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December 6, 2016

Dr. David J. Skorton
Secretary of the Smithsonian
Smithsonian Institution
PO Box 37012
Washington, DC 20013-7012

Mr. Richard Kurin
Acting Provost / Under Secretary for Museums and Research
Smithsonian Institution
PO Box 37012
Washington, DC 20013-7012

Mr. Lonnie G. Bunch III
Founding Director
National Museum of African American History and Culture
PO Box 37012
Washington, DC 20013-7012

Dear Dr. Skorton, Mr. Kurin, and Mr. Bunch,

First and foremost, I write to thank and congratulate you and the entire team of individuals who helped create the awe-inspiring Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. This amazing museum is essential in telling a complete history of the unique and compelling story of the Great Experiment that is the United States of America. Since the opening, I understand that the average time a visitor spends in the museum is nearly triple the amount of time that is spent in other Smithsonian museums, which is as much a tribute to your hard work and dedication as it is to the subject matter.

This past September, I was honored to receive an invitation to preview the museum before the building's historic public opening. As I walked through the museum's entrance, I could not help but think of my late grandfather, born in 1921, and who had seen, endured, and persevered through experiences that many of us today cannot even imagine. He would have stood in wonderment and amazement at the monument to the African American story that now sits on our national mall.

I have an unending appreciation for the African American men and women who endured so much to open doors for generations that followed, without them I would not have the privilege of serving the citizens of South Carolina in the United States Senate. Walking through the museum, I experienced not only the weight of the pain and suffering of African Americans throughout the history of our country but also a sense of accomplishment, pride, hope and optimism. African Americans have forever touched the landscape of American history with

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historic contributions that have enriched our culture, expanded our intellect, and advanced opportunity for people around the world.

In the spirit of your efforts to build a living history, I am writing to you today in regards to an important piece of our history I believe has been overlooked. I was saddened and extremely disappointed to learn that the museum excluded the celebration of one of the nation's most influential African Americans and preeminent legal minds, and the second-ever African American to serve on the United States Supreme Court, Associate Justice Clarence Thomas.

While Justice Thomas and I do not share the same keen mastery of constitutional law, I can identify to some degree, with some of the inherent stereotypes and personal obstacles that Justice Thomas overcame to reach the pinnacle of his profession. I can attest that, similar to Justice Thomas, as an African American man growing up in the abject poverty of the Deep South, without the full arsenal of a nuclear family, and having struggled early on in school, options for my success seemed limited and role models or mentors were hard to find.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture has an exhibition specifically entitled "Making A Way Out of No Way," which seeks to explore "themes of agency, creativity, and resilience through personal stories of African Americans who challenged racial oppression and discrimination and created ways out of "no way." I cannot think of a more appropriate African American figure to encapsulate the "Making A Way Out of No Way" mantra than Justice Thomas and the impossible socioeconomic obstacles and bigoted hurdles that he has overcome and continues to battle.

With those thoughts in mind, I respectfully request that the Smithsonian strongly reconsider the omission of Justice Thomas' significant legacy in the National Museum of African American History and Culture and take the appropriate steps to include a more comprehensive account of his legacy to African American history. I sincerely hope that a museum that has done so much right in telling the history of African Americans will not deny generations of Americans the privilege of experiencing Justice Thomas's incredible and inspirational story.

Sincerely,



Tim Scott
U.S. Senator