

# Opinions

## Reapportionment hearing in Catahoula By Leo Chappelle

An outfit called Strategic Demographics has, as I understand it, prepared a redistricting plan for Catahoula Parish. That plan will be unveiled for public comment at the next regular meeting of the Police Jury on April 25th, 2022, in Room 104 of the Harrisonburg Courthouse. This is no minor event. The show starts at 6:00 P.M. and the price of admission is all of the property and sales taxes you pay.

The census is a once-in-ten-years opportunity to do something fundamental with our government. Six years ago in these pages, I started talking about the need for economic development in Catahoula Parish. That plan centered on two points: smaller government and a restructured government chartered with a responsibility to seek out and enact programs leading to economic growth. The rationale behind this initial phase wasn't saving money on salaries and benefit packages with their legacy of debt. That might happen, of course, but even if we paid more but got more, it would be well worth it.

No, the real objective of the campaign was to encourage something like what the Breithaupts and former Mayor Murphy McMillin and those continuing that legacy have accomplished for LaSalle Parish. In a nation which over the last ten years has seen the population

of well over 50% of its rural counties decline, the stability of LaSalle has stood out like a city on a hill. No, they haven't grown, but they haven't declined. At this point in our nation's history, that's practically an economic miracle.

We should give credit where credit is due, of course, and Betty Gaither, for one, has been a standout performer along with the rest of the Harrisonburg Service League in consulting with experts, going after grants, maintaining a schedule of events to attract people to their community, and always looking for ways to celebrate and advertise their community's presence. They have been "community organizers", not in the political sense but in unifying themselves and establishing their brand, their identity, and their value to others.

When people like Mary Edwards were still active, Jonesville had the Balloon Festival and even Larto has put on a parade now and then.

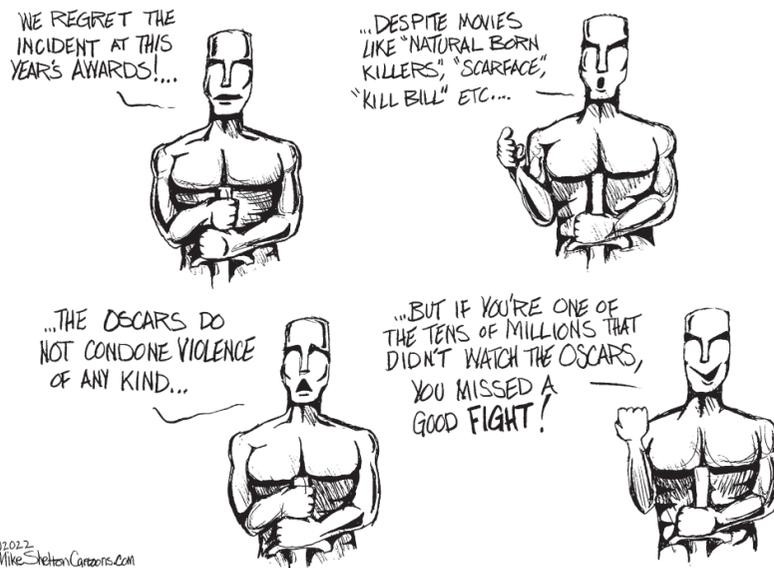
No doubt my list is incomplete, and pardon me for that, but the point is there are people who have tried. But elected leadership has political access that no community festival planner has. A government organized for efficiency and discipline and chartered with a mission to seek out resources for the facilitation of growth has been my objective.

I've explained it before, but briefly, a home

rule charter would permit our creating a government with an executive elected by the people and beholden to them for his job, not to his fellow committee members as now. The real executive of the parish in the Police Jury system is the unelected Secretary-Treasurer. That's pretty much how it is everywhere in Louisiana except in the 23 parishes with their own charter. Otherwise, the parish takes its orders from the state and the Secretary-Treasurer passes them along. As a former Secretary-Treasurer once explained it to me, their job is to keep the Police Jury out of trouble. No easy task, to be sure.

As it is, I have a high level of confidence that we will forgo this once in ten years opportunity to gain greater independence, flexibility, and focus on what matters and we will continue in Catahoula Parish as we always have. As of now, the direction in which we will continue appears to be toward decline.

It isn't that the Police Jury members aren't very decent people. Of course they are. But that's not the point. They're working in a system less flexible, less powerful, and without the essential checks and balances of an executive function and a legislative function independent from each other but accountable to the voters. A chance to change is slipping away.



## Clarence Thomas is Better Than His Critics *Durham's Righteous Investigation*

Clarence Thomas is, by far, our most abused Supreme Court justice.

His confirmation hearings in 1991 were, as he memorably put it, a high-tech lynching. Once on the Court, he was allegedly incapable of thinking for himself and was Antonin Scalia's "lawn jockey," as *Emerge* magazine shamefully put it. He rarely participated in oral arguments, supposedly because, in the words of an attorney at the Georgetown Law Center, he "either does not care about the cases or can't compete intellectually with his colleagues."

Your sensitivity meter doesn't have to be in overdrive to detect the racial condescension in these depictions of Thomas. Fair-minded legal analysts long ago abandoned this slighting view and have acknowledged the originality, consistency and influence of Thomas's work. But here come the media and the Democrats to tell us that his intellectually courageous jurisprudence is all about serving the narrow interests of his political activist wife, Ginni.

In the aftermath of the 2020 election, she sent hair-on-fire texts to then-White House chief of staff Mark Meadows urging him to fight what she believed was a stolen election. This proves, we are told, that Clarence Thomas' work on the Court is corrupt, and he either has to recuse himself from election- or Jan. 6-related cases or be impeached.

The recusal argument is absurd. Ginni Thomas wasn't party to any election-related litigation. She didn't write an amicus brief in any of the litigation. She didn't even give Meadows any legal advice, besides to keep Sidney Powell front and center (a bad idea that wasn't acted on).

Ultimately, Ginni Thomas didn't have any more or any less interest in election-related litigation than any other Republican who believed Trump's claims of fraud, and there were count-

less millions of them.

Critics of Thomas point out that he dissented when the Court turned away a meritless challenge by the state of Texas of election practices in other states. Yes, but the dissent reflected Thomas' well-considered view that the Court shouldn't summarily dismiss so-called original jurisdiction cases, and he was joined by Justice Samuel Alito, who shares his view. Both Thomas and Alito also dissented when the Court turned away a suit filed by Nebraska and Oklahoma to prevent Colorado from legalizing marijuana, and in another such case, *Arizona v. California*.

Thomas dissented, too, from the Court's rejection of Trump's emergency application to block the release of White House records regarding Jan. 6. In this, Thomas was alone. We can't know his reasoning because he didn't explain himself. Thomas has a robust view of presidential power, though, and it's not unusual for him to go his own way.

In the 2020-21 term, Thomas authored more concurrences and dissents than any other justice, including more solo concurrences and solo dissents.

As Nina Totenberg of NPR put it not too long ago, in a passage dripping with disapproval, "He is the only justice willing to allow states to establish an official religion; the only justice who believes teenagers have no free speech rights at all; the only justice who believes that it's unconstitutional to require campaign funders to disclose their identity; he's the only justice who voted to strike down a key provision of the Voting Rights Act; and the only justice to say that the court should invalidate a wide range of laws regulating business conduct and working conditions."

But we are supposed to believe that his unexplained sole dissent in the Trump records case

must be corrupt.

A while ago, the respected Supreme Court watcher Tom Goldstein wrote that if "the measure of a Justice's greatness is his contribution of new and thoughtful perspectives that enlarge the debate, then Justice Thomas is now our greatest Justice."

At the end of the day, this latest controversy won't dent Thomas' formidable reputation as a jurist, but it's another mark against his perfervid critics who have no decency or scruple.

*Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.*  
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## Catahoula News Booster

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