

## OUR VIEW

## Let's Relax

A bad week for Black men, you could say. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas publishes an autobiography, "My Grandfather's Son," rehashing sexual harassment allegations that turned his high-court confirmation 16 years ago in what he called back then "a high-tech lynching." And in New York on Tuesday, a jury finds New York Knicks coach Isiah Thomas, 46, guilty of sexually harassing a former employee.

In Thomas' book, he likens himself to a modern-day Bigger Thomas of Richard Wright's novel "Native Son." Young, poor and Black, Bigger Thomas couldn't escape the pernicious racism all around him. Quoting from the text—"He felt that this [W]hite man, having helped to put him down, having helped to deform him, held him up now to look at him and be amused"—Clarence Thomas attempts to draw parallels between a fictional account and his very real, very controversial defense against sexual harassment claims. He writes: "I was being pursued not by bigots in white robes but by left-wing zealots draped in flowing sanctimony."

A winner on the basketball court—two NBA championships—Knicks coach Isiah Thomas was handed his worst-ever loss in life in justice court. A jury awarded \$11 million to former marketing executive Anucha Browne Sanders. She'd accused Thomas of insulting and harassing her. Thomas was stunned. "I want to say it as loud as I possibly can. I'm innocent. I'm very innocent, and I did not do the things she has accused me, in this courtroom, of doing. I'm extremely disappointed that the jury could not see the facts in this case. I will appeal this, and I remain confident in the man that I am and what I stand for and the family that I have"

What a confluence of negativity. Clarence Thomas' book and Isiah Thomas' guilty verdict couldn't have come at a worse time for Black America in general and Black men, in particular. Black America doesn't need any more divisiveness than already exist. Were Thomas' book a mea culpa, then it could be used foster the healing desperately needed among Black men and women. Instead he omits plenty of damning information from young, Black women around him at the time that seems to corroborate Anita Hill's allegations of sexual harassment. It's tough to give Isiah Thomas the benefit of the doubt when the evidence seems so cut and dry. Thomas admitted trying to kiss Browne Sanders in December 2005.

As cultural pundits fire away at both Thomases, let us be mindful to not add fuel to the fire, to not make problems of four people (in two different situations) our problems. Sexual harassment is a serious issue and shouldn't be demeaned. These cases mustn't become a jumping-off point to bash all Black men or, conversely, to accuse all Black women of being greedy or wanting to bring a brother down. If anything, we need to use them to open dialogue and foster better understanding between the sexes. Because Black men are stronger with Black women by their side and, vice versa.

More than ever, a strong Black nation is what we need. For it's one of the only ways we'll save Black men. Black males are under attack all over this country. In the small town of Jena, La., the lives of six young Black men aren't likely to return to normal for months, maybe years, after their legal issues are resolved. Young Black males are dying violent deaths at alarming rates in our inner cities: Philadelphia and Newark, N.J., are on record-breaking paces for homicides. Black men are the last hired and first fired on jobs. They're incarcerated for crimes other races get probation for. They go to the worst-performing schools, live in the baddest neighborhoods, die the youngest, get racially profiled the most and are seen in many cities as public nuisances. Middle-aged and adult Black men endure their own issues: corporate glass ceilings; redlining; voter disenfranchisement; disproportionately suffer from prostate cancer and sickle cell anemia; and earn less than their White counterparts.

When you think about all the issues Blacks face, the deplorable actions of two Black men (as compared to the everyday nation-building work of millions of good Brothers), suddenly it is not worth getting super angry about.



## Post-apartheid, South Africa worse

By William Reed

As South Africa emerges as a leading political and economic force, opportunities for business, trade and cultural exchanges are increasing significantly.

African-American business people, academics and tourists have flooded South Africa since Blacks "took over" the country. But a leading South African activist is in America saying that conditions for most of the South African population are worse today than under apartheid.

How African-American civil and human rights groups and elected officials, who stake their bona fides on protests and initiatives that led to Blacks running South Africa's government, will react to Mfanelo Skwatsha's tour telling American audiences that the current Black-run government has left the majority of its people worse off than under the White-run government will be interesting.

As Executive Secretary of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, South Africa, Mr. Skwatsha will be addressing a series of African People's Solidarity Day events in the U.S. and discussing the need for economic empowerment for Black South Africans.

When he was presiding bishop for the AME in South Africa, Rev. McKinley Young said "Black Americans have always wanted to



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claim they could influence world events... this is one case in which African Americans definitely played a decisive role."

African People's Solidarity Day events organizer Wendy Snyder says, "Many people around the world who supported the struggle against South Africa's apartheid system erroneously believe that since the installation of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress in 1994 conditions have improved. However, Mr. Skwatsha will show, the reality is the opposite. Many workers say life in South Africa today is worse than apartheid."

The positions of the Pan Africanist Congress and African People's Solidarity group files in the face of African Americans that equated "political empowerment" with "economic empowerment."

Post-apartheid South Africa is an illustration that political and economic processes run on different tracks.

There's been political and cultural progress in South Africa since the end of apartheid, but half the population still lives below the poverty level and wealth remains divided along color lines.

Recent years have brought vast improvements in housing, water and electricity, as well as political stability and international support, but even President Thabo Mbeki admits that South Africa is "two nations" — one mostly White and well off, and one mostly Black and poor.

Statistics from the Southern African Regional Poverty Network say that since the official end of apartheid in 1994: "households living in poverty have sunk deeper into poverty and the gap between rich and poor has widened."

Ninety-six percent of South Africa's arable farmland is still owned by Whites

and 61 percent of people live below the poverty line with more than a third subsisting on less than \$2 a day.

Hardly a rube in matters of his country, Mr. Skwatsha may be a man worth hearing. His PAC was formed when it broke away from the ANC in 1959.

It promotes "return of the land to indigenous people" and was outlawed in 1960 after the Sharpeville massacre. Its leaders were exiled or detained for long periods.

These included Robert Sobukwe, its founder and leader, who was incarcerated in Robben Island until 1969 and then placed under house arrest until his death in 1978.

The PAC was Steve Biko's party and is based on "working for true self-determination for African people and belief that Africa's colonial borders is abandoned in favor of one united Africa."

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