



"Friday on the Potomac"

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"Friday on the Potomac"

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Racism infantilizes whites
(their judgment and
expectations)

Clarence played to this
child^{ish} ~~the~~ ^{new} by talking
to white men as tho' they

were children - evasive
Smiling ~~when~~ manipulative when
they were "nice" or "polite" - name-calling
+ and attacking when they were out of control
Anita spoke as tho' they

were adult - capable
of reasoning, ~~and~~ making
distinctions, selecting ~~and~~
ferreter pertinent facts and
drawing conclusions.

Language of bl. to whites
is frequently the patronizing
language of adults with
low expectations to (not by)
children

Clairing - shadowed self?
love & contempt?

Merry
Childlike quality ascribed
to blacks - legendary in
literature and social
discourse - Competes
with sullen violent
untrustworthy image.

But it seems to me that
blacks in lit. as the

the whites were children.

Jim	at best	instructive and
Till		teacherly
Bugs (Hemingway)	usually	evasive
(? doctor) Bellon		patronizing
		dismissive

Al's responses (shaped by
"handlers" and
advisors -
adhering to an agenda
designed to be successful)

are bracketed by deference (Senator Sir etc)
and framed by the spectacle of a black man

sitting below a panel of ^{powerful} white men
looking up and ~~toward~~ to them.

The content is ^{cloaked in} the sham of
a dismissive parent
repeating an effective
fairy tale

denying real knowledge
(of a fictitious Santa)
of how complex and
dangerous the world is

at the Senator never behaved as the
they were speaking to a peer
~~Cl. never~~ ^{neither} did Cl.

The low level of exchange
^{can} ~~may~~ be attributed to both panel
and candidate's sense of the
other's incompetence and culpability.

~~The intensity of these responses to the hearing, as well as~~

The intensity as well as the volume of these responses to the hearings were caused by more than the volatile content of the proceedings. The emptiness, ~~the chaos,~~ the unforthcoming ^{truths} ~~truths~~ that lay at the center of the state's performance contributed much to the frenzy as people grappled for meaning, for substance unavailable through ordinary channels. Michael Rustin has described race as "both an empty category and one of the most destructive and powerful forms of social categorization." This paradox of a powerfully destructive emptiness can be used to illustrate the ^{source} ~~source~~ of the confusion, the murk, the sense of helpless rage that accompanied the confirmation process.

insert 3d

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Robert F. Goheen Professor

(CT)

Friday on the Potomac

(AN)

Toni Morrison

"I have never asked to be nominated. . . . Mr. Chairman,
I am a victim of this process." Friday, October 11, 1991.

1 Clarence Thomas

#

EPIGRAPH

"It would have been more comfortable to remain
silent. . . . I took no initiative to inform anyone. . . . I
could not keep silent." Friday, October 11, 1991. Anita
Hill

1 Anita Hill, Friday, October 11, 1991

#

"At last he lays his head flat upon the ground, close to
my foot, and sets my other foot upon his head, as he had
done before; and after this, made all the signs to me
of subjugation, servitude, and submission imaginable, to
let me know how he would serve me as long as he lived."

1 Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe

Clusters of black people pray in front of the White
House for the Lord not to abandon them, to intervene and

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pp. 3a
through 3h
follow

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crush the forces that would prevent a black nominee to the Supreme Court from assuming the seat felt by them to be reserved for a member of the race. Other groups of blacks stare at the television set, revolted by the President's nomination of the one candidate they believed obviously unfit to adjudicate legal and policy matters concerning them. Everyone interested in the outcome of this nomination, regardless of race, class, gender, religion, or profession, turns to as many forms of media as are available. They read the Washington Post for verification of their dread or their hope, read The New York Times as though it were Pravda, searching between the lines of the official story for one that most nearly approximates what might really be happening. They read local papers to see if the response among their neighbors is similar to their own, or they try to figure out on what information their own response should be based. They have listened to newscasters and anchor people for the bits and ⁱ~~b~~ytes that pointed to, or deflected attention from, the machinery of campaigns to reject or accept the nominee. They have watched television screens that seem to watch back, that dismiss viewers or call upon them for flavor, reenforcement, or routine dissent. Polls assure and shock, gratify and discredit those who took them into serious account.

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only to do
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computers.

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But most of all, people talked to one another. There are passionate, sometimes acrimonious discussions between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, siblings, friends, acquaintances, colleagues with whom, now, there is reason to ^{accept} ~~embrace~~ into or to expel from their close circle. Sophisticated legal debates merged with locker-room guffaws; poised exchanges about the ethics and moral responsibilities of governance are debauched by cold indifference to individual claims and private vulnerabilities. Organizations and individuals call senators and urge friends to do the same ^{and} providing opinions, information, threatening, cajoling, explaining positions, or simply saying confirm! reject! vote yes vote no.

These were some of the scenes stirred up by the debates leading to the confirmation of Clarence Thomas, the revelations and evasions within the testimony, and by the irrevocable mark placed on those hearings by Anita Hill's accusations against the nominee. The points of the vector were all the plateaus of power and powerlessness: white men, black men, black women, white women, interracial couples; those with a traditionally conservative agenda, and those representing neo-conservative conversions; citizens with radical and progressive programs; the full specter of the "pro" f

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— ok? to
avoid
"embrace into."

Or

"welcome into"?

(3b)

(3b) Au:

"Debauched" —
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Or

"debased."

(There seems to
me a conflict
in "debauched"
+ "cold indifference.")

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antagonists ("choice" and "life"); there were the public^{ally} elected, the self-elected[^] the racial supremacists, the racial egalitarians[^] and nationalists of every stripe.

+ TK

It became clear, finally, what took place: a black male nominee to the Supreme Court was confirmed amidst a controversy that raised and buried issues of profound ^{social} national significance.

What is less clear is what happened, how it happened, why it happened; what implications may be drawn, what consequences may follow. For what was at stake during these hearings was history[^] ~~not its end, but its new beginning~~. In addition to what was taking place, something was happening. And as is almost always the case, the site of the exorcism of critical national issues was situated in the miasma of black life and inscribed on the bodies of black people.

It was to evaluate and analyze various aspects of what was and is happening that this collection suggested itself. The urgency of this project, an urgency that was overwhelming in November of 1991 when it began, is no less so now in 1992. For a number of reasons the consequences of not gathering the thoughts, the insights, the analyses of academics in a variety of disciplines would be too dire. The events surrounding the

A

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confirmation could be closed, left to the disappearing act that frequently follows the summing^u up process typical of visual and print media. the seismic reactions of women and men in the workplace, in organizations and institutions, could be calmed and a return to "business as usual" made effortless. While the public, deeply concerned with the issues raised by the confirmation, waited for the ultimate historical account or some other text representing the "last word," there might not be available to it a more immediate aid to the reflective sorting out ^{that} subsequent and recent events would demand. Furthermore, the advancing ~~seige~~ upon American universities, launched by fears of "relevance" and change, has fostered an impression and atmosphere of scholarly paralysis, censorship, and intimidation. Yet residing in the academic institutions of the country are not only some of the most knowledgeable citizens, but also those most able to respond quickly with contextualized and intellectually focussed insights. And insight from a range of views and disciplines seemed to us in low supply.

For insight into the complicated and complicating events that the confirmation of Clarence Thomas became, one needs perspective, not attitudes; context, not anecdotes; analyses, not postures. For any kind of

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lasting illumination the focus must be on the history routinely ignored or played down or unknown. For the kind of insight that invites reflection, language must be critiqued. Frustrating language, devious calls to arms, and ancient inflammatory codes deployed to do their weary work of obfuscation, short circuiting, evasion, and distortion. The timeless and timely narratives upon which expressive language rests, narratives so ingrained and pervasive they seem inextricable from "reality," require identification. To begin to comprehend exactly what happened, it is important to distinguish between the veneer of interrogatory discourse and its substance; to remain skeptical of topics (such as ^{whether the "system" is} ~~a "working" or~~ ^{"working"} ~~which pretend that the restoration of order lies in the~~ ^{question} ~~"workable" system~~; to be wary of pontifical discussions on the effectiveness or defect of the "process" because content, volatile and uncontextualized, can not be approached, let alone adequately discussed, in sixteen minutes or five hundred words or less. To inaugurate any discovery of what happened is to be conscious of the smooth syrup-like and glistening oil poured daily to keep the machine ^{to} state from screeching too loudly or breaking down entirely as it turns the earth of its own rut, digging itself deeper and deeper into the foundation of private life, burying itself for invisibility, for protection, for secrecy. To know what took place

Narrow

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summary is enough. To learn what happened requires multiple points of address and analysis.

Nowhere, remarked ^{an} historian, nowhere in the debate before and during the confirmation hearings was ^{there} ~~any~~ mention or ^{even the implied} ~~the~~ idea of the public good. How could ^{there} ~~it~~ be when the word "public" had itself become bankrupt, suffering guilt by association with the word "special" ^{with} ~~and~~ "special interest" proved. How could the notion of union, nation, or state surface when race, ~~and~~ gender, and class, separately, paired, matched, and mismatched, collapsed in a heap or swinging a divisive sword, dominated every moment and word of the confirmation process?

For example, the nominee ^{chosen} ~~said~~ ^{without regard to} ~~irrespective of race~~ ^{the president} was introduced by his sponsor with a reference to the nominee's laugh. It was, said Senator Danforth, second in his list of "the most fundamental points" about Clarence Thomas. "He is his own person. that is my first point. Second, he laughs. [laughter]" To some, this may seem a trivial matter. ^{to me, it's} important because laughter is the antidote to that dread disease, federalitis. The obvious strategy of interest groups trying to defeat a Supreme Court nominee is to suggest that there is something weird about the individual. I concede that there is something weird

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about Clarence Thomas. It's his laugh. It is the loudest laugh I have ever heard. It comes from deep inside, and it shakes his body. And here is something at least as weird in this most up-tight of cities: the object of his laughter is most often himself."

Weird? Not at all. Neither the laugh nor Danforth's reference to it. Every black person who heard those words understood. How necessary, how reassuring were both the grin and its being summoned for display. It is the laughter, the chuckle, that invites and precedes any discussion of association with a black person. For whites who require it, it is the gesture of accomodation and obedience needed to open discussion with a black person and certainly to continue it. The ethnic joke is one formulation ~~of~~ the obligatory recognition of race and possible equanimity in the face of it. But in the more polite halls of the Senate, the laugh will do, the willingness to laugh, its power as a sign takes the place of the high sign of perfect understanding. It is difficult to imagine a sponsor introducing Robert Bork or William Gates ^{or} ~~and~~ that happy exception ^{Thurgood} Marshall) with a call to this most clearly understood metonym for racial accomodation. Not simply because they may or may not have had a loud, infectious laugh, but because it would have been ~~patently~~ inappropriate,

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irrelevant, puzzling to do so.

But what was inappropriate, even startlingly salacious in other circumstances became the habitual text^e with this candidate. The New York Times found it interesting to include in that paper's initial story on the president's nominee a curious spotlight on his body. Weight^g lifting was among his accomplishments, said the Times, presciently, perhaps, since ^{later on} the candidate's body came violently into view. Of course, this may be simply a news account that aims to present an attractive image of a man about to step on^{to} a national stage, yet a reference to a black person's body is de rigueur in white discourse. ^{Like the unswerving focus on the female body} ~~the black woman (whether she is a judge, actress, a scholar, or a waitress) is beautiful, large, sensual, or well-dressed or not well-dressed or colorful or warm;~~ the black man's body is ~~equally~~ dwelled upon with what often seems to be ~~unprecedented~~ voluptuousness in biographies about them, journalism on them, remarks about them. "I wanted to find out," said Senator Pete Domenici, "as best I could what his life^m from outhouse to the White House^{in print} has been like." With ^{vulgar} ~~printed~~ remarks like that, why wouldn't the public's initial view of this black nominee have an otherwise puzzling, even silly, reference to body^d building? Other erstwhile oddities rippled through the media, glancing and stroking

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black flesh. President Bush probably felt he was being friendly, charmingly informal, when he invited this black man into his bedroom for the interview. "That is where Mr. Bush made the final offer and Judge Thomas accepted." To make Thomas feel at home was more important than to respect him, apparently, and the Times agreed, selecting this tidbit to report in an article that ended with a second tantalizing, not so veiled reference to the nominee's body. When asked by reporters whether he expected to play golf, "one of Mr. Bush's favorite sports," Thomas replied, "No. The ball's too small." Thomas's answer is familiar but nuanced; the emphasis gained by the remark's position in the piece is familiar too. What would have been extraordinary would have been to ignore Thomas's body, for in ignoring it, the articles would have had to discuss in some detail that aspect of him more difficult to appraise his mind. + TIK

In a society ^{with a history of trying} ~~determined~~ to accomodate both slavery and freedom, ^{and a present that wishes} ~~to both~~ exploit and deny ^{the} ~~its~~ pervasiveness ^{of racism,}

black people are rarely individualized. Even when his supporters were extolling the fierce independence and the "his own man" line about Clarence Thomas, ^{their} ~~the~~ block and blocked thinking of racial stereotype prevailed. Without individuation, without non-racial perception, black people, as a group, are used to signify the polar

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opposites of love and repulsion. On the one hand, they signify benevolence, harmless and servile guardianship, and endless love. On the other hand, they have come to represent insanity, illicit sexuality and chaos. In the confirmation hearings the two fictions were at war and on display. They are interchangeable fictions from a utilitarian menu^s and can be mixed^{and} matched to suit any racial palette. Furthermore, they do not need logical transition from one set of associations to another. Like Captain Delano in Benito Cereno, the racist thinker can jump from the view of the slave, Babo, as "naturally docile, made for servitude" to "savage cannibal" without any gesture toward what may lie in between the two conclusions, or any explanation of the jump from puppy to monster, so the truth of Babo's situation^m—that he is leading a surreptitious rebellion aboard the slave ship, that he is a clever man who wants to be free^m—never enters the equation. The confirmation hearings, as it turned out, had two black persons to use to nourish these fictions. Thus, the candidate was cloaked in the garments of loyalty, guardianship, and (remember the laugh) limitless love. Love of god via his Catholic school, of servitude via a ^{Marian} disciplinist patriarchal grandfather, of loyalty to party via^a his accumulated speeches and the trophies of "America" on his office walls. The

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interrogator, therefore, the accusing witness Anita Hill⁰ was dressed in the oppositional costume of madness, anarchic sexuality, and explosive verbal violence. There seemed to be no other explanation for her testimony. Even Clarence Thomas was at a loss to explain not her charges but why she would make them. All he could come up with is speculation on Professor Hill's dislike of "lighter-complexioned" women¹ meaning his marriage to a white woman⁰ one gathers². No other narrative context could be found for her charges, no motive except ~~wanton~~ fantasy, ~~and perhaps even meanness~~ ^a ~~or jealousy~~ ^{that destabilized her}. Since neither the press nor the Senate Committee would entertain seriously or exhaustively the truth of her accusations, she could be called any number or pair of discrediting terms and the contradictions would never be called into question, because, as a black woman, she was contradiction itself, irrationality in the flesh. She was ^{portrayed as} a lesbian who hated men and a vamp who could be ensnared and painfully rejected by them. She was a mixture heretofore not recognized ⁱⁿ ^{glossary} on the ~~menu~~ of racial tropes: an intellectual daughter of black farmers; a black female taking offense; a black lady repeating dirty words. ^{Anita Hill's description} ~~It was she who~~ ^{racial} ignited the exchange, ~~the rematch~~ ^{the nominees} of tropes, for the ~~nominee~~. Now it was he who was in danger of moving from "natural servant" to "savage demon" and the force of the

wanton
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balance of the confirmation process was to re^oorder these signifying fictions. Is he lying or is she? Is he the benevolent one and she the insane one? Or is he the date raper, sexual assaulter, the illicit sexual signal, and she the docile, loyal servant? Those two major fictions, either/or, were blasted and tilted by a factual thing masquerading as a true thing: Lynching^o, being both a fact of white history and black life, ^{lynching} is also the metaphor of itself. While the mythologies^o about black person^ea debauched the confirmation process for all time, the history of black life was appropriated to elevate it.

An accusation of such weight as sexual misconduct would probably have disqualified a white candidate on its face. Rather than any need for "proof," the slightest possibility that it was public^oly verifiable would have nullified the candidacy, forced the committee members to insist on another^{nominee} rather than entertain the necessity for public debate on so loathsome a charge. But in a racialized and race-conscious society, standards are changed, facts marginalized, repressed, ^{and} the willingness to air such charges, to actually debate them, ~~their accuracy or falsehood~~ outweighed the seemliness of a ^{Substantive} ~~significant~~ hearing because the actors were black. Rather

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than claiming how certain feminist interests forced the confrontation, rather than editorializing about ~~how~~ ~~humiliated and~~ how reluctant the Committee members were ^{to} ~~in~~ ^e investigating Anita Hill's charges publicly, ^{and how humiliated they were in doing so} it seems blazingly clear that with this unprecedented opportunity to hover over and to cluck at, to meditate and ponder the limits and excessive^{es} of black bodies, no other strategies were going to be entertained. There would be no recommendation of withdrawal by sponsor, president, senators, or anybody. No request for or insistance^e that the executive branch propose another name so that such volatile issues could be taken up in a forum more suitable to their airing, and possible^y receive an open and just decision. No. The participants were black, so what could it matter? The participants were black and therefore "known," servicable^e, expendable in the interests of limning out one or the other of two mutually^a antagonistic fabulations. Under the pressure of voyeuristic desire, fueled by mythologies that render blacks publically^e servicable instruments of private dread^a and longing, extraordinary behavior on the part of the state could take place. Anita Hill's witnesses, credible and persuasive as they were, could be dismissed, as one "reporter" said, apparently without shame, because they were too intellectual to be believed. (!) Under the

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pressure of racist mythologies, loyal staff (all female) had more weight than disinterested observers or publically available documentation. Under such pressure the chairman of the Committee could apply criminal court procedure to a confirmation hearing and assure the candidate that the assumption of innocence lay with the nominee. As though innocence¹/_M rather than malfeasance or ethical character or fitness to serve¹/_M was the charge against which they struggled to judge the Judge. As though a rhetorical

"I am not a crook" had anything at all to do with the heavy responsibility the committee was under.

Would such accusations have elicited such outsize defense mechanisms if the candidate had been white? Would the Committee and many interest groups have considered the suitability of a white candidate untainted by these accusations? Hardly, but with a black candidate, already stained by the figurations of blackness as sexual aggressiveness or rapaciousness or impotence, the stain need only be proved reasonably doubted, which is to say, if he is black, how can you tell if that really is a stain? Which is also to say, blackness is itself a stain, and therefore unstainable. Which is also to say, if he is black and about to ascend to the Supreme Court bench, if the bench is to become

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stain-free, this newest judge must be bleached, race-free, as his speeches and opinions illustrated. Allegations of sexual misconduct ~~re~~^{ref}aced him, which, in this administration, meant, ~~re~~^{re}stained him, dirtied him. Therefore the "dirt" that clung to him following those allegations, "dirt" he spoke repeatedly of must be shown to have originated elsewhere. In this case, the search for the racial stain turned on Anita Hill. Her character. Her motives. Not his.

Clarence Thomas has gone through the nomination process before, and in that connection ^{has} been investigated by the FBI before. Nothing is not known about him. And the senators know that nothing about him is not known. But what is known and what is useful to be distributed as knowledge are different things. ^{In these hearings} ~~But~~ data, not to mention knowledge, ~~have~~ ^{deliberations} had no place in these ~~deliberations~~. The ~~hearings~~ became a contest and the point was to win. At stake was always a court: stacked or balanced; ^{ir}reproachable in its ethical and judicial standards or malleable and compliant in its political agenda; alert to and mindful of the real lives most of us live, as these lives are measured by the good of the republic, or a court that is aloof, delusional, indifferent to any mandate, popular or unpopular, if it is not first vetted by the Executive branch.

pp. 4a
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4a

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The capacity to delude oneself into thinking one is fit to serve or to shape the public is bottomless. Perhaps it should be ¹/_m bottomless, that is, For desire elides quickly into deserve.

#

As in virtually all of ^{this} the nation's great debates, non-whites and women figure powerfully, although their ~~literal bodily~~ ^{disguised} presence may be ~~obliterated~~ ^{obliterated}, denied or ~~unremarked~~ ^{and}. So it is perhaps predictable that this instance ¹/_m where serious issues of male prerogative ^{and} sexual assault [^] the issues of racial justice and racial redress [^] the problematics of governing and controlling women's bodies [^] the alterations of work space into (sexually) domesticated space ¹/_m be subsumed into the debate over the candidacy for the Supreme Court. That these issues be worked out, on [^] and inscribed upon the canvas/flesh of black people should come as no surprise to anyone.

SET
SOLIDUS

The contempt emanating from the White House was palpable ¹/_m it was not necessary for the candidate to be a first-rate legal scholar [^] (as it had not been necessary for other candidates). Nor was it necessary that he have demonstrated a particular sensitivity ^{to} ~~for~~ the issues and concerns of a race he belonged to but which "had no bearing" on his selection to fill a seat vacated by the

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single Supreme Court Justice who both belonged to and did represent the interests of that race. The "race" that "had no bearing" on the ~~President's~~ choice, could nevertheless be counted on to support the nominee since "skin voting" would overwhelm every other consideration. This riskless gamble held almost perfect sway. Many blacks were struck mute by the embarrassing position of agreeing with Klansmen and their sympathizers; others leaped to the defense of the candidate on the grounds that he was "no worse than ~~x~~" or that any white candidate would be a throwback that "who knows what he might do or become in those hallowed halls?" Who knows? [Well, his nominators did know, and they were correct, as even the earliest action Clarence Thomas has taken in the cases coming before the court confirm.

Appropriate also was the small secret swearing-in ceremony once the candidate was confirmed. For secrecy had operated from the beginning. Not only the dismissed and suppressed charges against the candidate, but also ~~[add]. And underneath these topside secrets were deeper~~ more ancient ^{secrets} ~~ones~~ of males bonding and the demonizing of females who contradict them.

In addition to race, class surfaced in both predictable and unexpected ways. Predictably the nominee was required to shuck: to convince white men in power

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that ~~operating~~ a trucking business was lowly work in a Georgia where most blacks would have blessed dirt for such work. It wasn't a hard shuck. Because race and class, ^{that is,} black equals poor, ^{is a} ⁿ equation that functions usefully if unexamined, it is possible to advance exclusionary and elitist programs by the careful use of race as class. It is still possible to cash in on black victim^{hood}, ^(the pain of being a poor black innocent boy) ^{to articulate victimness} (Thomas called himself a victim of a process he of all people knew was designed to examine a candidate's worth), and to deplore the practice in others all at the same time. It is still possible to say "my father was a doorman" (meaning servant, ^{meaning poor}) and get the sympathy of whites who can not or will not do the arithmetic needed to know the difference between ^{the earnings of} ~~what~~ a Washington, D.C. doorman ~~earns~~ ^{those of} and a clerk at the census bureau.

claim
victim
status

In addition to class transformations, there was on display ^a race transcendence. The nominee could be understood as having realized his yearning for and commitment to "racelessness" by having a white spouse at his side. At least their love, we are encouraged to conclude, had transcended race, and this matrimonial ~~conjugal~~ ^{love} had been more than ~~ecstasy~~ ^{and} companionship¹—it had been for Virginia Thomas an

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important education on how to feel and think about black people. The People Magazine lead story, taken with a straight face, proved their devotion, their racelessness, which we already recognized because he shook her hand in public on three occasions. And it was ^{envy of} this racially ideal union that was one of the reasons Thomas came up with in trying to explain Anita Hill's charges. Professor Hill, he seem^ed to be suggesting, harbored reactionary, race-bound opinions about interracial love which, as everybody knows, can drive a black woman insane and cause her to say wild, incredible things. ^{Expectedly} ~~Predictably too~~, the nominee called for a transcendence of race, remarked ^epeatedly on its divisive nature, its costliness, its undeniable degradation of principles of freedom. Unexpectedly, however, ~~and~~ ^d race surface^d on the very site of its interment. And it was hard not to murmur "Freddy's back¹" as the spectre² of this living corpse broke free of its hastily dug grave. But this resurrection was bouyed and winged by the fact of its gender component. If the forward face of the not-dead was racism, its ^{other} backward face was sexism.

#

Insert

On a Friday, Anita Hill articulated graphically points in her accusation of sexual misconduct. On the same Friday Clarence Thomas answered, in a manner of

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speaking, these charges. ~~It was a momentous day of that week, and could easily turn one's attention to another Friday. Momentous also for~~ ^{it was} Friday in 1709 when Alexander Selkirk found an "almost drowned Indian" on the shore of an island upon which he had been shipwrecked. Ten years later Selkirk's story ^{would} ~~will~~ be immortalized by Daniel Defoe in Robinson Crusoe. There the Indian becomes a "savage cannibal," ¹/_m black, barbarous, stupid, servile, adoring ¹/_m and ¹/_m although nothing is reported of his sexual behavior, he has an acquired taste for the flesh of his own species. Crusoe's narrative is a success story, one in which a socially, culturally, and biologically handicapped black man is civilized and Christianized ¹/_m taught, in other words, to be like a white one. From Friday's point of view it is a success story as well ¹/_m. Not only is he alive; he is greatly enabled by his association with his savior. And it should not go unremarked ~~upon~~ that Crusoe is also greatly enabled ¹/_m including having his own life saved ¹/_m by Friday. Yet, like all successes, what is earned is mitigated by what one has lost.

If we look at the story from Friday's point of view, ¹/_m rather than Crusoe's, it becomes clear that Friday had a very complex problem. By sheer luck he had escaped death, annihilation, anonymity and engulfment by enemies

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within his own culture. By great and astonishing good fortune he had been rescued. The gift of his own life was so unexpected, so welcome, he felt he could regulate the debt only by offering that life to his rescuer, by making the gift exchange literal. But he had a problem.

Before he appeared on the shore, his rescuer, Crusoe, had heard no other voice except a parrot's trained to say his owner's name, ⁱⁿ Robin, for short. Crusoe wanted to hear it again. For over twenty years he had had only himself for company, and although he has conquered nature and marked time, no human calls his name, acknowledges his presence or his authority. Lucky for him he discovers a refugee escaping certain slaughter. Once rescue has been effected, Crusoe is in a position to have ^{more than unopposed} ~~status as well as~~ dominion; ^{Now he is} ~~Both are~~ ^{able to acquire} ~~important~~ ^{status in Crusoe's self regard} ~~so~~ he does not ask the refugee what his name is; instead, Crusoe names him. ^{So} ~~^~~ Nor does he tell the refugee his own name; instead he teaches him the three words that for months will do just fine: "master," "yes," and "no."

Friday's real problem, however, was not to learn the language of repetition, easily, like the parrot, but to learn to internalize it. For longer than necessary the first words he is taught, first "Master," then "yes" or "no," remain all he is permitted to say. During the time in

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which he knows no other English, one has to assume he ^{thinks} ~~thought~~ in his own language, cogitated^s in it, explained^s stimuli and phenomena in the language he was born ~~into~~. But Crusoe's account suggests otherwise, suggests that before his rescue Friday had no language and even if he did, there was nothing to say in it. After a year Friday is taught some English vocabulary and the grammar to hold it. "This was the pleasantest year of all the life I led in this place; Friday began to talk pretty well, and understand the names of almost everything I had occasion to call for, and of every place I had to send him to, and talked a great deal to me. .|.|.."

Had he expected that the life he offered Crusoe would include not just his services, his loyalty, his devotion, but also his language as well? Did he ever wonder why Crusoe did not want to learn his language? Or why he could never speak his master's name? In the absence of his master's desire ^{to speak his tongue} ~~did he~~ ^{Friday} forget completely the language he dreamed in? Think no more of the home he fled before the weapons of those who had conquere^ed and occupied it? On the two or three occasions when Crusoe is curious enough to ask Friday a question about the black man's feelings, the answers are surprising. Yes, he longs for his home. Yes, it is beautiful on his island. Yes, he will refrain from eating human flesh.

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Yes if he has the opportunity, he will teach his tribe to eat bread, cattle and milk instead. But no, he will not return to his home alone; he will go only if Crusoe accompanies him. (If Crusoe's assumption that Friday's people eat only each other were true, the practice would have decimated them long ago, but no matter the white man teaches food habits; the black man learns them.) So far, Friday can be understood to engage in dialogue with his master, however limited. Eventually, he learns more: he moves from speaking with to thinking as Crusoe.

The problem of internalizing the master's tongue is the problem of the rescued. Unlike the problems of survivors who may be lucky, fated, etc, the rescued have the problem of debt. If the rescuer gives you back your life, he shares in that life. But, as in Friday's case, if the rescuer saves your life by taking you away from the dangers, the complications, the confusion of home, he may very well expect the debt to be paid in full. Not, "go your own way and sin no more" Not, "here, take this boat and find your own adventure in or out of your own tribe." But full payment, forever. Because the rescuer wants to hear his name, not mimicked but adored. This is a serious problem for Friday and gets more complicated the ~~longer~~ ^{more} one thinks about it.

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culture that threatened him, that wants to kill and engulf him, but also from the culture that loves him. That too, ^J he has left behind forever.

Even when he discovers his own father, ~~half~~^{half}-dead, in precisely the danger he himself had been in when Crusoe saved his life, his joy is not so reckless as to quarrel with the menial labor he and his father are directed to do, while an also-rescued Spaniard, who has lived among Friday's tribe for years, is given supervisory responsibilities. ~~Not~~^{Not} is his joy so great ^a that he speaks to his father in their mutual tongue for both ^R their delight. Instead, he translates for Crusoe what his father says.

This loss of ^{the} mother tongue seems not to disturb Friday, even though he never completely learns the master's. He negotiates a space somewhere in between. He develops a ^eservicable grammar that will never be eloquent; he learns to shout warning^s of advancing, also black ^eenemies, but he can never ^eda^r speak to these enemies as his master does. Without a mother tongue, without the language of his original culture, all he can do is recognize his old enemies and, when ordered, kill them. Finally, Friday no longer negotiates space between his own language and Crusoe's. Finally, the uses of Crusoe's language, if not its grammar, become his own. The

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In one of the incidents that occur on the island, a band of Spanish mutineers come ashore, holding their captain prisoner. Crusoe and Friday liberate ^{the captain} him, and consider how to dispose of the criminals. ^{some of the} mutineers are singled out by their captain as villains; others are identified as being forced into mutiny. So some are spared, others slaughtered. This discrimination is never applied to Friday's people. With one exception, an old man tied and bound for execution, all of the blacks Friday and Crusoe see are killed or wounded (most of whom, in Crusoe's tallying of the dead, Friday kills). The exception, who turns out to be Friday's father, is not given a name nor, as with his son Friday, is one solicited from him. He becomes part of Crusoe's team, called upon and relied on for all kinds of service. He is sent on an errand, back to his island with the Spaniard. The Spaniard returns, Friday's father does not, but most curiously, once his services are no longer needed, there is no mention of him again ^{by} the master or the son. While he was among them, and after he has gone, he is called by Robinson Crusoe "the old savage." We still do not know his name.

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satisfactions to mitigate the problems that may ensue. But being rescued into ~~another~~ adversarial culture can carry a huge debt. ^{the} debt one feels one owes to the rescuer can be paid, simply, honorably, in lifetime service. But if in that transaction the rescued loses his idiom, the language of his culture, there may be other debts outstanding. Leon Higginbotham has charted the debt Clarence Thomas owes ^{to} the culture ^{that} fought for and protected him before he arrived out of a turbulent social sea on to the shore of political patronage. In that sea Thomas was teased and humiliated by his own people, called ABC, American's Blackest Child. He was chastened for wanting an education superior to theirs. He was also loved and nurtured by them. As in any and everybody's background, family, culture, race, ^{and} region, there are persecutors and providers ^{of} kindness and loathing. No culture every quite measures up to our expectations of it without a generous dose of romanticism, self-delusion, or simple compassion. Sometimes it seems easier, emotionally and professionally, to deny it, ignore it, erase it, even destroy it. And if the language of one's culture is lost or surrendered, ^{or one may be forced} ~~it is easy~~ to describe that culture in the ^{language} ~~terms~~ of the rescuing one, to dismiss ~~it~~ by substituting the phrase "culture of the victim" for the critique and

African-American culture

Ans:

— Please clarify
these lines
and the one
following.

(4k)

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 redress of systemic racism, ^{MINUS ONE'S OWN idiom} to cry and decry
 victimization, loathing it when it appears in the
 discourses of one's own people, but summoning it up for
 one's expediently de-racialized self. It becomes easy
 to confuse the metaphors embedded in the blood language
 of one's own culture with the objects they stand for and to
 call patronizing, coddling, undemanding, rescuing,
 complicitous white racists a lynch mob. Under such
 circumstances, it is not just easy to speak the master's
 language, it is necessary. One is obliged to cooperate
 in the mis-use of figurative language, ^{IN} the re-enforcement
 of cliché, the ^{erasure} of difference, the jargon of
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 vandalizing, sentimentalizing and trivializing ^{ation} of the
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Both Friday and Clarence Thomas accompany their
 rescuers into the world of power and salvation. But the
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 mimic, then to internalize and adore, but never to utter
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Ans:

— Please
clarify.

OK (?)

(42)

Ans:

— There is
no referent
for "they."

(42)

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#

Clarence Thomas once quoted someone who said that dwelling on the horrors of racism invited one of two choices: vengeance or prosperity. He argued for a third choice: "to appeal to that which is good." He did not elaborate on which he had chosen, finally, but the language he speaks, the actions he takes, the Supreme Court decisions he has made ^{or} ~~of~~ aligned himself with, the foot, as it were, that he has picked up and placed on his head give us some indication of what his choice has been. The footprint in the sand that so worried Crusoe's nights, that compelled him to build a fortress, and then another to protect his new world order, disappears from his nightmares once Friday embraces then internat^lizes his master's voice and can follow the master's agenda with passion.

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It is hard not to think of these events in any way but as unfortunate. And it is difficult to convince anybody that what happened is over ⁱⁿ without serious consequences. For those who looked forward eagerly to Thomas's confirmation, the expectation of a reliably conservative court may be reassuring. Time will have the most to say about that. For those who believe the

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future of the nation as a democracy is imperiled by this most recent addition to the bench, again, time will speak rather definitively. Yet, regardless of political alliances, something positive and liberating has already surfaced. In matters of race and gender, it is now possible and necessary, as it seemed never to have been before, to speak about these matters without the barriers, the silences, the embarrassing gaps in discourse. It is clear to the most reductionist intellect that black people think differently from one another; it is also clear that the time for undiscriminating racial unity has passed. A conversation, a serious exchange between black men and women has begun in a new arena, and the contestants defy the mold. Nor is it as easy as it used to be to split along racial lines as the alliances and coalitions between white and black women, and the conflicts among black women, and among black men, during the intense debates regarding Anita Hill's testimony against Clarence Thomas's appointment prove.

This volume is one of the several beginnings of these new conversations in which issues and arguments are taken as seriously as they are. Only through thoughtful, incisive and far-ranging ^{dialogue} ~~discourse~~ will all of us be able to appraise and benefit from Friday's dilemma.

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END OF ESSAY

to p. 5

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Clusters of black people are praying in front of the White House for the Lord not to abandon them, to intervene and crush the forces that would prevent a black nominee to the Supreme Court from assuming the seat felt by them to be reserved for a member of the

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important education on how to feel and think about black people. The People Magazine lead story, taken with a straight face proved their devotion, their racelessness, which we already recognized because he shook her hand in public on three occasions. And it was this racially ideal union that was one of the reasons Thomas came up with in trying to explain Anita Hill's charges. Professor Hill, he seemed to be suggesting, harbored reactionary, race-bound opinions about interracial love which, as everybody knows, can drive a black woman insane and cause her to say wild incredible things. Predictably too, the nominee called for a transcendence of race, remarked repeatedly on its divisive nature, its costliness, its undeniable degradation of principles of freedom. Unexpectedly, however, did race surface on the very site of its interment. And it was hard not to murmur "Freddy's back," as the spectre of this living corpse broke free of its hastily dug grave. But this resurrection was buoyed and winged by the fact of its gender component. If the forward face of the not-dead was racism, its other backward face was sexism.

On a Friday Anita Hill articulated ^{graphic} points in her accusation of sexual misconduct. On the same Friday Clarence Thomas answered, in a manner of speaking, these

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charges. It was a momentous day of that week, and could easily turn one's attention to another Friday. Momentous also, for it was Friday in 1709 when Alexander Selkirk found an "almost drowned Indian" on the shore of an island upon which he had been shipwrecked. Ten years later Selkirk's story will be immortalized by Daniel Defoe in Robinson Crusoe. There the Indian becomes a "savage cannibal," black, barbarous, stupid, servile, adoring and, although nothing is reported of his sexual behavior, he has an acquired taste for the flesh of his own species. Crusoe's narrative is a success story, one in which a socially, culturally and biologically handicapped black man is civilized and Christianized--taught, in other words, to be like a white one. From Friday's point of view it is a success story as well. Not only is he alive, he is greatly enabled by his association with his savior. And it should not go unremarked upon that Crusoe is also greatly enabled--including having his own life saved--by Friday. Yet, like all successes, what is earned is mitigated by what one has lost.

If we look at the story from Friday's point of view, rather than ~~Crusoe's~~^{Crusoe's}, it becomes clear that Friday had a very complex problem. By sheer luck he had escaped death, annihilation, anonymity and engulfment by enemies

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within his own culture. By great and astonishing good fortune he had been rescued. The gift of his own life was so unexpected, so welcome, he felt he could regulate the debt only by offering that life to his rescuer, by making the gift exchange literal. But he had a problem.

Before he appeared on the shore, his rescuer, Crusoe, had heard no other voice except a parrot's trained to say his owner's name, Robin, for short. Crusoe wanted to hear it again. For over twenty years he had had only himself for company, and although he has conquered nature and marked time, no human calls his name, acknowledges his presence or his authority. Lucky for him he discovers a refugee escaping certain slaughter. Once rescue has been effected, Crusoe is in a position to have status as well as dominion. Both are important, so he does not ask the refugee what his name is; instead Crusoe names him. Nor does he tell the refugee his own name; instead he teaches him the ^{three} ~~two~~ words that for ~~six~~ months will do just fine: "master" and "yes." ^{and "no!"}

Friday's ^{Real} problem ^{however} was not to learn the language of repetition, easily, like the parrot, but to ^{learn to} internalize it. For longer than necessary the first words he is taught, first Master; then Yes, ^{& NO} remain all he is permitted to say. During the time in which he knows no

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other English, one has to assume he thought in his own language, cogitated in it, explained stimuli and phenomena in the language he was born into. [^] ~~By and by~~ he is taught more English vocabulary and the grammar to hold it. ^{quote} [^] Had he expected that the life he offered Crusoe would include not just his services, his loyalty, his devotion, but also his language as well? Did he ever wonder why Crusoe did not want to learn his language? Or why he could never speak his master's name? In the absence of his master's desire did he forget completely the language he dreamed in? Think no more of the home he fled before the weapons of those who had conquered and occupied it? On the two or three occasions when Crusoe is curious enough to ask Friday a question about the black man's feelings, the answers are surprising. Yes, he longs for his home; Yes it is beautiful on his island. Yes he will refrain from eating human flesh. Yes if he has the opportunity he will teach his tribe to eat bread, cattle and milk instead. But no, he will not return to his home alone; he will go only if Crusoe accompanies him. [If Crusoe's assumption that Friday's people eat only each other were true, the practice would have decimated them long ago, but no matter the white man teaches food habits; the black man learns them.] So far, Friday can be understood to engage in dialogue with his

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The problem of internalizing the master's tongue is the problem of the rescued. Unlike the problems of survivors who may be lucky, fated etc, the rescued has the problem of debt. If the rescuer gives you back your life, he shares in that life. But, as in Friday's case, the rescuer saves your life by taking you away from the dangers, the complications, the confusion of home, he may very well expect the debt to be paid in full. Not, "go your own way and sin no more," Not, "here, take this boat and find your own adventure--in or out of yur own tribe." But full payment, forever. Because the rescuer wants to hear his name, not mimicked but adored. This is a serious problem for Friday and gets more complicated the longer one thinks about it.

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Toni Morrison

FRIDAY ON THE POTOMAC

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race. Other groups of blacks stare at the television set revolted by the President's nomination of the one candidate they believe outrageously unfit to adjudicate legal and policy matters concerning them. Everyone interested in the outcome of this nomination, regardless of race, class, gender, religion or profession, turns to as many forms of media as are available. They read the Washington Post for verification of their dread or their hope; read The New York Times as though it were Pravda, searching between the lines of the official story for one that most nearly approximates what might really be happening; they read weeklies and local papers to see if the response among their neighbors is similar to their own, or they try to figure out on what information their own response should be based. They have listened to newscasters and anchor people for the bits and bytes that pointed to, or deflected attention from, the machinery of campaigns to reject or accept the nominee. They have watched television screens that watch back, that dismiss viewers or call upon them for flavor, reenforcement or routine dissent. Polls assure and shock, gratify and discredit those who take them into serious account.

But most of all, people talk to one another. There are passionate, sometimes acrimonious discussions between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, siblings, friends, acquaintances, colleagues with whom, now, there is reason to embrace into or to expel further from their close circle.

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Sophisticated legal debates merge with locker room guffaws; poised exchanges about the ethics and moral responsibilities of governance are debauched by cold indifference to individual claims and private vulnerabilities. Organizations and individuals call senators and urge friends to do the same--providing opinions, information; threatening, cajoling, explaining positions, or simply saying confirm! reject! vote yes, vote no.

These were some of the scenes stirred up by the debates leading to the confirmation of Clarence Thomas, by the revelations and evasions within the testimony, and by the irrevocable mark placed on those hearings by Anita Hill's accusations against the nominee. The points of the vector were all the plateaus of power and powerlessness: white men, black men, black women, white women, interracial couples; those with traditionally conservative agenda, and those representing neo-conservative conversions; citizens with radical and progressive programs; the full specter of the "pro" - antagonists ("choice" and "life"); there were the publically elected, the self-elected; the racial supremacists, the racial egalitarians and nationalists of every stripe.

It became clear, finally, what took place: a black male nominee to the Supreme Court was confirmed amidst a controversy that raised and buried issues of profound national significance.

What is less clear is what happened; how it happened; why it happened; what implications may be drawn, what consequences may

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follow. For what was at stake during these hearings was history-

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not its end, but its new beginning. In addition to what was taking place, something was happening. And as is almost always the case, the battle plain for the exorcism of critical national issues was situated in the miasma of black life and inscribed on the bodies of black people.

It was to evaluate and analyze various aspects of what was and is happening that this collection suggested itself. The urgency of this project, an urgency that was overwhelming in November of 1991 when it began, is no less so now in 1992. For a number of reasons the consequences of not gathering the thoughts, the insights, the analyses of academics in a variety of disciplines would be too dire. The events surrounding the confirmation could be closed, left to the disappearing act that frequently follows the summing up process typical of visual and print media. The seismic reactions of women and men in the workplace, in organizations and institutions could be calmed and a return to "business as usual" made effortless. While the public, deeply concerned with the issues raised by the confirmation, waited for the ultimate historical account, or some other text representing the "last word", there might not be available to it a more immediate aid to the reflective sorting out subsequent and recent events would demand. Furthermore, the advancing seige upon American Universities,

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launched by fears of "relevance" and change, has fostered an impression and atmosphere of scholarly paralysis, censorship, and intimidation. Yet residing in the academic institutions of the country are not only some of the most knowledgeable citizens, but also those most able to respond quickly with contextualized and intellectually focussed insights. And insight--from a range of views and disciplines--seemed to us in low supply.

For insight into the complicated and complicating events that the confirmation of Clarence Thomas became one needs perspective, not attitudes; context not anecdotes; analyses not postures. For that the focus must be on the history routinely ignored or played down or unknown. For that kind of insight, language must be critiqued. Frustrating language, devious calls to arms and ancient inflammatory codes deployed to do their weary work of obfuscation, short circuiting, evasion and distortion. The timeless and timely narratives upon which expressive language rests, narratives so ingrained and pervasive they seem inextricable from "reality." To begin to comprehend exactly what happened it is important to distinguish between the veneer of interrogatory discourse and its substance; to remain skeptical of topics such as a "working or workable" system; to be wary of pontifical discussions on the effectiveness or defect of the "process" rather than content because content, volatile and uncontextualized, can not be approached let alone adequately discussed in sixteen minutes or

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five hundred words or less. To inaugurate any discovery of what happened is to be conscious of the smooth syrup-like and glistening oil poured daily to keep the machine of state from schreeching too loudly or breaking down entirely as it turns the earth of its own rut, digging itself deeper and deeper into the foundation of private life, burying itself for invisibility, for protection, for secrecy. To know what took place summary is enough. To learn what happened requires multiple points of address and analysis.

Nowhere, remarked an historian, nowhere in the debate before and during the confirmation hearings was the mention or the idea of the public good. How could it be when race, and gender and class, separately, paired, matched and mismatched, collapsed in a heap and dominated every moment and word of the confirmation process?

For example, the nominee, chosen said the president irrespective of race, was introduced by his sponsor with a reference to the nominee's laugh. It was, said Senator Danforth, what he first noticed, what attracted him to his candidate--his infectious laugh that seemed to rock his whole body. Infectious indeed and reassuring as well. Every black person who heard those words understood. How needed, how necessary was the grin and its being summons for display, the chuckle that invites and precedes any discussion of association with a black person. For whites, it is the gesture of accommodation and obedience required to open

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discussion and certainly to continue it. The ethnic joke is one formulation; the obligatory recognition of race and possible equanimity in the face of it. But in the more polite halls of the Senate, the laugh will do, the willingness to laugh, its power as a sign takes the place of the high sign of perfect understanding. It is difficult to imagine a sponsor introducing Bork, or Gates, (and that happy exception--Thurgood Marshall) with a call to this most clearly understood metonym for racial accommodation. Not simply because they may or may not have had a loud, infectious laugh, but because it would have been patently inappropriate, irrelevant, puzzling to do so.

But what was inappropriate, even startlingly salacious in other circumstances became the habitual text with this candidate. The New York Times found it interesting to include in that paper's initial story on the president's nominee, a curious spotlight on his body. Weight-lifting was among his accomplishments, said the Times, presciently, perhaps, since the candidate's body came violently into view. Of course this may be simply a news account that aims to present an attractive image of a man about to step on a national stage, yet, a reference to a black person's body is de rigeur in white discourse: the black woman (whether she is a judge, actress, scholar, or waitress) is beautiful, large, sensual or well-dressed or not well-dressed or colorful or "warm."; the black man's body is equally dwelled upon with what often seems to be

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unprecedented voluptuousness in biographies about them, journalism on them, remarks about them. So why wouldn't the public's initial view of this black nominee have an otherwise puzzling, even silly, reference to body building? President Bush probably felt he was being friendly? , charmingly informal when he asked this black man to have his first interview with the Chief of State in the Chief's bedroom. To make Thomas feel at home was more important than to respect him and the Times agreed, selecting this tidbit to report in an article that ended with a second tantalizing not so veiled reference to the nominee's body. When asked by reporters whether he expected to play golf with the president, Thomas replied, "No, no. The ball is too small." The answer is familiar repartee; the emphasis gained by the remark's position in the piece is familiar too. What would have been extraordinary would be to ignore Thomas' body, for in ignoring it, the articles would have had to discuss in some detail the other aspect of him more difficult to appraise aspect--his mind.

In society determined to accomodate both slavery and freedom, to both exploit and deny its pervasiveness black people have come to signify the polar opposites of love and repulsion. On the one hand they signify benevolence, harmless and servile guardianship and endless love. On the other hand they have come to represent insanity, illicit sexuality and chaos. In the confirmation hearings these two fictions were at war and on display. They are

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interchangeable fictions from a utilitarian menu and can be mixed, matched to suit any racial palette. Furthermore they do not need logical transition from one set of associations to another. Like Captain Delano in Benito Cereno, the racist thinker can jump from the view of the slave Babo as "naturally docile, made for servitutde" to "savage cannibal" without any gesture toward what may lie in between the two conclusions, any explanation of the jump from puppy to monster, so the truth of Babo's situation--that he is leading a surreptitious rebellion aboard the slave ship, that he is a clever man who wants to be free--never enters the equation. Thus, the candidate was cloaked in the garments of loyalty, guardianship and (remember the laugh) limitless love. Love of god via his Catholic school, of servitutde via a disciplinist patriarchal grandfather, of loyalty to party via his accumulated speeches and the trophies of "America" on his office walls. The interrogator, therefore, the accusing witness Anita Hill, was dressed in the oppositional costume of madness, anarchic sexuality, and explosive verbal violence. There seemed to be no other explanation for her testimony. Even Clarence Thomas was at a loss to explain not her charges but why she would make them. All he could come up with is speculation on Professor's Hill's dislike of "lighter complexioned" women--meaning his marriage to a white woman, one gathers. No other narrative context could be found for her charges, no motive except wanton fantasy and perhaps even

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meanness or jealousy. Since neither the press nor the Senate Committee would entertain seriously or exhaustively the truth of her accusations, she could be called any number or pair of discrediting terms and the contradictions would never be called into question, because, as a black woman she was contradiction itself, irrationality in the flesh. She was a lesbian who hated men and a vamp who could be ensnared and painfully rejected by them. She was a mixture heretofore not recognized on the menu of racial tropes: an intellectual daughter of farmers; a black female taking offense; a lady repeating dirty words. It was she who ignited the exchange, the rematch of tropes for the nominee. Now it was he who was in danger of moving from "natural servant" to "savage demon"--and the force of the balance of the confirmation process was to re-order these signifying fictions. Is he lying or is she? Is he the benevolent one and she the insane one? Or is he the date raper, sexual assaulter, the illicit sexual signal and she the docile, loyal servant? Those two major fictions, either/or, were blasted and tilted by a factual thing masquerading as a true thing. Lynching, being both a fact of white history and black life, is also the metaphor of itself. While the mythologies about black personae debauched the confirmation process for all time, the history of black life was appropriated to elevate it.

An accusation of such weight as sexual misconduct would probably have disqualified a white candidate on its face. Rather

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than any need for "proof " the slightest possibility that it was publically verifiable would have nullified the candidacy; forced the Committee members to insist on another rather than entertain the necessity for public debate on so loathsome a charge. But in a racialized and race-conscious society, standards are changed, facts marginalized, repressed, the willingness to air such charges to actually debate them--their accuracy or falsehood--outweighed the seemliness of a dignified hearing because the actors were black. Rather than claiming how certain feminist interests forced the confrontation, rather than editorializing about how humiliated and how reluctant the Committee members were in investigating Anita Hill's charges publicly, it seems blazingly clear that with this unprecedented opportunity to hover over and to cluck at, to meditate and ponder the limits and excesses of black bodies, no other strategies were going to be entertained. There would be no recommendation of withdrawal by sponsor, president, senators or anybody. No request for or insistance that the executive branch propose another name, so that such volatile issues could be taken up in a forum more suitable to their airing, and possibly receive an open and just decision. No. The participants were black so what could it matter? The participants were black and therefore "known," servicable, expendable in the interests of limning out one or the other of two mutually antagonistic fabulations. Under the pressure of a voyeuristic desire fueled by mythologies that render

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blacks publically servicable instruments of private dread and longing, extraordinary behavior on the part of the state could take place. Anita Hlil's witnesses, credible and persuasive as they were, could be dismissed as one "reporter" said, apparently without shame, because they were too intellectual to be believed (!) Under the pressure of racist mythologies, loyal interested staff [all female] could have more weight than disinterested observers or publically available documentation. Under such pressure the chairman of the Committee could apply criminal court procedure to a confirmation hearing and assure the candidate that the assumption of innocence lay with the nominee. As though innocence--rather than malfeasance or ethical character or fitness to serve--was the charge against which they struggled to judge the Judge. As though a rhetorical "I am not a crook" had anything at all to do with the heavy responsibility the committee was under. Would such accusations have elicited such outsize defense mechanisms if the candidate had been white? Would the committee and many public areas have considered the suitability of a white candidate permanently stained by these accusations? Hardly, but with a black candidate, already stained by the figurations of blackness as sexual aggressiveness or rapaciousness or impotence, the stain need only be proved reasonably doubted, which is to say, if he is black how can you tell if that really is a stain? Which is also to say, blackness is itself a stain, and therefore unstainable. Which is

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also to say, if he is black and about to ascend to the Supreme Court bench if the bench is to become stain-free, this newest judge must be bleached, race-free, as his speeches and opinions illustrated. Allegations of sexual misconduct re-raced him which, in this administration, meant re-stained him, dirtied him. Therefore, the "dirt" that clung to him following those allegations must be shown to have originated elsewhere. In this case, the search for the racial stain turned on Anita Hill. Her character. Her motives. Not his.

Clarence Thomas has gone through the nomination process before, and in that connection been investigated by the FBI before. Nothing is not known about him. And the senators know that nothing about him is not known. But what is known and what is useful to be disturbed and knowledge are different things. But data, not to mention knowledge, have had no place in these deliberations. The hearings became a contest and the point was to win. At stake was always a court: stacked or balanced; unrepachable in its ethical and judicial standards or malleable and compliant in its political agenda; alert to and mindful of the real lives most of us live, as these lives are measured by the good of the republic or a court that is aloof, delusional, indifferent to any mandate popular or unpopular, if it is not first vetted by the Executive branch.

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The capacity to delude oneself into thinking one is fit to serve or to shape the public is bottomless. Perhaps it should be-bottomless, that is. For desire elides quickly into deserve.

As in virtually all of the nation's great debates, non-whites and women figure powerfully, although their literal bodily presence may be obliterated, denied or go unremarked. So it is perhaps predictable that this instance, where serious issues of male prerogative, sexual assault; the issues of racial justice and racial redress; the problematics of governing and controlling women's bodies; the alterations of work space into {sexually} domesticated space be subsumed into the debate over the candidacy for the Surpeme Court. That these issues be worked out, on and inscribed upon the canvas/flesh of black people should come as no surprise to anyone.

The contempt emanating from the White House was palpable--it was not necessary for the candidate to be a first rate legal scholar, (as it had not been necessary for other candidates). Nor was it necessary that he have demonstrated a particular sensitivity for the issues and concerns of a race he belonged to but which "had no bearing" on his selection to fill a seat vacated by the single Supreme Court Justice who both belonged to and did represent the interests of that race. The "race" that "had no bearing" on the President's choice, could nevertheless be counted on to support the

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nominee since "skin voting" would overwhelm every other consideration. This riskless gamble, what Cornel West has called "racial reasoning", held almost perfect sway. Many blacks were struck mute by the embarrassing position of agreeing with David Duke; others leaped to the defense of the candidate on the grounds that he was "no worse than x"; or that any white candidate would be a throw-back; that "who knows what he might do or become in those hallowed halls?" Who knows? Well, his nominators did know, and they were correct as even the earliest action Clarence Thomas has taken in the cases coming before the court confirm.

Appropriate also was the small secret swearing in ceremony once the candidate was confirmed. For secrecy had operated from the beginning. Not only dismissed and suppressed charges against the candidate; but also [add]. And underneath these topside secrets were deeper more ancient ones unearthed rather elegantly in Homi Bhaba's essay...

In addition to race, class surfaced in both predictable and unexpected ways. Predictably the nominee was required to shuck: to convince white men in power that operating a trucking business was lowly work in a Georgia where most blacks would have blessed dirt for such work. It wasn't a hard shuck. Because race and class, that is black equals poor, is a equation that functions usefully if unexamined, and it is possible to advance exclusionary and elitist programs by the careful use of race as! class. It

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is still possible to cash in on black victim-hood, [the pain of being a poor black innocent boy]; to articulate victim-ness [Thomas, in a stunning reversion to "affirmative action" discourse, called himself a victim of a process he of all people knew was designed to examine a candidate's worth] and to deplore the practice in others all at the same time. It is still possible to say "my father was a doorman" (meaning servant; meaning poor) and get the sympathy of whites who can not or will not do the arithmetic needed to know the difference between what a Washington, D.C. door man earns and a clerk at the census bureau. In addition to class transformations, there were on display race transcendence. The nominee could be understood as having realized his yearning for and commitment to "racelessness" by having a white spouse at his side. At least their love, we are led to conclude, had transcended race, and this matrimonial conjugal love had been more than ecstasy and companionship--it had been, for Virginia Thomas an important education on how to feel and think about black people. The People Magazine lead story, taken with a straight face, proved their devotion, their racelessness, which we already recognized because he shook her hand in public on three occasions. And it was this racially ideal union that was one of the reasons Thomas came up with in trying to explain Anita Hill's charges. Professor Hill, he seemed to be suggesting, harbored reactionary race-bound opinions about interracial love which, as everybody knows, can

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drive a black woman insane and cause her to say wild incredible things. Predictably too, President Bush's "raceless" nominee called for a transcendence of race, remarked repeatedly on its divisive nature, its costliness, its undeniable degradation of principles of freedom. Those were the predictable utterances of language manipulated to both raise and bury race. Unexpectedly, however, did race surface on the very site of its interment. And it was hard not to murmur, "Freddy's back," as the spectre of this living corpse broke free of its hastily dug grave. But this resurrection was bouyed and winged by the fact of its gender component. If the forward face of the not-dead was racism, its other backward face was sexism.

On a Friday Professor Hill articulated points in her accusation of sexual misconduct by the nominee. On the same Friday Clarence Thomas answered, in a manner of speaking, these charges. It was a momentous day of that week, and could easily turn one's attention to another Friday. Momentous also, for it was on Friday in 1709 when Alexander Selkirk found an "almost drowned Indian" on the shore of an island upon which he had been shipwrecked. Ten years later Selkirk's story will be immortalized by Daniel Defoe in Robinson Crusoe. There the Indian becomes a "savage cannibal," black, barbarous, stupid, servile, adoring and, although nothing is reported of his sexual behavior, he has an acquired taste for

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the flesh of his own species. Crusoe's narrative is a success story, one in which a socially, culturally and biologically handicapped black man is civilized and Christianized--taught, in other words, to be like a white. From Friday's point of view it is a success story as well. Not only is he alive, he is greatly enabled by his association with his savior. And it should not go unremarked upon that Crusoe is greatly enabled--including having his life saved--by Friday. Yet, like all successes, what is earned is mitigated by what one has lost.

If we look at the story from Friday's point of view, rather than Crusoe's, it becomes clear that Friday had a very complex problem. By sheer luck he had escaped death, annihilation, anonymity and engulfment by enemies within his own culture. By great and astonishing good fortune he had been rescued. The gift of his own life was so unexpected, so welcome, he felt he could regulate the debt only by offering that life to his rescuer, by making the gift exchange literal. But he had a problem.

Before he appeared on the shore, his rescuer, Crusoe, had heard no other voice except a parrot's trained to say his owner's name, Robin, for short. Crusoe wanted to hear it again. For over twenty years he has had only himself for company, and although he has conquered nature and marked time, no human calls his name, acknowledges his presence or his authority. Lucky for him he discovers a refugee escaping certain slaughter. Once rescue has been

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effected, Crusoe is in a position to have status as well as dominion. Both are important, so he does not ask the refugee what his name is; instead Crusoe names him. Nor does he tell the refugee his own name; instead he teaches him the two words that for xx months will do just fine: Master and Yes.

Friday's problem was not to learn the language of repetition, easily, like the parrot, but to internalize it. For longer than necessary the first words he is taught, first Master; then Yes. remain all he is permitted to say. During the time in which he knows no other English, one has to assume he thought in his own language, cogitated in it, explained stimuli and phenomena in the language he was born with. By and by he is taught more English vocabulary and the grammar to hold it. Had he expected that the life he offered Crusoe would include not just his services, his loyalty, his devotion, but also his language as well? Did he ever wonder why Crusoe did not want to learn his language? Or why he could never speak his master's name? In the absence of his master's desire did he forget completely the language he dreamed in? Think no more of the home he fled before the weapons of those who had conquered and occupied it? On the two or three occasions when Crusoe is curious enough to ask Friday a question about the black man's feelings, the answers are surprising. Yes, he longs for his home; Yes it is beautiful on his island. Yes he will refrain from eating human flesh. Yes if he has the opportunity he

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will teach his tribe to eat bread, cattle and milk instead. But no, he will not return to his home alone; he will go only if Crusoe accompanies him. [If Crusoe's assumption that Friday's people eat only each other were true, the practice would have decimated them long ago, but no matter the white man teaches food habits; the black man learns them.]

The problem of internalizing the master's language is the problem of the rescued. Unlike the problems of survivors who may be lucky, fated etc, the rescued has the problem of debt. If the rescuer gives you back your life, he shares in that life. But if, as in Friday's case, the rescuer saves your life by taking you away from the dangers, the complications, the confusion of home, he may very well expect the debt to be paid in full. Not, "go your own way and sin no more," Not, "here, take this boat and find your own adventure--in or out of your own tribe." But full payment, forever. Because the rescuer wants to hear his name, not mimicked but adored. This is a serious problem for Friday and seems to get more complicated the longer one thinks about it.

Friday has left and been rescued from not only the culture that threatened him, that wants to kill and engulf him, but also from the culture that loves him. That too, he has left behind forever.

Even when he discovers his own father, half dead, in precisely the position he himself had been in when Crusoe saved his life, his

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joy is not so reckless as to quarrel with the menial labor he and his father are directed to do, while an also-rescued Spaniard, who has lived among Friday's tribe for years, is given supervisory responsibilities. Nor is his joy so great that he speaks to his father in their mutual tongue. Instead he translates for Crusoe.

This loss of mothertongue seems not to disturb Friday, even though he never completely learns the master's. He negotiates a space somewhere in between. He develops a serviceable grammar that will never be eloquent; he learns to shout warnings of advancing also black enemies but he can never dare speak to these enemies as his master does. Without a mother tongue, without the language of his original culture, all he can do is recognize his old enemies and, when ordered, kill them. Eventually Friday no longer negotites space between his own language and Crusoe's. Eventually the uses, of Crusoe's language, if not its grammar, become his own.

In one of the incidents that occur on the island, a band of Spanish mutineers come ashore, holding thier Captain prisoner. Crusoe and Friday liberate him and consider how to dispose of the criminals. Some of the mutineers are singled out by their Captain as villains; others were identified as being forced to mutiny. So some are spared; others slaughtered. This discrimination is never applied to Friday's people. With one exception, an old man tied and bound for execution, all of the blacks Friday and Crusoe see are killed or wounded (most of whom, in Crusoe's tallying of the

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dead, Friday kills). The exception, who turns out to be Friday's father, is not given a name nor, as with Friday, is one solicited from him. He becomes part of Crusoe's team, called upon and relied on for all kinds of service. He is dead at the end of the story. While he is alive and after he is gone, he is called by his master "the old savage."

Voluntary entrance into another culture, voluntary sharing of more than one culture has certain satisfactions to mitigate the problems that ensue. But being rescued into another adversarial culture can carry a huge debt. The debt one feels one owes to the rescuer can be paid, simply, honorably in lifetime service. But if in that transaction the rescued loses his language, the language of his culture, there may be other debts outstanding. Leon Higgenbotham has charted the debt Clarence Thomas owes to the culture that fought for and protected him before he arrived out of a turbulent sea on to shore. Thomas was teased and humiliated by black people, called ABC, American's Blackest Child; he was chastened for wanting an education superior to theirs. He was also loved and nurtured by them. As in any and everybody's background, family, culture, race, region--there are persecutors and providors; kindness and loathing. No culture ever quite measures up to our expectations of it without a generous dose of romanticism, self-delusion or simple compassion. Sometimes it seems easier, emotionally and professionally, to deny it, ignore it, erase it,

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even destroy it. And if the language of one's culture is lost or abandoned, it is easy to describe that culture in the terms of the rescuing one, to dismiss it by substituting the phrase "culture of the victim" for the critique and redress of systemic racism; to cry and decry victimization, loathing it when it appears in the discourse of one's own people, but summoning it up for one's expediently de-racialized self. It becomes easy to confuse the metaphors embedded in the blood-language of one's own culture with the objects they stand for and call patronizing, coddling, undemanding, rescuing, complicitous white racists a lynch mob. It is not just easy to speak Crusoe's language, it is necessary. One is obliged to cooperate in the mis-use of figurative language, the re-enforcement of cliché, the erasure of difference, the jargon of justice, the evasion of logic, the denial of history, the crowning of patriarchy, the inscription of hegemony, the vandalizing, sentimentalizing and trivializing of the torture black people have suffered. Necessary because, without one's own idiom, there is no other language to speak.

Both Friday and Clarence Thomas accompany their rescuers into the world of power and salvation. But the problem of rescue still exists: both men, black but unrecognizable at home or away, are condemned to mimic, to internalize, to adore--but never to utter a single sentence understood to be beneficial to their original culture--whether they are the people who wanted to hurt them or

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those who loved them to death.

Clarence Thomas once quoted someone who said that dwelling on the horrors of racism invited one of two choices: vengeance or prosperity. He argued for a third choice. tk He did not elaborate on which he had chosen, finally, but the language he speaks, the actions he takes, the Supreme court decisions he has made or aligned himself with, the foot, as it were, that he has picked up and placed on his head give us some indication of what his choice has been. The footprint in the sand that so worried Crusoe's nights, that compelled him to build a fortress, and then another to protect his new world order, disappears from that white man's nightmares once Friday embraces then internalizes his master's voice, and can follow the master's agenda with passion.

It is hard not to think of these events in any way but unfortunate. And it is difficult to convince anybody that what took place is over--without serious consequences. For those who looked forward eagerly to Thomas' confirmation, the expectation of a reliably conservative court may be re-assuring. Time will have the most to say about that. For those who believe the future of the nation as a democracy is imperiled by this most recent addition to the bench. Again, time will speak rather definitively. Yet, regardless of political alliances, something positive has already surfaced. In matters of race and gender, it is now possible and

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necessary, as it seems never to have been before, to speak about these matters without the barriers, the silences, the embarrassing gaps in discourse. It is clear to the most reductionist intellect that black people think differently from one another; it is also clear that the time for undiscriminating racial unity has passed; a conversation, a dialogue between black men and women has begun in a new arena and the contestants defy the mold. Nor is it as easy as it used to be to split along racial lines as the alliances and coalitions between white and black women, and the conflict among women, and among black men prove.

This volume is one of the several beginnings of these new dialogues in which issues are taken as seriously as they are. Only through thoughtful incisive and far-ranging discourse will all of us be able to appraise and benefit from Friday's dilemma.

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race. Other groups of blacks stare at the television set revolted by the President's nomination of the one candidate they believe outrageously unfit to adjudicate legal and policy matters concerning them. Everyone interested in the outcome of this nomination, regardless of race, class, gender, religion or profession, turns to as many forms of media as are available. They read the Washington Post for verification of their dread or their hope; read The New York Times as though it were Pravda, searching between the lines of the official story for one that most nearly approximates what might really be happening; they read ~~weeklies and~~ local papers to see if the response among their neighbors is similar to their own, or they try to figure out on what information their own response should be based. They have listened to newscasters and anchor people for the bits and bytes that pointed to, or deflected attention from, the machinery of campaigns to reject or accept the nominee. They have watched television screens that watch back, that dismiss viewers or call upon them for flavor, reenforcement or routine dissent. Polls assure and shock, gratify and discredit those who take them into serious account.

But most of all, people talk to one another. There are passionate, sometimes acrimonious discussions between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, siblings, friends, acquaintances, colleagues with whom, now, there is reason to embrace ~~into~~ or to expel ~~further~~ from their close circle.

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Sophisticated legal debates merge with locker room guffaws; poised exchanges about the ethics and moral responsibilities of governance are debauched by cold indifference to individual claims and private vulnerabilities. Organizations and individuals call senators and urge friends to do the same--providing opinions, information; threatening, cajoling, explaining positions, or simply saying confirm! reject! vote yes, vote no.

penzy These were some of the scenes stirred up by the debates leading to the confirmation of Clarence Thomas, by the revelations and evasions within the testimony, and by the irrevocable mark placed on those hearings by Anita Hill's accusations against the nominee. The points of the vector were all the plateaus of power and powerlessness: white men, black men, black women, white women, interracial couples; those with traditionally conservative agenda, and those representing neo-conservative conversions; citizens with radical and progressive programs; the full specter of the "pro" - antagonists ("choice" and "life"); there were the publically elected, the self-elected; the racial supremacists, the racial egalitarians and nationalists of every stripe.

It became clear, finally, what took place: a black male nominee to the Supreme Court was confirmed amidst a controversy that raised and buried issues of profound national significance.

What is less clear is what happened; how it happened; why it happened; what implications may be drawn, what consequences may

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follow. For what was at stake during these hearings was history-

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not its end, but its new beginning. In addition to what was taking place, something was happening. And as is almost always the case, the battle plain for the exorcism of critical national issues was situated in the miasma of black life and inscribed on the bodies of black people.

It was to evaluate and analyze various aspects of what was and is happening that this collection suggested itself. The urgency of this project, an urgency that was overwhelming in November of 1991 when it began, is no less so now in 1992. For a number of reasons the consequences of not gathering the thoughts, the insights, the analyses of academics in a variety of disciplines would be too dire. The events surrounding the confirmation could be closed, left to the disappearing act that frequently follows the summing up process typical of visual and print media. The seismic reactions of women and men in the workplace, in organizations and institutions could be calmed and a return to "business as usual" made effortless. While the public, deeply concerned with the issues raised by the confirmation, waited for the ultimate historical account, or some other text representing the "last word", there might not be available to it a more immediate aid to the reflective sorting out subsequent and recent events would demand. Furthermore, the advancing seige upon American Universities,

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launched by fears of "relevance" and change, has fostered an impression and atmosphere of scholarly paralysis, censorship, and intimidation. Yet residing in the academic institutions of the country are not only some of the most knowledgeable citizens, but also those most able to respond quickly with contextualized and intellectually focussed insights. And insight--from a range of views and disciplines--seemed to us in low supply.

For insight into the complicated and complicating events that the confirmation of Clarence Thomas became one needs perspective, not attitudes; context not anecdotes; analyses not postures. For that the focus must be on the history routinely ignored or played down or unknown. For that kind of insight, language must be critiqued. Frustrating language, devious calls to arms and ancient inflammatory codes deployed to do their weary work of obfuscation, short circuiting, evasion and distortion. The timeless and timely narratives upon which expressive language rests, narratives so ingrained and pervasive they seem inextricable from "reality." To begin to comprehend exactly what happened it is important to distinguish between the veneer of interrogatory discourse and its substance; to remain skeptical of topics such as a "working or workable" system; to be wary of pontifical discussions on the effectiveness or defect of the "process" rather than content because content, volatile and uncontextualized, can not be approached let alone adequately discussed in sixteen minutes or

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five hundred words or less. To inaugurate any discovery of what happened is to be conscious of the smooth syrup-like and glistening oil poured daily to keep the machine of state from schreeching too loudly or breaking down entirely as it turns the earth of its own rut, digging itself deeper and deeper into the foundation of private life, burying itself for invisibility, for protection, for secrecy. To know what took place summary is enough. To learn what happened requires multiple points of address and analysis.

Nowhere, remarked an historian, nowhere in the debate before and during the confirmation hearings was the mention or the idea of the public good. How could it be when race, and gender and class, separately, paired, matched and mismatched, collapsed in a heap and dominated every moment and word of the confirmation process?

For example, the nominee, chosen said the president irrespective of race, was introduced by his sponsor with a reference to the nominee's laugh. It was, said Senator Danforth, what he first noticed, what attracted him to his candidate--his infectious laugh that seemed to rock his whole body. Infectious indeed and reassuring as well. Every black person who heard those words understood. How needed, how necessary was the grin and its being summoned^{ed} for display, the chuckle that invites and precedes any discussion of association with a black person. For whites, it is the gesture of accommodation and obedience required to open

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discussion and certainly to continue it. The ethnic joke is one formulation; the obligatory recognition of race and possible equanimity in the face of it. But in the more polite halls of the Senate, the laugh will do, the willingness to laugh, its power as a sign takes the place of the high sign of perfect understanding. It is difficult to imagine a sponsor introducing Bork, or Gates, (and that happy exception--Thurgood Marshall) with a call to this most clearly understood metonym for racial accommodation. Not simply because they may or may not have had a loud, infectious laugh, but because it would have been patently inappropriate, irrelevant, puzzling to do so.

But what was inappropriate, even ^tstartlingly salacious in other circumstances became the habitual text with this candidate. The New York Times found it interesting to include in that paper's initial story on the president's nominee, a curious spotlight on his body. Weight-lifting was among his accomplishments, said the Times, presciently, perhaps, since the candidate's body came violently into view. Of course this may be simply a news account that aims to present an attractive image of a man about to step on a national stage, yet, a reference to a black person's body is de ^{signific}~~signific~~ in white discourse: the black woman (whether she is a judge, actress, scholar, or waitress) is beautiful, large, sensual or well-dressed or not well-dressed or colorful or "warm."; the black man's body is equally dwelled upon with what often seems to be

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unprecedented voluptuousness in biographies about them, journalism on them, remarks about them. So why wouldn't the public's initial view of this black nominee have an otherwise puzzling, even silly, reference to body building? President Bush probably felt he was being friendly? , charmingly informal when he asked this black man to have his first interview with the Chief of State in the Chief's bedroom. To make Thomas feel at home was more important than to respect him and the Times agreed, selecting this tidbit to report in an article that ended with a second tantalizing, not so veiled reference to the nominee's body. When asked by reporters whether he expected to play golf with the president, Thomas replied, "No, no. The ball is too small." The answer is familiar repartee; the emphasis gained by the remark's position in the piece is familiar too. What would have been extraordinary would be to ignore Thomas' body, for in ignoring it, the articles would have had to discuss in some detail the other aspect of him more difficult to appraise aspect--his mind.

In society determined to accomodate both slavery and freedom, to both exploit and deny its pervasiveness black people have come to signify the polar opposites of love and repulsion. On the one hand they signify benevolence, harmless and servile guardianship and endless love. On the other hand they have come to represent insanity, illicit sexuality and chaos. In the confirmation hearings these two fictions were at war and on display. They are

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interchangeable fictions from a utilitarian menu and can be mixed, matched to suit any racial palette. Furthermore they do not need logical transition from one set of associations to another. Like Captain Delano in Benito Cereno, the racist thinker can jump from the view of the slave Babo as "naturally docile, made for servitude" to "savage cannibal" without any gesture toward what may lie in between the two conclusions, any explanation of the jump from puppy to monster, so the truth of Babo's situation--that he is leading a surreptitious rebellion aboard the slave ship, that he is a clever man who wants to be free--never enters the equation. Thus, the candidate was cloaked in the garments of loyalty, guardianship and (remember the laugh) limitless love. Love of god via his Catholic school, of servitude via a disciplinist patriarchal grandfather, of loyalty to party via his accumulated speeches and the trophies of "America" on his office walls. The interrogator, therefore, the accusing witness Anita Hill, was dressed in the oppositional costume of madness, anarchic sexuality, and explosive verbal violence. There seemed to be no other explanation for her testimony. Even Clarence Thomas was at a loss to explain not her charges but why she would make them. All he could come up with is speculation on Professor's Hill's dislike of "lighter complexioned" women--meaning his marriage to a white woman, one gathers. No other narrative context could be found for her charges, no motive except wanton fantasy and perhaps even

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meanness or jealousy. Since neither the press nor the Senate Committee would entertain seriously or exhaustively the truth of her accusations, she could be called any number or pair of discrediting terms and the contradictions would never be called into question, because, as a black woman she was contradiction itself, irrationality in the flesh. She was a lesbian who hated men and a vamp who could be ensnared and painfully rejected by them. She was a mixture heretofore not recognized on the menu of racial tropes: an intellectual daughter of farmers; a black female taking offense; a ^{black} lady repeating dirty words. It was she who ignited the exchange, the rematch of tropes for the nominee. Now it was he who was in danger of moving from "natural servant" to "savage demon"--and the force of the balance of the confirmation process was to re-order these signifying fictions. Is he lying or is she? Is he the benevolent one and she the insane one? Or is he the date raper, sexual assaulter, the illicit sexual signal and she the docile, loyal servant? Those two major fictions, either/or, were blasted and tilted by a factual thing masquerading as a true thing. Lynching, being both a fact of white history and black life, is also the metaphor of itself. While the mythologies about black personae debauched the confirmation process for all time, the history of black life was appropriated to elevate it.

An accusation of such weight as sexual misconduct would probably have disqualified a white candidate on its face. Rather

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than any need for "proof " the slightest possibility that it was publically verifiable would have nullified the candidacy; forced the Committee members to insist on another rather than entertain the necessity for public debate on so loathsome a charge. But in a racialized and race-conscious society, standards are changed, facts marginalized, repressed, the willingness to air such charges to actually debate them--their accuracy or falsehood--outweighed the seemliness of a dignified hearing because the actors were black. Rather than claiming how certain feminist interests forced the confrontation, rather than editorializing about how humiliated and how reluctant the Committee members were in investigating Anita Hill's charges publicly, it seems blazingly clear that with this unprecedented opportunity to hover over and to cluck at, to meditate and ponder the limits and excesses of black bodies, no other strategies were going to be entertained. There would be no recommendation of withdrawal by sponsor, president, senators or anybody. No request for or insistance that the executive branch propose another name, so that such volatile issues could be taken up in a forum more suitable to their airing, and possibly receive an open and just decision. No. The participants were black so what could it matter? The participants were black and therefore "known," servicable, expendable in the interests of limning out one or the other of two mutually antagonistic fabulations. Under the pressure of a voyeuristic desire fueled by mythologies that render

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blacks publically servicable instruments of private dread and longing, extraordinary behavior on the part of the state could take place. Anita Hill's witnesses, credible and persuasive as they were, could be dismissed as one "reporter" said, apparently without shame, because they were too intellectual to be believed (!) Under the pressure of racist mythologies, loyal interested staff [all female] could have more weight than disinterested observers or publically available documentation. Under such pressure the chairman of the Committee could apply criminal court procedure to a confirmation hearing and assure the candidate that the assumption of innocence lay with the nominee. As though innocence--rather than malfeasance or ethical character or fitness to serve--was the charge against which they struggled to judge the Judge. As though a rhetorical "I am not a crook" had anything at all to do with the heavy responsibility the committee was under. Would such accusations have elicited such outsize defense mechanisms if the candidate had been white? Would the committee and many ^{"interest"} ~~public~~ ^{groups} ~~areas~~ have considered the suitability of a white candidate permanently stained by these accusations? Hardly, but with a black candidate, already stained by the figurations of blackness as sexual aggressiveness or rapaciousness or impotence, the stain need only be proved reasonably doubted, which is to say, if he is black how can you tell if that really is a stain? Which is also to say, blackness is itself a stain, and therefore unstainable. Which is

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also to say, if he is black and about to ascend to the Surpreme Court bench if the bench is to become stain-free, this newest judge must be bleached, race-free, as his speeches and opinions illustrated. Allegations of sexual misconduct re-raced him which, in this administration, meant re-stained him, dirtied him. Therefore, the "dirt" that clung to him following those allegations must be shown to have originated elsewhere. In this case, the search for the racial stain turned on Anita Hill. Her character. Her motives. Not his.

Clarence Thomas has gone through the nomination process before, and in that connection been investigated by the FBI before. Nothing is not known about him. And the senators know that nothing about him is not known. But what is known and what is useful to be distrubted ¹⁴ ^{CS} and knowledge are different things. But data, not to mention knowledge, have had no place in these deliberations. The hearings became a contest and the point was to win. At stake was always a court: stacked or balanced; unreproucheable in its ethical and judicial standards or malleable and compliant in its political agenda; alert to and mindful of the real lives most of us live, as these lives are measured by the good of the republic or a court that is aloof, delusional, indifferent to any mandate popular or unpopular, if it is not first vetted by the Executive branch.

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The capacity to delude oneself into thinking one is fit to serve or to shape the public is bottomless. Perhaps it should be -bottomless, that is. For desire elides quickly into deserve.

As in virtually all of the nation's great debates, non-whites and women figure powerfully, although their literal bodily presence may be obliterated, denied or go unremarked. So it is perhaps predictable that ~~this~~ instance, where serious issues of male prerogative, sexual assault; the issues of racial justice and racial redress; the problematics of governing and controlling women's bodies; the alterations of work space into (sexually) domesticated space be subsumed into the debate over the candidacy for the Surpeme Court. That these issues be worked out, on and inscribed upon the canvas/flesh of black people should come as no surprise to anyone.

The contempt emanating from the White House was palpable--it was not necessary for the candidate to be a first rate legal scholar, (as it had not been necessary for other candidates). Nor was it necessary that he have demonstrated a particular sensitivity for the issues and concerns of a race he belonged to but which "had no bearing" on his selection to fill a seat vacated by the single Supreme Court Justice who both belonged to and did represent the interests of that race. The "race" that "had no bearing" on the President's choice, could nevertheless be counted on to support the

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nominee since "skin voting" would overwhelm every other consideration. This riskless gamble, what Cornel West has called "racial reasoning", held almost perfect sway. Many blacks were struck mute by the embarrassing position of agreeing with David Duke; others leaped to the defense of the candidate on the grounds that he was "no worse than x"; or that any white candidate would be a throw-back; that "who knows what he might do or become in those hallowed halls?" Who knows? Well, his nominators did know, and they were correct as even the earliest action Clarence Thomas has taken in the cases coming before the court confirm.

Appropriate also was the small secret swearing in ceremony once the candidate was confirmed. For secrecy had operated from the beginning. Not only dismissed and suppressed charges against the candidate; but also [add]. And underneath these topside secrets were deeper more ancient ones unearthed rather elegantly in Homi Bhaba's essay...

In addition to race, class surfaced in both predictable and unexpected ways. Predictably the nominee was required to shuck: to convince white men in power that operating a trucking business was lowly work in a Georgia where most blacks would have blessed dirt for such work. It wasn't a hard shuck. Because race and class, that is black equals poor, is a equation that functions usefully if unexamined, and it is possible to advance exclusionary and elitist programs by the careful use of race as class. It

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is still possible to cash in on black victim-hood, [the pain of being a poor black innocent boy]; to articulate victim-ness [Thomas, in a stunning reversion to "affirmative action" discourse, called himself a victim of a process he of all people knew was designed to examine a candidate's worth] and to deplore the practice in others all at the same time. It is still possible to say "my father was a doorman" (meaning servant; meaning poor) and get the sympathy of whites who can not or will not do the arithmetic needed to know the difference between what a Washington, D.C. door man earns and a clerk at the census bureau. ¶ In addition to class transformations, there ^{was} ~~were~~ on display race transcende^Nce. The nominee could be understood as having realized his yearning for and committment to "racelessness" by having a white spouse at his side. At least their love, we are led to conclude, had transcended race, and this matrimonial conjugal love had been more than ect^Sasy and companionship--it had been, for Virginia Thomas an important education on how to feel and think about black people. The People Magazine lead story, taken with a straight face, proved their devotion, their racelessness, which we already recognized because he shook her hand in public on three occasions. And it was this racially ideal union that was one of the reasons Thomas came up with in trying to explain Anita Hill's charges. Professor Hill, he seemed to be suggesting, harbored reactionary race-bound opinions about interracial love which, as everybody knows, can

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drive a black woman insane and cause her to say wild incredible things. Predictably too, President Bush's "raceless" nominee called for a transcendence of race, remarked repeatedly on its divisive nature, its costliness, its undeniable degradation of principles of freedom. Those were the predictable utterances of language manipulated to both raise and bury race. Unexpectedly, however, did race surface on the very site of its interment. And it was hard not to murmur, "Freddy's back," as the spectre of this living corpse broke free of its hastily dug grave. But this resurrection was bouyed and winged by the fact of its gender component. If the forward face of the not-dead was racism, its other backward face was sexism.

On a Friday Professor Hill articulated points in her accusation of sexual misconduct by the nominee. On the same Friday Clarence Thomas answered, in a manner of speaking, these charges. It was a momentous day of that week, and could easily turn one's attention to another Friday. Momentous also, for it was on Friday in 1709 when Alexander Selkirk found an "almost drowned Indian" on the shore of an island upon which he had been shipwrecked. Ten years later Selkirk's story will be immortalized by Daniel Defoe in Robinson Crusoe. There the Indian becomes a "savagc cannibal," black, barbarous, stupid, servile, adoring and, although nothing is reported of his sexual behavior, he has an acquired taste for

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the flesh of his own species. Crusoe's narrative is a success story, one in which a socially, culturally and biologically handicapped black man is civilized and Christianized--taught, in other words, to be like a white.^{one} From Friday's point of view it is a success story as well. Not only is he alive, he is greatly enabled by his association with his savior. And it should not go unremarked upon that Crusoe is^{also} greatly enabled--including having his life saved--by Friday. Yet, like all successes, what is earned is mitigated by what one has lost.

If we look at the story from Friday's point of view, rather than Crusoe's, it becomes clear that Friday had a very complex problem. By sheer luck he had escaped death, annihilation, anonymity and engulfment by enemies within his own culture. By great and astonishing good fortune he had been rescued. The gift of his own life was so unexpected, so welcome, he felt he could regulate the debt only by offering that life to his rescuer, by making the gift exchange literal. But he had a problem.

Before he appeared on the shore, his rescuer, Crusoe, had heard no other voice except a parrot's trained to say his owner's name, Robin, for short. Crusoe wanted to hear it again. For over twenty years he has had only himself for company, and although he has conquered nature and marked time, no human calls his name, acknowledges his presence or his authority. Lucky for him he discovers a refugee escaping certain slaughter. Once rescue has been

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effected, Crusoe is in a position to have status as well as dominion. Both are important, so he does not ask the refugee what his name is; instead Crusoe names him. Nor does he tell the refugee his own name; instead he teaches him the two words that for xx months will do just fine: Master and Yes.

Friday's problem was not to learn the language of repetition, easily, like the parrot, but to internalize it. For longer than necessary the first words he is taught, first Master; then Yes. remain all he is permitted to say. During the time in which he knows no other English, one has to assume he thought in his own language, cogitated in it, explained stimuli and phenomena in the language he was born with. By and by he is taught more English vocabulary and the grammar to hold it. Had he expected that the life he offered Crusoe would include not just his services, his loyalty, his devotion, but also his language as well? Did he ever wonder why Crusoe did not want to learn his language? Or why he could never speak his master's name? In the absence of his master's desire did he forget completely the language he dreamed in? Think no more of the home he fled before the weapons of those who had ^{conquered} ~~conquered~~ and occupied it? On the two or three occasions when Crusoe is curious enough to ask Friday a question about the black man's feelings, the answers are surprising. Yes, he longs for his home; Yes it is beautiful on his island. Yes he will refrain from eating human flesh. Yes if he has the opportunity he

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will teach his tribe to eat bread, cattle and milk instead. But no, he will not return to his home alone; he will go only if Crusoe accompanies him. [If Crusoe's assumption that Friday's people eat only each other were true, the practice would have decimated them long ago, but no matter--the white man teaches food habits; the black man learns them.]

The problem of internalizing the master's language is the problem of the rescued. Unlike the problems of survivors who may be lucky, fated etc, the rescued has the problem of debt. If the rescuer gives you back your life, he shares in that life. But if, as in Friday's case, the rescuer saves your life by taking you away from the dangers, the complications, the confusion of home, he may very well expect the debt to be paid in full. Not, "go your own way and sin no more," Not, "here, take this boat and find your own adventure--in or out of your own tribe." But full payment, forever. Because the rescuer wants to hear his name, not mimicked but adored. This is a serious problem for Friday and seems to get more complicated the longer one thinks about it.

Friday has left and been rescued from not only the culture that threatened him, that wants to kill and engulf him, but also from the culture that loves him. That too, he has left behind forever.

Even when he discovers his own father, half dead, in precisely the position he himself had been in when Crusoe saved his life, his

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joy is not so reckless as to quarrel with the menial labor he and his father are directed to do, while an also-rescued Spaniard, who has lived among Friday's tribe for years, is given supervisory responsibilities. Nor is his joy so great that he speaks to his father in their mutual tongue. Instead he translates for Crusoe.

This loss of mothertongue seems not to disturb Friday, even though he never completely learns the master's. He negotiates a space somewhere in between. He develops a serviceable grammar that will never be eloquent; he learns to shout warnings of advancing also black enemies but he can never dare speak to these enemies as his master does. Without a mother tongue, without the language of his original culture, all he can do is recognize his old enemies and, when ordered, kill them. Eventually Friday no longer negoti^{ates}_^tes space between his own language and Crusoe's. Eventually the uses, of Crusoe's language, if not its grammar, become his own.

In one of the incidents that occur on the island, a band of Spanish mutineers come ashore, holding thier Captain prisoner. Crusoe and Friday liberate him and consider how to dispose of the criminals. Some of the mutineers are singled out by their Captain as villains; others ^{are} ~~were~~_^ identified as being forced ^{into}_^ to mutiny. So some are spared; others slaughtered. This discrimination is never applied to Friday's people. With one exception, an old man tied and bound for execution, all of the blacks Friday and Crusoe see are killed or wounded (most of whom, in Crusoe's tallying of the

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dead, Friday kills). The exception, who turns out to be Friday's father, is not given a name nor, as with Friday, is one solicited from him. He becomes part of Crusoe's team, called upon and relied on for all kinds of service. He is dead at the end of the story. While he is alive and after he is gone, he is called by his master "the old savage."

Voluntary entrance into another culture, voluntary sharing of more than one culture has certain satisfactions to mitigate the problems that ensue. But being rescued into another adversarial culture can carry a huge debt. The debt one feels one owes to the rescuer can be paid, simply, honorably in lifetime service. But if in that transaction the rescued loses his language, the language of his culture, there may be other debts outstanding. Leon Higgenbotham has charted the debt Clarence Thomas owes to the culture that fought for and protected him before he arrived out of a turbulent sea on to shore. Thomas was teased and humiliated by black people, called ABC, American's Blackest Child; he was chastened for wanting an education superior to theirs. He was also loved and nurtured by them. As in any and everybody's background, family, culture, race, region--there are persecutors and providers; kindness and loathing. No culture ever quite measures up to our expectations of it without a generous dose of romanticism, self-delusion or simple compassion. Sometimes it seems easier, emotionally and professionally, to deny it, ignore it, erase it,

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even destroy it. And if the language of one's culture is lost or abandoned, it is easy to describe that culture in the terms of the rescuing one, to dismiss it by substituting the phrase "culture of the victim" for the critique and redress of systemic racism; to cry and decry victimization, loathing it when it appears in the discourse of one's own people, but summoning it up for one's expediently de-racialized self. It becomes easy to confuse the metaphors embedded in the blood-language of one's own culture with the objects they stand for and call patronizing, coddling, undemanding, rescuing, complicitous white racists a lynch mob. *(Under such circumstances,)* It is not just easy to speak ^{the master's} ~~crusade's~~ language, it is necessary. One is obliged to cooperate in the mis-use of figurative language, the re-enforcement of cliché, the erasure of difference, the jargon of justice, the evasion of logic, the denial of history, the crowning of patriarchy, the inscription of hegemony, the vandalizing, sentimentalizing and trivializing of the torture black people have suffered. Necessary because, without one's own idiom, there is no other language to speak.

Both Friday and Clarence Thomas accompany their rescuers into the world of power and salvation. But the problem of rescue still exists: both men, black but unrecognizable at home or away, are condemned to mimic, to internalize, to adore--but never to utter a single sentence understood to be beneficial to their original culture--whether they are the people who wanted to hurt them or

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those who loved them to death.

Clarence Thomas once quoted someone who said that dwelling on the horrors of racism invited one of two choices: vengeance or prosperity. He argued for a third choice. tk He did not elaborate on which he had chosen, finally, but the language he speaks, the actions he takes, the Supreme court decisions he has made or aligned himself with, the foot, as it were, that he has picked up and placed on his head give us some indication of what his choice has been. The footprint in the sand that so worried Crusoe's nights, that compelled him to build a fortress, and then another to protect his new world order, disappears from that white man's nightmares once Friday embraces then internalizes his master's voice, and can follow the master's agenda with passion.

It is hard not to think of these events in any way but unfortunate. And it is difficult to convince anybody that what ~~took place~~ ^{happened} is over--without serious consequences. For those who looked forward eagerly to Thomas' confirmation, the expectation of a reliably conservative court may be re-assuring. Time will have the most to say about that. For those who believe the future of the nation as a democracy is imperiled by this most recent addition to the bench, Again, time will speak rather definitively. Yet, regardless of political alliances, something positive ^{and liberating} has already surfaced. In matters of race and gender, it is now possible and

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necessary, as it seems never to have been before, to speak about these matters without the barriers, the silences, the embarrassing gaps in discourse. It is clear to the most reductionist intellect that black people think differently from one another; it is also clear that the time for undescribating racial unity has passed; a conversation, a dialogue between black men and women has begun in a new arena and the contestants defy the mold. Nor is it as easy as it used to be to split along racial lines as the alliances and coalitions between white and black women, and the conflict among ^{black} women, and among black men prove.

This volume is one of the several beginnings of these new dialogues in which issues are taken as seriously as they are. Only through thoughtful, incisive and far-ranging discourse will all of us be able to appraise and benefit from Friday's dilemma.

problem. Before he appeared on the shore, his rescuer, Mr. Crusoe had heard no other voice except a parrot trained to say his owner's name, Robin, for short. The problem was, Mr. Crusoe wanted to hear it again. Wanted a voluntary repetition of his name, his rank, his power. So Friday's problem was not to learn the language of repetition, easily, like the parrot, but to internalize it. For longer than necessary the first words he is taught suffice: Master and Yes [?] In the time[?] during which he knows no other English, one has to assume he thought in his own language, cogitated in it, explained stimuli and phenomena in the language he was born with. By and by he is taught more English words and the grammar to hold them. Had he expected that the life he offered Crusoe would include not just his services, his loyalty, his devotion, but his language as well? Did it ever occur to him that Crusoe might want to learn Friday's language? In the absence of his master's desire did he forget completely the language he dreamed in? Think no more of the home he fled before the weapons of those who had conquered and occupied it? On the two or three occasions when Crusoe is curious enough to ask Friday a question about the black man's feelings, the answers are surprising. Yes, he longs for his home; Yes it is beautiful. Yes, he will refrain from eating human flesh. Yes if he has the opportunity he will teach his tribe to eat bread, cattle and milk instead. If Crusoe's assumption that Friday's people eat only each other were true, the practice would have decimated them long ago, but no matter the white man teaches food habits; the blackman learns them .etc.

The problem of the rescued, unlike the problem of survivors,

education on how to feel and think about black people. The People Magazine lead story, taken with a straight face proved their devotion which we already recognized because he shook her hand in public on three occasions. And it was this union that was one of the reasons Thomas came up with in trying to explain Ania Hill's charges.] Predictably too, the nominee called for a transcendence of race, remarked on its divisive nature, its costliness, its degradation of principles of freedom. Unexpectedly, did race surface bouyed and weighted by the fact of its gender component.

The rights of women, seething issues which are altering the nation in ways that, except under an American dictatorship, will remain permanent, threatened to wipe off the map the ideology-not-race strategy the nominators had. And leaked sources became the focus of those matters, not the issues raised.

[title: "Friday on the Potomac"]

On Friday Anita Hill articulated points in her accusation. Friday afternoon Thomas answered, in a manner of speaking, these charges. It was a momentous day of that week, and turned my attention to a Friday that is not a day, but a person as well as as matrix of race relationships.

Friday had a complex problem. By sheer luck he had escaped death, annihilation, anonymity and engulfment by enemies within his own culture. By great and astonishing good fortune he had been rescued. The gift of his own life was so unexpected so welcome, he felt he could regulate the debt only by offering that life to his rescuer, by making the gift exchange literal. But he had a

Blacks could be relied on to support well, Willie Horton even? for skin voting would overwhelm every other consideration. {This riskless gamble, what Cornel West calls "racial reasoning", held perfect sway.} Msny blacks were struck mute by the embarrassing position of agreeing with David Dukes, others leaped to the defense of the candidate on the grounds that he was "no worse than x"; that any white candidate would be a throw-back; that "who knows what he might do or become in thosse hallowed halls"? But his nominators did know and they were correct as even the earliest action CT has taken in the cases coming before the court confirm.

Appropriate also was the small secret swearing in ceremony once the candidate was confirmed. For secrecy had operated from the beginning. {see notes and lead into the secret rites Bhaba refers to]

In addition to race, class surfaced in both predictable and unexpected ways. Predictably the nominee was required to shuck: to convince white men in power that operating a trucking business was lowly work in a Georgia where most blacks would have blessed dirt for such work. It wasn't a hard shuck. It is still possible to say my father was a doorman {meaning servant, meaning poor) and get the sympathy of whites who can not or will not do the arithmetic needed to know the difference between what a DC doorman earns and a clerk at the census bureau. [The nominee could be understood as having realized his yearning for and committment to "racelessness" by having a white spouse at his side. At least their love had transcended race, at least love had been more than ectasy and compaionship--it had been for Virginia Thomas an important

agenda; alert to and mindful of the real lives most of us live, as it is translated into the good of the republic or aloof, delusional, indifferent to any mandate popular or unpopular, if it is not first vetted by the Executive branch. The capacity to delude oneself into thinking one is fit to serve or to shape the public is bottomless. Perhaps it should be--bottomless, that is. For desire elides quickly into deserve.

As in virtually all of the nation's great debates, non-whites and women figure powerfully although their literal bodily presence may be obliterated, denied or go unremarked. So it is perhaps predictable that this instance where serious issues of male prerogative, sexual assault, the issues of racial justice and racial redress, the problematics of governing and controlling women's bodies, the alterations of work space into (sexually) domesticated space, be subsumed into the candidacy for the supreme court. That these issues be worked out on, and inscribed upon the canvas/flesh of black people is no surprise.

The contempt emanating from the White house was palpable--it was not necessary for the candidate to be a first rate legal scholar, as it had not been necessary for other candidates. NOR was it necessary that he have demonstrated a particular sensitivity for the issues and concerns of a race he belonged to but which "had no bearing" on his selection to fill a seat vacated by the single Supreme Court Justice who both belonged to and did represent the interests of that race. The "race" that does not matter could be counted on within the race that really does not matter because

LUBIANO'S NOTES RE TONI'S INTRODUCTION
CT-AH BOOK

* (1-2) In the first couple of pages you're describing the state of information overload and overkill that masks the "nothing there" state that actually exists. Not enough is thrown out that a coherent, substantive discussion is possible; thus the speculation frenzy. There never is anymore when it comes to the state's relation to blacks. This is hyper reality; reality simulacra at its most chaos producing. You're also describing intense grappling after meaning and reassurance. People talking to one another but more like dogs worrying over a bone with no meant on it. Maybe after describing this process as you do here, you could say explicitly that this is what has gone on.

* (3) "a black male nominee to the Supreme Court was confirmed"-- what is black? what is male? in that moment? Perhaps you could ask some version of that question, or answer it.

* (4) "In addition to what was taking place, something was happening" -- how about switching the order of the two phrases, because the second phrase is the conventional way of describing an event; "what was taking place," I think, then serves to imply greater significance. And it is the greater significance that you then go on to explore--so "what was taking place" is the gateway to the rest of the essay.

*This
also
speaks
to the
bottom
of pg. 3.*

In that way
one could
feel compelled
to dismiss
bl. culture
as
unlike in
able to acquire
status - to
demonstrate and
confirm superiority

did not so much
ignite a ^{sustained} research
for truth or
a retreat from
her charges
; rather
simply produced
an exchange of

* (4) "the consequences of not gathering the thoughts, ... of academics ... would be too dire" -- I agree, but why? Especially why these academics? Although I know you're not being specific in the sentence, I think being so would be a good idea. (Not about us as individuals, but as the particular kinds of academics we all are.)

* (5) "history routinely ignored or played down ..." -- including the history of our present. (that phrase is from something.)

* (6) "smooth ... oil poured daily" -- yes, I like that; but oil poured where or by whom? Through the media? Over the consciousness of us all?

* (7) body emphasis -- a return of the repressed in a form that "manages" the fear; describing the body is a way of "handling" that body--and by extension the fear of the larger black body.

* (8) relation between discussion of the body and then discussion of the polarities love/repulsion -- is abrupt; no transition--yet this is a fascinating area. Plus, what you say about black people is entirely consistent with the ways in which "woman" is figured; so these hearing tied together so neatly the fear of the other. And Thomas's language -- I don't understand what would motivate her--is the constant cry of "I don't understand them" of white folks about black folks, of men about women.

* (9) puppy to monster; pet to insanely unpredictable "nature" -- also describes the relation of men to women in both private and public (eg. office) worlds

* (11) "dignified hearing" -- how about "substantive hearing"? ✓

* (11) the presence of the racialized other in the chambers had the same effect upon whites that contact with them in the Cotton Club must have had--an easing of everybody's inhibitions; classic psychological displacement of sexual anxiety and desire onto the "other".

* (13) "what is useful to be distributed as knowledge" -- very good.

* (15-16) the stuff on what class means among blacks was really good and cogent.

* (17) "could easily turn one's attention to another Friday" -- is just too disingenuous. It wasn't an easy or natural turning-- I, for example, was stunned when you suggested it, and, as with any really powerful analogy, once it is stated and explained, then it seems inevitable--but not before!!!! Why not personalize the essay here and claim this insight more directly and forcefully as yours; say a little bit of how you arrived at it; especially since the essay has been to this point fairly restrained and not personal?

* (18) relation of "But he had a problem" to the next paragraph where your attention goes to Crusoe. More of a transition is needed.

— By the way: The Friday stuff is superb!

* (20-21) the discovery of the father who is then placed in yoke also to Crusoe is wonderful. It reminded me of the use to which Thomas put his grandfather--he wrote the history of his romanticized paternity and then put it at the state's service.

* (21) the incident of the incursion of the Spanish mutineers merits more of an introduction than just the quantitative "one of the incidents".

* (24-25) the next to the last paragraph is really powerful; which makes the very last sentence look even blander.

* Just thought about this: Friday was even more a Cannibal with Crusoe: what he ate was himself, ^{his people} his own history, his language and culture. What he ate was his human particularity and what was left was the tamed and servile demon that his self-Cannibalization -- and Crusoe's attenuated enjoyment of it -- created. Actually, both Crusoe and Friday "ate" Friday's pre-existence, pre-history. Which is the always already colonizing move.