

Bush shouldn't use situation to censor

Our suddenly sensitive president just announced proposals for reforming the Senate confirmation process because, among other things, it shows little concern for the reputation and feelings of its subjects.

The proposals include censoring Senate access to confidential FBI reports during future executive branch nominee background checks, and the investigation of information leaks.

Offended by the "bruising hearings" of Clarence Thomas, the president recently told public policy groups at the Smithsonian's Museum of American History that he wouldn't stand for special interest groups practicing the "piranha tactics of smearing the individual and ignoring the issue ..." because the tactics "destroy lives and wreck reputations."

It's good to see the radiant Bush in all his humanitarian glory, but there's a group (females) he forgot to include. The issue — inquiry into Thomas' actions, opinions and character — was not ignored by asking whether the man committed sexual harassment, but underscored.

Sexual harassment has for too long been regarded as unimportant, explaining Bush's assumption that "the issue" was being ignored when the question was raised. Sexual harassment is an issue in itself and deserves to be part of the examining process.

The problem wasn't in addressing Thomas' possible committal of this action — that was necessary once the question came to light, but in the way it was brought forward and ultimately handled.

Senate Judiciary Chairman Joseph Biden, with Democratic Senators Howard Metzenbaum and Ted Kennedy, knew about Anita Hill's harassment charges from the beginning, but kept quiet primarily because she requested confidentiality and no FBI investigation.

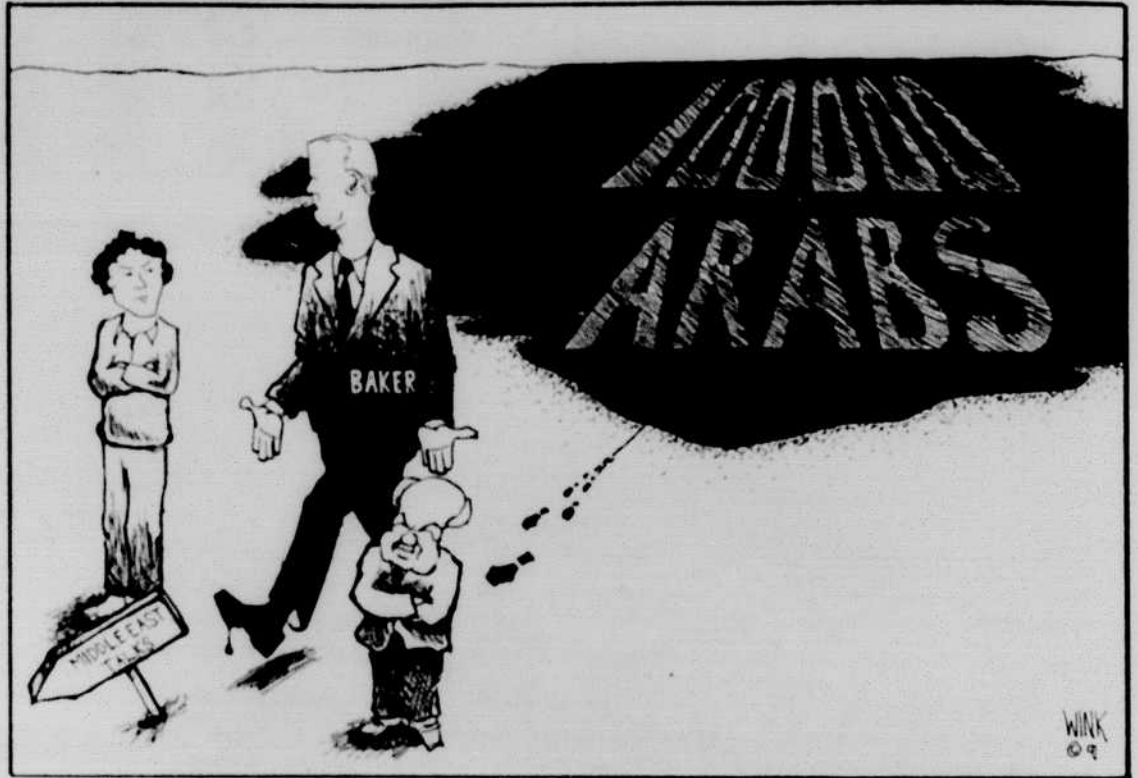
After Hill decided to go public, Biden blew it. With the vote scheduled for Sept. 27th, Biden didn't brief his fellow Democrats on the committee until Sept. 26th, giving them barely any time to evaluate Hill's charges. Some committee Democrats got the statement just 20 minutes before the scheduled vote and at least one was never told of the report.

The confusion carried over into the rescheduled hearings, justifying Bush's "burlesque show" label. His reprimand of the confirmation process is valid, but it wasn't the system's fault as much as the participants'.

Bush now wants to discourage future fiascos, attributing this one to leaked information, by shutting FBI files down. But the connection doesn't fit. The damage was done by the leaked statement, not the FBI report. These are two different documents.

The embarrassing situation presents Bush the perfect opportunity to fix things, no questions asked — but questions *should* be asked. Limiting access to FBI files is a serious action, as is closer monitoring of information leaks.

There's no doubt, the review process needs streamlining. Censoring information, however, should not be part of reformation measures.



↑ DON'T YOU GUYS KNOW YOU CAN SOLVE THIS PEACEFULLY? ↑

COMMENTARY

Reputations based on accusations

By Jason Keuter

Now that the fuss over Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill is over, and their reputations have been demeaned because of unproven allegations, perhaps we should take a second look at a few characters against whom nothing can be "alleged" to demean their characters. As we look at the U.S. Senate, it should come as no surprise that they would create a public forum for unsubstantiated allegations.

Given their public records, I believe the members of the U.S. Senate decided to lend credence to unsubstantiated allegations as the best means for the public to judge public figures; this is why they made such a fuss over Hill's allegations.

If we were to judge the Senate on these terms, then no members of that exalted body would emerge with their reputations intact. As every U.S. Senator knows, unsubstantiated allegations are the only viable weapons this country's politicians have to ensure their good standing among their constituents.

Let's begin with Ted Kennedy. Although many may now regard Kennedy as a champion of the victims of sexual harassment, others still remember the Ted Kennedy drunkenly steered his car off that bridge at Chappaquiddick, he may have been slurring his way through a denunciation of sexual harassment to the young damsel riding shotgun, but whether or not this was the case, we'll never know.

But now the benefit of the doubt rests with the accused, we must assume that this was not the case. Unfortunately, my unsubstantiated accusation against Ted Kennedy will not receive the endorsement of the Senate, but perhaps it will create, in the public mind at least, a more favorable impression of the senior senator from Massachusetts.

If we are going to judge Thomas and Hill on the basis of unsubstantiated allegations, it's only fair that we give the same treatment to our nation's senators, for our opinions of them have for too long been based upon the unflattering revelations of facts.

But I cannot make allegations against Thomas's foes alone. What about Strom Thurmond? One of Thomas's staunchest supporters, the former segregationist rallied to the defense of an appointee from an administration that got elected by pandering to the very same racial stereotypes that the evil Democrats paraded in front of the nation during the past week. Since America hasn't had a good dose of Willie Horton for so long, the Democrats thought it only fair that, this time, they should bear the burden of dredging up the racist themes extolled in the film *Birth of a Nation*.

Birth of a Nation is a movie which depicts the results of black political power during Reconstruction as being the triumph of hedonism and bodily excess over rational democratic government. It seems as if the same conclusions were established during the course of the hearings.

We must commend the Democrats for upholding the tradition of lending credence to racial stereotypes established by Woodrow Wilson, a Southern Democrat who gave a private screening of *Birth of a Nation* and attempted to resegregate Washington, D.C., during a moment of Southern Democratic ascendancy in our body politic.

Needless to say, Thurmond, the king of the Civil Rights Bill filibuster, was deeply disturbed by the racism of the Democrats, so much so that he gave his questioning time to his Republican colleague, Arlan Specter. Although this is just an allegation, I think it is fair to say that Thurmond, shocked and dismayed by the potential racial strife that could result from the

hearings, was afraid he wouldn't be able to hold back his tears if he was to ask questions of his good friend from Georgia. Rumor has it that while Specter asked the questions, Thurmond took the opportunity to read a few phone books he never got around to finishing several decades ago.

Of course that is an unsubstantiated allegation testifying to Thurmond's commitment to get to know the names and numbers of as many constituents as he can. No other Senator seeks such intimate contact with the good citizens of this nation. We owe Thurmond an enormous debt of gratitude for bridging the seemingly insurmountable gap between the powers that be and those they rule.

Finally, we have Senator Robert Byrd: Majority Leader, Democrat from West Virginia and former member of the Ku Klux Klan. Byrd, initially a Thomas supporter, changed his mind after hearing Hill's testimony. He was outraged at Thomas's remark that the Senate investigation was a "high tech lynching." Byrd said Thomas blackmailed the committee with charges of racism, and the committee shamefully backed down.

One might speculate that Byrd thought it a shame that his fellow Dixiecrats ... I mean Democrats ... would back down from a black man making a charge of racism. Perhaps Byrd had grown too accustomed to situations where many white men would level allegations (such as rape) against one black man, and these white men would never back down. Signs of defiance by such black men were summarily punished. What sorrow Byrd must have felt as the tables turned, and the nation watched a single black man defy the accusations of a concert of white men, who withered in their seats as that black man accused them of attempting a high tech lynching.

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