said that it was even worse than those visuals depicted, so yeah, a poverty not too many of us have even seen.
- Bill Walton: [16:47](#) What surprised you most about him after you spent that time with him?
- Michael Pack: [16:53](#) It's that, that he doesn't see himself as a victim, that he feels his life was blessed, and that he has humility. This is a rare trait. We're here in the DC area. Politicians, maybe all, could use a lot more of it. He has it. He says a prayer for humility every day, and he has that sense that his life is blessed. I think that attitude towards his life is something we should all share.
- Bill Walton: [17:22](#) You're watching The Bill Walton Show. I'm here with Michael Pack, and we're talking about the fascinating journey he took with Clarence Thomas to make his documentary. I'm learning that Clarence Thomas is even better in person than he is on film. Michael, thank you for sharing. What else about the making of the film would we be interested in?
- Michael Pack: [17:48](#) Well, I do feel it was a privilege to interview him for over 30 hours, but in terms of what he's like in person-
- Bill Walton: [17:57](#) Now, at some point, did he say to you, "I'm not going to answer that question" or "I don't want to talk about that"?
- Michael Pack: [18:03](#) The reason I think it was a privilege is-
- Bill Walton: [18:04](#) It could be a tough interview, too.
- Michael Pack: [18:06](#) It was a tough interview for him. It wasn't fun for him or for Ginni. Ginni teared up several times in the interview. And Justice Thomas, too, you could see his emotion. It's not fun to relive some of these horrible moments of his past, including his contentious confirmation and the Anita Hill charges. But once he agreed to do it, the stubbornness came into play again and he wanted to see it through, and I'm happy that he did, honored that he did.
- Michael Pack: [18:36](#) In terms of what he's like off camera, in making the film Justice Thomas, and this is very rare for interview subjects, he wanted

to do long interviews, so I interviewed him for four hours at a time. Most people can't stand being interviewed for more than an hour or so. But I did promise to Ginni, his wife, and to his staff at the Supreme Court that I would turn the cameras off at noon every day. As you know, most producers are not 100% truthful about what the last question is or when the camera is turned off, but I really promise-

- Bill Walton: [19:10](#) I find on this show we get all our best stuff after we think we've stopped taping.
- Michael Pack: [19:16](#) Indeed, so that's a tricky thing. But I did turn it off at noon. I promised. I did. Ginni always said to me, "You know, he does have a real job that's demanding." I knew that, my research had turned that up, and I wanted to send him back to that real job.
- Michael Pack: [19:36](#) But at noon every day, my wife, who's very clever this way, sent our son, who was a production assistant, over to say, "Justice Thomas, would you like to stay for lunch?" Every single time, he stayed for lunch for another hour, so he never left before 1:00, in spite of my promise. After that, I just promised to turn the camera off.
- Michael Pack: [19:55](#) And at lunch, he was ebullient. He was particularly interested in the young people in the crew, like my son and another production assistant. He remembered from session to session what they said last time. He inquired about them. He laughed a lot at lunch. The crew said to me all the time, "You should be filming lunch," but I didn't. That interest in every single person is very remarkable. In the case of one production assistant, she was planning to go into the film business, and Justice Thomas convinced her to go into the law, to go to law school, something I think her parents should thank me for.
- Michael Pack: [20:35](#) He just took that interest in everybody, and everybody was struck by that. The crew had a wide variety of political points of view, but they were all struck by his humanity and his concern.
- Bill Walton: [20:47](#) You did a very good job setting up the Anita Hill incident. I was struck by how you built that story, from his taking his first job with Danforth in Missouri and following him to the Capitol through his career, and then having Danforth with him, Senator Danforth.
- Michael Pack: [21:06](#) Yes, Senator.

Bill Walton: [21:06](#) Was that footage hard to come by? How did you edit all the CNN material? There was a lot to work with, and I think you brought out just the most salient highlights.

Michael Pack: [21:18](#) Well, because it's Clarence Thomas in his own words, our approach was always to see it as he sees it. Although some of us of a certain age remember the hearings well, it's rare to see it as he saw it, to experience it his way. As you know, before the Anita Hill charges were released, there had been a whole other hearing. He had his real hearing, as he likes to call it, a whole week of being grilled by the Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by Democrats, chaired by Joe Biden.

Bill Walton: [21:50](#) Chaired by Joe Biden.

Michael Pack: [21:52](#) That was really hard, and it was grueling. He really felt when that was over that he had finished a tremendously difficult process, and he and his wife went off on a vacation. It was then, when it was over, that Anita Hill's charges were leaked leaked to Newsday and NPR. As a result of the leak, the Senate decided to reconvene the Judiciary Committee for this second group of hearings. As Justice Thomas says, it's like you've run one marathon, it's over, you relax, and you're told now you have to run a second marathon.

Michael Pack: [22:28](#) He experienced that second marathon differently. As he said, he felt that he was in a Kafkaesque world. It was sort of surreal. Ginni said he was physically, emotionally spent. They had to rely on their faith to get them through. I hope the viewers get to see how Thomas experienced it that way through the hearings, and then it does culminate in his very dramatic high-tech lynching speech before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Bill Walton: [22:56](#) Riveting.

Michael Pack: [22:57](#) Riveting.

Bill Walton: [22:57](#) Riveting. Although, thinking about the inquisition part one, you did provide us with comic relief.

Michael Pack: [23:06](#) I did.

Bill Walton: [23:06](#) The comic relief was Joe Biden talking about natural law.

Michael Pack: [23:09](#) Yeah. Well, Joe Biden-

Bill Walton: [23:12](#) He hasn't changed that much.

Michael Pack: [23:14](#) No. He's not changed that much, although it's interesting to see him so young. But yes, he was trying to... He got lost a little bit in the intricacies of natural law philosophy and in his effort to get Justice Thomas to say something about abortion and Roe. That's what the first hearing was about.

Michael Pack: [23:30](#) Women's groups were very mobilized. There was the fear that if Justice Thomas was on the court, they would roll back the Roe decision and the other, and abortions would be more rare, it would be harder. So they mobilized, and the senators, too, were very focused on that. The natural law thing was just a way to get around his unwillingness to discuss that issue, and you see Joe Biden get lost in that.

Bill Walton: [23:57](#) Well, it's one of the powers of documentary filmmaking. I read Justice Thomas's book and it was fabulous, but you conveyed, and I hope I'm getting at this effectively, through music and through visuals and photographs and then the CNN televised inquisition some things that you can't bring out in a book.

Michael Pack: [24:16](#) Well, that's right. I'm very pro book, too, but you get to see Justice-

Bill Walton: [24:21](#) Well, you were president of Claremont Institute.

Michael Pack: [24:23](#) That's right.

Bill Walton: [24:23](#) I guess there are a few books there. You are responsible for some written word, but-

Michael Pack: [24:28](#) Indeed. We're big believers in Plato and Aristotle and their importance, and they never made movies. But it's true, I feel in this format you see Justice Thomas's emotion. When he talks about it, you feel it with him in a way that's hard to do in a book, and you get to see the actual, in the case of the hearings, these clips from the hearings. In fact, it was very tricky to make them all blend together. It was many sources, CNN, C-SPAN a little bit, ABC, NBC. We had to use every source to get the shots and the quality that we wanted.

Bill Walton: [25:03](#) Well, Michael, thanks for being here. This has been a fascinating conversation, but as usual with me, I've taken all the time to talk about one thing. We need to talk about something else that I think would be equally interesting, which is what life is like as a conservative documentary filmmaker in today's world.

- Bill Walton: [25:22](#) Join me in the after show, where we'll be talking about what it's like to make films when you're surrounded by people from Hollywood who don't necessarily like you. You can check it out on our website, which will be posted in a couple of days. Also on the website you can learn more about Michael Pack on our Interesting People section of the site.
- Bill Walton: [25:43](#) Please give me your comments about this show, and I would also love to get your opinions about who we ought to have on and other topics that you'd be interested in. Anyway, thanks for joining, as usual, and we will see you back again.
- Speaker 2: [25:57](#) Thanks for listening. Want more? Be sure to subscribe at thebillwaltonshow.com or on iTunes.