

## MOVE OVER WILLIE HORTON

by

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Move over Willie Horton. Here comes Anita Fay Hill, not in her own person but in the form of Senate Judiciary Committee member and staff shenanigans. This coldly cynical political tactic may now be history, so far as the confirmation of our newest Associate Supreme Court Justice is concerned. But it is tomorrow's news as far as the public's growing concern with unscrupulous political tactics is concerned.

This new case is not so remote from the Willie Horton scandal as may at first appear. It is sufficient to recall that the Lee Atwater campaign commercial did not initially raise Horton's race explicitly. That issue eventually surfaced, but not without very helpful innuendoes from Democrats, seeking to derail a charge about leniency toward serious crime with charges of racism. The Democrat effort did not prevent the election of George Bush, but it did serve to perpetuate a dangerous racial polarization in American life.

Similarly, the tarring of Justice Clarence Thomas has not prevented his ascension to our highest Court, but it has served to smear our political institutions. What did Senators Kennedy and Metzenbaum accomplish with such a reprehensible approach? Perhaps we give them too much credit when we assume that theirs was a desperate, last-minute attempt to defeat a Court nominee with whom they disagree. Perhaps there is reason in their vindictiveness, their debasing of the coinage of political discourse in the United States.

Consider that, this morning, not only are the careers of these distinguished Senators, and others such as Alan Cranston, tainted by justified reproaches, but they have now added to their company even so august an office as that of a Supreme Court Justice. Can they really be all that bad, if we appoint to the highest Court in the land a man about whom such issues have been raised? Leave aside that the charges against Justice Thomas seem entirely without merit and have been stage-managed by political schemers instead of surfacing through the meritorious complaints of innocent victims. The unanswered charge serves as well as an official report or a jury verdict to palliate the sins of those Senators who have made use of this charge so shamelessly. They force us to ask whether we can trust anyone, thus diminishing the impact of our justified mistrust of them.

One month ago, just before the Senate Judiciary Committee began its hearings, a group of conservatives launched television commercials in support of the Thomas nomination. In the commercials they challenged the moral and ethical propriety of several of the Senators who were to sit in judgment of Clarence Thomas. The conservative's advocates justified themselves by pointing out that theirs was a pre-emptive strike at what they anticipated to be the tactics of the liberal left. For their efforts they were roundly condemned, not only by liberals but by President Bush and nominee Thomas. We must in retrospect see how prescient they were. Too bad they did not continue their effort!

The lesson to be learned from all this is that no criticism is too harsh for those entrenched political insiders who will stop at nothing to secure their position. If they can not measure up to the high standards of the political institutions designed by the Framers to

attract representatives of the highest characters and abilities, then they will aim mortal blows at those institutions themselves. By depreciating our institutions, diminishing our respect for everyone, they build such a world as they can continue to move freely in and hold their heads up high. Theirs is the political ambition described by Abraham Lincoln, which being unable to ascend by freeing slaves will advance by means of enslaving free-men. Willie Horton and Anita Fay Hill are the common currency of their political discourse, a debased currency. The only question is, why do we continue to leave in their hands the power to print up such bogus bills whenever they choose.