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Anthony's Silence: The Intersection of Sex, Gender and Race in *Designing Women*

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Editor's Note: Lynn H. Turner and Helen Sterk examine one small part of the Designing Women script, a short speech by Anthony (one of the series' regulars). They argue that, as the only African American male in the series, Anthony was in a unique position to examine the gender and race issues posed by the Thomas/Hill hearings, and by the Thomas nomination itself. Calling on writings by African American scholars commenting on the Senate hearings and on race and gender issues generally, the authors conclude that the structure of Anthony's speech represents a missed opportunity.

On November 4, 1991, CBS's *Designing Women* departed from the usual situation comedy format to present the strong views of its creator, Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, on the gendered aspects of the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas Senate hearings and Thomas's eventual confirmation as a Supreme Court justice. In this episode, the main characters did not engage in dialogue so much as deliver short speeches representing various feminist or antifeminist points of view concerning the hearing, Hill's allegations, and Thomas's responses. The cumulative effect of these speeches reinforced Bloodworth-Thomason's thesis that Hill was truthful and Thomas lied. Additionally, the episode indicted the hearings and the all-male panel of senators. Danforth was cast as delusional, Thomas as a ham actor, Doggett and Kennedy as dogs, Simpson as a pig, and Specter as a perjurer (Ross, 1992).

However clear the presentation of the gendered aspects of this situation may have been, the multilayered aspects of race were ignored. This is unfortunate because one of the main characters, Anthony, was in a prime position to highlight racial issues. The character of Anthony is an African

American man who might have given voice to some of the racial complexity inherent in the Hill/Thomas hearings. Instead, Anthony was silenced. Anthony reacted to the women characters, listened to them vent their feelings on sexual harassment, and finally spoke at some length on what he claimed was the most important issue: Was Clarence Thomas qualified to serve on the Supreme Court?

Given that Anthony speaks, how can we maintain he was silenced? Although not literally speechless, Anthony remained silent on issues that were swirling through African American communities, issues that centered on racial unity, pain at having "dirty linen" aired, and whether an African American woman should put her honor before that of an African American man.

Our argument depends on an analysis of the content of Anthony's one major speech, which reflected a White feminist point of view, contrasting that content with what it could have been—a speech more responsive to nuances of race, gender, and sex. The analysis proceeds in four parts: first, discussion of the White media's appropriation of the Hill/Thomas narrative; second, exploration of the racially based possibilities for Anthony's speech; third, exploration of the gender and racially based possibilities; and fourth, exploration of the sex, gender, and racially based possibilities. On the basis of our analysis, we contend that the character of Anthony, in this episode, does not speak authentically as an African American male, with all the historical and cultural baggage that entails, but rather speaks as a mouthpiece for the Caucasian-American feminist sensibility that informs *Designing Women*.

THE NARRATIVE'S RHETORICAL APPROPRIATION

The Hill/Thomas hearings provided Americans with a powerful, rhetorical drama. What started out behind the scenes on September 12, 1991, with Hill's behind-closed-doors testimony about Clarence Thomas's treatment of her, quickly moved to center stage on October 6 when National Public Radio and New York *Newsday* scooped their competition by publicizing Anita Hill's allegations. On October 11, Thomas's hearing was reopened, carried live on all the networks, as well as C-SPAN (Spencer, 1991). The hearing carried all the necessary marks of a good rhetorical drama, including a public playing space, conflict, intrigue, morality and a clash of perspectives that demanded audience involvement (Fisher, 1989).

Thomas took the stage first, denying the allegations and arguing his reputation had been impugned. He took issue with the publicity of the allegations, saying, "As if the confidential allegations themselves were not enough, this apparently calculated public disclosure has caused me, my

family, and my friends enormous pain and great harm" (U. S. Senate Committee, 1991, Part 4, p. 8). By calling Hill's disclosure "calculated," Thomas placed the disclosure in the category of a conspiracy. He further highlighted the conspiratorial interpretation of events by implying that powerful White interests were behind Hill's testimony. With a certain amount of passion, he asserted, "I will not provide the rope for my own lynching, or for further humiliation. I am not going to engage in discussions, nor will I submit to roving questions, of what goes on in the most intimate parts of my private life, or the sanctity of my bedroom. These are the most intimate parts of my privacy, and they will remain just that: private" (p. 10). Through naming the hearings as a kind of lynching, Thomas reminded listeners of the ugly violence White men perpetrated on Black men over at least the last 100 years.

Close on the heels of this impassioned, angry address by the accused judge, Amita Hill spoke to the Judiciary Committee and, through the mass media, to all of America. Her story did not rely on the insidious power of conspiracy theories for its spine. Instead, she told a story of one employee, a woman, embarrassed by the disclosures and comments of one employer, a man:

My working relationship became even more strained when Judge Thomas began to use work situations to discuss sex. . . . He spoke about acts that he had seen in pornographic films involving such matters as women having sex with animals and films showing group sex or rape scenes. He talked about pornographic materials depicting individuals with large penises or large breasts involving various sex acts. (p. 37)

Hill concluded her remarks by telling the committee, and the larger audience, that Thomas "made a comment that I vividly remember. He said that if I ever told anyone of his behavior that it would ruin his career" (p. 39). She ended her prepared testimony by saying she would have preferred to keep silent, "But when I was asked by a representative of this committee to report my experience, I felt I had to tell the truth. I could not keep silent" (p. 40).

In contrast to Thomas, Hill offered no interpretation of or framework for her story. She placed it in no cultural context, but presented it as a "report" of her experience, for the audience to take up and analyze. Later, in an interview with Jill Nelson for *Essence* magazine, Hill did place a racial frame around her testimony. She said she recognized the harassment of Black women as a betrayal of the race, a recognition not widely shared in African American communities struggling to establish honor for Black men. Furthermore, she noted, "[As] African American women, we are always trained to value our community, even at the expense of ourselves, and so we attempt to protect the African American community" (Nelson, 1992, p.

119). However, in her public testimony before the Judicial Committee, Hill neglected this racial analysis. In so doing, Hill effectively relinquished control over her story and invited the firestorm of controversy that followed.

The contrast between Hill's and Thomas' stories could hardly have been greater. As told by Thomas, the allegations were prompted by White conspiracy; as told by Hill, the allegations concerned only a female employee and her male boss. When picked up by the White media, the story was interpreted as one of sexual harassment, an employer taking advantage of an employee, a story of gender and power or a story of a woman crying "Wolf!" to bring down a man (see, e.g., "A not very funny thing," 1991; Boo, 1991; Carlson, 1991; Gibbs, 1991; Marton, 1991; Painton, 1991; Salholz, Kaplan, & Clift, 1991; Stone, 1991; Taubin, 1991). These cultural frames were legitimated by Hill's testimony. However, as interpreted by the Black media, the stories were those prompted by Thomas's testimony—stories of negative effects of White stereotypes of Black sexuality (as animalistic and unbridled), of Black men's unjust accusations and lynchings, and stories of the problems for Black women and men if Black women do not "put the race first" (see, e.g., Allen, 1991; Boyd, 1991; Bray, 1991; "Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill," 1992; Crawford, 1991; Gillespie, 1993; Guy-Sheftal, 1991; Jeffers, 1991; Malveaux, 1991; Morrison, 1992; Nelson, 1992; Ransby, 1991; Simmons, Nelson, Chamber, & Cox, 1992; "Sisters in defense," 1992). Clarence Thomas raised the issue of race in his defense; Anita Hill remained focused on the relationship she shared with Thomas. For two reasons, her perspective dominated the White media. First, because her focus could more easily be expanded into a broader cultural focus on sexual harassment, something that crosses racial lines, her interpretation found greater media play. Second, because her interpretation allows the frame of liberal, democratic ideology to be placed on the story—a frame that gives presence to discussions of individual rights, a frame used to good effect by White feminists who have brought about legal progress for women—her interpretation met the understanding of a White, rights-conscious culture.

Issues surrounding sexual harassment are important, but telling stories featuring harassment alone strips this particular case of its complexity. Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas were both Black; both held privileged places in a White-dominated society. Treated as a heroine by many in the mainstream media, such as that represented by *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines, Hill was not accepted wholeheartedly as a heroine in the Black media. As the rest of this chapter will show, many African American people, especially men, but also women, saw this entire episode as shameful for the race. Concern for one's race leads to a consciousness of personal responsibility for the good of the group over individual rights. Many African Americans believed the good of the race would be served by Hill's public silence. If she had problems with Thomas's behavior, they thought,

she should have dealt with him in private. For example, Shahrazad Ali, author of *The Blackman's Guide to Understanding the Blackwoman*, was quoted in *Essence* magazine as saying, "I do not think that a Black woman under any circumstances should report any kind of sexual issue to a White man, unless it's rape or something like that. . . . It's just a sham, because every Black woman in America knows how to get a Black man off her" (Simmons et al., 1992, p. 59). Although Ali's statement may sound somewhat crude, it spoke for more than just one person. Issues of shame for African Americans, of pressures on Hill to remain silent so a Black man could sit on the bench of the highest court in the land, and of racial unity were not issues that found voice in media normally heard, read, or viewed by a broad range of White Americans.

Because these issues were muted in American mass media, public decision making was impoverished. As Walter Fisher (1989) has established, public decisions—political, social, cultural, and religious—depend upon stories to give common folk the "good reasons" to make decisions. When people watched the hearings on television or discussed them around the water cooler at work or at the dinner table, they weighed the stories. Hill's story was reinforced by stories of other women who had been harassed, such as in *Newsweek's* feature, "All Too Common a Story." Thomas's claim of racial bias, and corresponding questions of why Black women should continue to put themselves behind Black men, rarely were featured. As a result, the three ingredients of race, sex, and gender were not mixed together in a search for "good reasons" to make decisions about harassment or about racial preference. Instead, gender usually was distilled out and served up as the *key* "good reason" to use in deciding how men and women should relate to one another.

POSSIBILITIES FOR RACIALLY BASED SPEECH

Before the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings took place, many African Americans were concerned with Thomas's qualifications for the Supreme Court. This concern was focused on the question of whether Thomas was equipped, intellectually or ideologically, to give voice to the traditional values of the African American community. Beverly Guy-Sheftal (1991), in *The Black Scholar*, discussed the fears the Black community shared including:

his unfitness to serve on the High Court due to inadequate judicial experience and overall mediocrity; his views on affirmative action and abortion; his record at the EEOC; his disavowal of deeply held, frequently stated right-wing views; his portrayal of his hard-working,

supportive sister as a disgusting welfare mother; and his obvious lying—he claims not to have read a report opposing abortion which he signed, or having ever discussed *Roe v. Wade*. (p. 35)

In media sensitive to African American concerns, such as *Black Enterprise* magazine and the PBS documentary produced by Ofra Bikel, “Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill: Public Hearings, Private Pain,” two conflicting desires emerged. First, African Americans keenly felt the need for one of their own race to be represented on the Supreme Court. Second, they wanted African American interests—which were not seen as fitting into a conservative political agenda—to enter into Court decisions. They were not sure that Clarence Thomas, even though Black, was the person to accomplish this.

In early July 1991, the N.A.A.C.P. met one week after President Bush nominated Thomas. Thomas’s race did matter to them and so did his conservative views. The N.A.A.C.P. decided to postpone their decision for six weeks. During that crucial time period, John Danforth worked the Senate for Thomas’s approval (“Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill,” 1992). The Congressional Black Caucus went on record as being opposed to Thomas. They said, “We cannot ignore or excuse Clarence Thomas’s record, views and values merely because he is Black. His view of constitutional rights as he has articulated them as jurist, administrator and before the nation’s press are inconsistent with the interests of the people we serve” (Foote, 1991). Thomas’s race mattered deeply to many African Americans because, as Roger Wilkins of George Mason University said, a “perverse kind of racism” (“Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill,” 1992) was expressed by nominating a conservative African American with little judicial experience as a Supreme Court justice.

Anthony’s one sustained speech in the *Designing Women* episode devoted to the Hill/Thomas hearings spoke to Thomas’s limited qualifications and the insult that was delivered to African Americans by choosing someone who had black skin, but lacked credentials:

You know what bothers me about the whole thing? Everyone has gotten off the issues: Is Clarence Thomas qualified to be a Supreme Court justice? All I know is that the American Bar Association voted him barely qualified. For the first time in history, two committee members voted not qualified. Now, I am a Black law student and I don’t need fourteen White men to tell me how remarkable it is for this man to pull himself up from his roots. But that does not a Supreme Court justice make. Now what amazes me is how all those senators sat there and let him make that speech about how all these liberal groups are persecuting him because he’s Black, when it is painfully obvious that is the only thing that they like about him. (Bloodworth-Thomason, 1991)

However, this was not the speech of a racially conscious person who had witnessed the Hill/Thomas hearings. The speech echoes concerns that the White community had about Thomas, while ignoring the issues voiced by African Americans. Even though Anthony stated he, too, is Black, Anthony's reference to race was painfully superficial. If he were to speak as a racially conscious person, he might have focused on Thomas's ideological positions and commented on how they clashed with traditional African American concerns. Furthermore, Anthony's speech addressed neither of the issues stated earlier as important to his race—getting a Black person on the court and getting Black interests a place on the table. Anthony did not support Thomas in order to get a Black person on the court, and Anthony did not speak to Thomas's anti-Black ideology. As a result, Anthony did not make an authentic, racially nuanced statement.

POSSIBILITIES FOR RACIAL AND GENDER BASED SPEECH

During the Hill/Thomas hearings and subsequent to them, within the African American community, the relatively straightforward issue of race became complicated by its juxtaposition with issues of gender (gender referring to the cultural construction of "woman" and "man"). Several gender issues emerged during and shortly after the hearings, including Black women's recognition of the relatively low status of women within African American social systems (and the perceived need for African American women to submerge their self-interests for the "good of the race") and the anger felt by Black men, as well as some women, over a Black woman being used to bring down a Black man.

These gender issues differ significantly from those affecting White-Americans. White-Americans enjoy racial privilege in America; being White is considered the norm, whereas other races are framed culturally and literally as "the other." In America, where many White-Americans still feel "White makes right," and many African Americans believe when White-Americans refer to "justice" they mean "just-us," another layer of power, over and above patriarchal power, is imposed on gender relations. Race adds complexity to gender in that African Americans feel obliged to act in a united way in order to make progress in a White-dominated culture. What this means for African American women is that they feel a pressure to put their men's good ahead of their own, at least until racial equality is achieved. At that time, women's autonomy and authority can be given fuller attention (hooks, 1989, 1990; Walker, 1983).

In some very compelling ways, African American women, feminist and nonfeminist alike, are caught between a rock and a hard place. They see their future in society as bound together with the future of African American

men in a way quite unlike White-American women, who tend to view their future good as somewhat independent from the future good of White men. For many White feminists, the only way to achieve empowerment is through the dismantling of the White male power structure. However, for African American women, acting *responsibly* for communal good holds higher value than their acting to gain *rights* as individuals. Rosemary Bray (1991) says of the sacrifice made willingly by Black women, that it "has been an unspoken promise to our people; it has made us partners with Black men in a way White women and men cannot know" (p. 94). At least one outcome of being in partnership with Black men has been Black women's silence on misogyny within African American communities. Quoted in an *Essence* article surveying 21 influential African Americans, Ralph Wiley indicated his displeasure with Anita Hill for choosing her individual rights over the good of the race: "But the Black women I really talked to, do business with, whose opinions I respect or have had past relations with refused to take that quantum leap into 'Well, we're women first.' They seemed to understand the relationship of their negritude to this whole thing" (Simmons et al., 1992, p. 92). More obliquely, yet just as surely, Joseph Perkins, editorial writer for *The San Diego Union*, suggested that Hill had betrayed her race. That most Black women believed Thomas over Hill, Perkins asserted, suggests that they "brought a certain level of objectivity and detachment" to the issue (Simmons et al., 1992, p. 92). No truly "objective" and "detached" Black woman could possibly believe another Black woman's accusations against a Black man.

Although African American women voluntarily, for the most part, have linked their fortunes with African American men, many feel frustration that their choice is not given honor within their culture. Gillespie (1993) lamented that "we women have routinely been expected to put our men first, no matter what. But many of us are also painfully conscious of the way that misogyny in our community is often both heightened and disguised under the banner of racial consciousness" (p. 80). Some African American women called members of their community to account, using the Hill/Thomas hearings as an opportunity to argue for the personhood of women, as deserving of liberation and respect as Black men. Thus, Ransby (1991) argued for "an agenda that recognizes the personhood of all African American people, and which recognizes that for more than half of the population, liberation also means fighting against the sexist and misogynist culture which affects us as Black women" (p. 83). The "trashing" of Anita Hill within African American communities gave presence to the risk to personal reputation, honor, and loss of group status a Black woman might face if she "betrayed" the race.

Although Black women chafed at having to bear indignities in silence for racial good, Black men were angered at being brought low by a Black woman, one of their own. Joseph Perkins compared the Thomas case

with that of DC Mayor Marion Barry, for in both scenarios "a Black woman was used to bring down a Black man" (Simmons et al., 1992, p. 92). The Black men interviewed by Ofra Bikel for *Frontline* agreed that they were "against what she did for harmony's sake, for the sake of peace and pride" ("Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill," 1992). Anita Hill was seen as breaking rank with people she should have been united with; as a result, her testimony was viewed as betrayal, and the appropriate response to betrayal is anger.

For African Americans, there was at least one more issue of gender and race, and that was that *they* were not sought out by the media as experts on what Black-on-Black sexual harassment might mean. Hill and Thomas were treated by the media as if they were White, ignoring the potential nuances harassment might exhibit because of their race. Both Black men and Black women found themselves excluded from the pantheon of "talking heads" the news media called up for comment (Crawford, 1991, p. 16). The *Frontline* documentary included such statements by African American feminists as "I'm not sure I want to leave it up to White women to articulate my needs" and "They [White feminists] never remembered they were liberated from their kitchens because my grandmother cleaned them" ("Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill," 1992). The point they were making is that White feminist experience is not Black feminist experience; White women may experience sexism, but Black women have historically borne the brunt of White women's own brand of sexism, one flavored with racism. White women who assume they know Black women's experience without at least attempting to understand it through research and conversation insult Black women as surely as men who presume to speak for women insult women. Black women, especially feminists, have felt their silencing keenly, coming as it did from their two sources of community—one racial, the other ideological.

When gender issues are blended together with racial ones, many possibilities emerge for the character of Anthony on *Designing Women*. If Bloodworth-Thomason had wished to play up Anthony's identification with women's concerns, Anthony could have commented on Thomas's perspective that Black males constitute the race. When Thomas called attention to his "high-tech lynching," he highlighted the experience of Black *males* in a White-dominated society. Furthermore, Anthony could have pointed out, as did Ernest Allen (1991) in *The Black Scholar*, that "the connection between the lynching of Black males and racial stereotypes had to do with the alleged rape of White females, not the sexual harassment of Black ones" (p. 15). Anthony might have spoken with reference to a group of women called the "Sisters in Defense of Anita Hill." They wrote in their *New York Times* advertisement (1992) that "Clarence Thomas outrageously manipulated the legacy of lynching in order to shelter himself from Anita Hill's allegations" (p. 56). With a certain amount of heat, Julianne Malveaux (1991) argued, "But

here is the bottom line. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas was confirmed because he invoked the image of a Black man hanging. They don't make ropes for Black women's lynchings or destroy us with high drama. Instead, it is the daily grind of life that wears us slowly down, the struggle for a dignified survival" (p. 71). Thomas was confirmed; he was not hanged from a tree. He abused the powerful, culturally charged image of lynching in order to highlight the racial injustice men with black skins have suffered in this country ever since they were brought here as slaves.

The abuse was that Thomas ignored the very real sexual terrorism of Anita Hill that also took place during and after the hearings. Anthony's speech might have acknowledged this. On at least two counts, Thomas could have been said to have distorted Black experience in America by ignoring Black women as being in the race with him and by rhetorically manipulating the reality of lynching. If, on the other hand, Bloodworth-Thomason had wanted Anthony to speak as a male-identified Black man, Anthony could have expressed some sense of outrage at Anita Hill's accusations of one of her own race. Not a hint of either perspective appeared in his speech; his speech responded to issues that mattered before Hill spoke, issues of credentials, rather than to issues crucial to race and gender.

POSSIBILITIES FOR RACIAL, GENDER AND SEXUALLY BASED SPEECH

On other occasions he referred to the size of his own penis as being larger than normal, and he also spoke on some occasions of the pleasures he had given to women with oral sex. (U. S. Senate Committee, 1991, Part 4, p. 38)

The Hill/Thomas hearings greatly humiliated African Americans. Talk of penises and pubic hair, and sex talk overlaid with racial overtones, shamed African Americans. Shame silences, for it is evoked when taboos are broken. To speak to the taboo takes great bravery, because resistance to open discussion is so strong. In this case, the taboo from the African American perspective was to talk about sex between Black people, especially nonconsensual sexual activity. In America, African American sexuality has been framed by White-Americans as bestial, wild, and "bigger than life." Many African Americans therefore choose not to feed the fires of stereotype and prejudice by discussing their sexuality, especially anything negative about it, outside of their own communities. To talk about sexuality would invite what Patricia Williams called, "the pornographic voyeurism of white people" (Simmons et al., 1992, p. 59).

At least two themes associated with Black sexuality emerged in the hearings: references to male insatiability and to female promiscuity. The first was evoked when Thomas called the hearings a "high-tech lynching," and when he said he would "not provide the rope for my own lynching" (U. S. Senate Committee, 1991, Part 4, p. 10). White men, especially White men hooded and covered with white sheets, have hanged Black men for allegedly raping White women. These allegations hinged on the perception that Black men could not control their sexual desires for White women and would risk their lives for the chance to rape White women.

If Black men are stereotyped as insatiable, driven wild by desire for White women, Black women also suffer from sexual stereotyping, the stereotyping of promiscuity. This justifies all sorts of sexual abuse of Black women. If a woman is promiscuous, after all, she cannot by definition be "raped," in that she is always available, always willing, always fair game. During the hearings, some of the comments of the members of the Judicial Committee came dangerously close to such a characterization of Anita Hill. In particular, Alan Simpson impugned Hill's sexual reputation:

And now I really am getting stuff over the transom about Professor Hill. . . . I got letters hanging out of my pockets, I got faxes, I've got statements from her former law professor, statements from people that know her, statements from Tulsa, Oklahoma, saying WATCH OUT for this woman. . . . But nobody's got the guts to say it because it gets all tangled up in this sexual-harassment crap. . . . If we had 104 days to go into Ms. Hill, her character, her background, her proclivities, and all the rest, I'd feel much better about the system. (U. S. Senate Committee, 1991, Part 4, p. 253)

Although Simpson left ambiguous just what he meant by "proclivities," he did imply that there were sexual slurs he could make about her. He did not produce any proof of these claims during the hearings—no letters, faxes, or statements—but he did introduce innuendo into the proceedings, innuendo that Hill was impure. He used implication to destroy her credibility, because, of course, an impure woman *deserves* harassment. Barbara Ransby (1991) expressed outrage at Simpson and his colleagues, claiming that "what was termed by reactionary White conservatives as a 'high tech lynching' of Clarence Hill was in actuality a public gang rape of Anita Hill, and by extension a violent assault upon all women of African descent" (p. 85). It is the deepest kind of sexism that says if a woman is not a "lady" as patriarchal culture defines "lady," then she, and everyone like her, is a tramp who deserves and gets no respect and can be abused with impunity.

The news media framed the Hill/Thomas hearings as being first and foremost about sexual harassment and, second, about African American sexual practices. However, such was not the case for African American people. For them, a race sexually used and abused by White-Americans, the

accusation that a very powerful African American man sexually humiliated a well-educated and relatively powerful African American woman caused deep shame and embarrassment and tore the semblance of dignity from the race. For them, these hearings were about the humiliation and leveling of the African American race on national television (Ransby, 1991; Simmons et al., 1992).

The character of Anthony on *Designing Women* did not reflect this sense either in his sustained speech about Thomas's qualifications or in other actions during the course of the show. To the contrary, in one little interchange with Bernice, a rather empty-headed older female character, Anthony *reinforced* White stereotypes of Black sexuality. As the characters on the show watch the Hill/Thomas hearings on their television, the issue of oversized Black male sexual organs emerges. When Bernice says, "I must admit I have wondered if what they say is true." Anthony responds, "This is the kind of sexual harassment I put up with around here every day," but adds the aside, "And yes, Bernice, it is true" (Bloodworth-Thomason, 1991). This interchange, as well as the longer speech, plays with White stereotypes, not Black concerns. Although the banter is humorous, its humor appeals more to White audiences than to Black ones. In fact, given the kind of humiliation felt by Black America over the hearings in general, this commentary by Anthony could well be seen as tasteless, if not disrespectful.

From an African American perspective, this *Designing Women* episode had a wealth of complex issues to explore. The character of Anthony provided a perfect vehicle for voicing at least some of them. In other episodes, Bloodworth-Thomason has Anthony speak to Black concerns of oppression and stereotypes. The interplay in earlier seasons between Anthony's character and one of the women characters, Suzanne, often highlighted stereotyped conceptions of African American males, and deflated them. In this episode Anthony—and along with him any distinctively African American concern—is rendered mute. Furthermore, the character of Anthony is doubly silenced in this episode. First, the point made in his one sustained speech about Thomas's qualifications is never picked up and discussed by the women characters. So, in effect, his speech stands alone, unintegrated into the rest of the episode. The lack of uptake by the other characters reinforces the perception that Anthony speaks as a mouthpiece and not as a human being enmeshed in the racial and sexual realities incumbent upon his identity as an African American male. Second, the character of Anthony is not given any lines referring to uniquely African American concerns about the Hill/Thomas hearings, concerns such as power, women's place in Black culture, and racial-sexual stereotyping. Because of this silencing, Linda Bloodworth-Thomason missed an opportunity to enrich America's understanding of race and gender relations.

HOW THE POSSIBILITIES COULD HAVE BEEN MADE ACTUAL

Based on the preceding analysis, it seems to us that the character of Anthony had available to him at least two racially, sexually, and gender-based options from which to speak—either to pass some sort of judgment on Hill for “dissing” a Black man and, therefore, the Black race, via her graphic depictions of conversations years passed, or conversely to bring into awareness the lonely courage it takes for a Black woman to accuse a Black man of sexual improprieties, a prerogative culturally reserved for White women and men. In either case, a racially oriented Anthony would have been aware of the shame and humiliation many African Americans felt over two wealthy, well-educated, successful Black people discussing sexual secrets in excruciating, explicit detail.

Awareness of the shame would not necessarily demand that Anthony express it; he could simply have acknowledged it. Consider, for example, Michele Wallace's observations about the hearings: “I have never seen Black people on television like that—in control of their own statements and their own images” (Simmons et al., 1992, p. 92). Anthony similarly could have recognized that, despite all its indignities, the hearings brought two very prominent Black people before the American public and gave them a high-profile public forum. This was especially true in Anita Hill's case, in that Thomas had already appeared on television at length during the first round of confirmation hearings.

Instead, Anthony addressed the “safe” issue of Thomas's credentials and the subtle racism that kept opponents from grilling Thomas further. In so doing, the character of Anthony ignored the complexity of race and gender relations implicit in the Hill-Thomas hearings. As a result, *Designing Women* did not do a thorough job of exploring the varied implications of this public event.

It seems to us that in writing *Designing Women*'s “The Strange Case of Clarence and Anita,” Linda Bloodworth-Thomason would have done well to make Anthony more central rather than relegating him to a minor character role. Anthony was the only character in the show who could address these implications—he is a thoughtful Black man, surrounded by White women who spend a lot of time talking about gender issues. The other characters could have asked him what his perspective on the Hill-Thomas hearing was and then worked the commentary and humor around this perspective.

Crenshaw (1992) observes that “at least one important way social power is mediated in American society is through the contestation between the many narrative structures through which reality might be perceived and talked about” (p. 403). Bloodworth-Thomason chose to highlight a White feminist narrative whose key issue is sexual harassment in the workplace at

the expense of so many others, more culturally and racially situated, that could have been told in this episode. She had the characterological resources needed to tell a more enlightened story—sympathetic, liberal, White women; a conservative and arrogant White woman; a slightly off-center, eccentric, older female character; and a Black man who has experienced oppression. Anthony had been imprisoned for some time and alludes to sexual pressures in prison; that could have served as an entry point for observations on power and sex, perhaps even the intersections of power, sex, and race. Anthony was silenced in spite of the fact that it would have been in character for him to explore these other narratives.

Perhaps having Anthony function as we suggest here would have jeopardized the clear feminist focus of the “he did it,” “she lied” arguments of this episode. Still, there would have been great value in taking that risk. Unless women and men of color can speak from and to their own experiences in the mainstream mass media, our understanding of gender will continue to be shaped by the voices of power and privilege, whether those belong to rich, White, ideologically biased men—or women.

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