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# Living History Pin Point Celebrates Its Past

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*Honorable Clarence Thomas - Associate Justice, U.S. Supreme Court, and  
Dr. W. Todd Groce - President and CEO, Georgia Historical Society - revealing the marker.*



It was a beautiful morning, both outside and inside the Sweetfield of Eden Baptist Church. The white wooden interior was lit through a pair of prayerful hands on each pastel tinted window. A stream of historians, reporters, photographers and politicians filed into the quaint sanctuary, where they crowded the pews, filled the aisles and brimmed the back of the church to sit shoulder-to-shoulder with the people of Pin Point. This was the long-awaited day on which the little-known (beyond these parts) Pin Point would receive the anchor of recognition with an official historical marker.

As Pin Point's "most famous son," Clarence Thomas remarked, the place was not the site of a famous battle or home to a great book of philosophy. Rather, "Pin Point was just us, people at this level, coming and going..." The consistency and continuity in these comings and goings is remarkable in and of itself as kin communities "evaporated into progress."

Settled in 1896 by former slaves from Ossabaw, Green and Skidaway Islands, the living values of Pin Point were grounded by "the ancestors," who felt the need to own their own land and direct their own destiny. These core values of a strong work ethic, respect and a deep sense of family held fast the identity of the community, with the next generation expected to work as hard in school as their parents did toiling in shrimping, crabbing and oyster harvesting along the waterfront. Pin Point came to produce educators, welders, nurses, engineers, architects and, most notably, a Supreme Court judge. Even as these individuals sought higher education and professions a long way from home, it became clear that Pin Point has the power to pull its people back in.

"It doesn't matter how far you stray from here, you will return," Maggie Walker-Ziegler explained as we waited for the ceremony to begin. "Knowing your own history provides you with a strong foundation for where you're headed. The younger generation will learn that, even if they don't grow up here." As a member of the "middle generation," Ms. Walker-Ziegler said that despite enormous hardship, the residents of Pin Point were "rich in seafood and rich in values," adding that this day was a "rebirth for the mindset of the community," in which their sustaining values would be secured in the passage of time.

After opening remarks, musical responses and a handful of robust "amens," Dr. Todd Groce extended a welcome and congratulations on behalf of the Georgia Historical Society. Acknowledging the words of a wise man, he asked, "How will the future ever be as it ought to be if we don't tell the past as it was?" The Society has, in response, sought to tell a comprehensive story of Georgia with the privatization of historical markers, re-purposing the program to represent a greater diversity of topics and people.

As Justice Thomas and his fellow speakers reminisced over old nicknames and adventures, the picture of the tight-knit community appeared inherently private at first. Nevertheless, as the event wore on and we became familiarized with the Pin Point personality, the sense of extended family seemed to extend to everyone present. We found ourselves taking part in communal memories of experiences we'd never had, of catching minnows in cans and jars at the creek and of noting the passing planes as a lone sign of the outside world. The justice recalled his grandfather's insistence on donating spare vegetables to their neighbors because it was the right thing to do.

According to Thomas, the previous generation taught folks how to work and survive, even "when there seemed little reason to do so," demonstrating that conditions do not determine character, because dignity is, "...as we say in the courts... 'antecedent.'" In

remembrance of a community that developed "...at the edge of the water, at the edge of society and at the edge of Savannah," Thomas asked those gathered to remember the good things that they did have and to restore those values and principles at Pin Point and elsewhere.

Like "Cousin Clarence," Dr. Lamar Haynes, the regional vice president of operations at Charter College, has encountered disbelief upon stating his humble place of origin. Dr. Haynes encouraged the community to take pride in its identity and to tell the world, "Pin Point is my home. Pin Point is on the map, and it was so a long time ago. Be prepared, because this is just the beginning."

The entire assembly walked outside to witness the unveiling of the historical marker. As we looked upon the GHS banner draped over the signpost, historian Vaughnette Goode-Walker built up a sense of monument in the crowd, crying out, "Calling all the ancestors!...Do you feel them lifting up?"

She continued, "They are no longer in the ground. We can't honor ourselves if we don't honor them. Thank them for being here for us..." and suddenly the air rang with shouted names.

When silence settled over the cemetery once more, the marker was revealed and a schoolboy stepped forward to read the history of Pin Point aloud. The longer story lay about a mile ahead at the A.S. Varn & Son Factory on the water, newly restored as the innovative Pin Point Heritage Museum and site of the reception. There, over the soothing chimes of oyster shells clinking together underfoot, Dr. Groce reflected on the juxtaposition of the past and the future, as symbolized at the end of the ceremony. Perhaps in 50 years to come, the same boy will find himself urging following generations to restore Pin Point to the community he knew in his youth, when life was harder and the spirit was stronger. Regardless of what lies ahead, Pin Point has been preserved as a paragon of living heritage with the will to remember.

*The Pin Point Historical Marker was erected by the Georgia Historical Society and the Pin Point Community Betterment Association on November 19.*

