

The selling of the trashing of Justice Thomas

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By Armstrong Williams

“Strange Justice: The Selling of Clarence Thomas,” (by Jane Mayer and Jill Abramson) hits the shelves this week amid much press fanfare. It has been accompanied by an orchestrated effort in the media to rekindle a controversy about the character of Justice Clarence Thomas.

The big guns have trained their sights on Justice Thomas, hoping to blast his reputation to tatters. This is nothing new when it comes to Supreme Court nominees found unsatisfactory to the intellectual fashion-brokers of the left. Robert Bork, for example, has felt the sting of his own public character assassination. What is new is the relentless smearing upon nomination.

The Washington Post ran a huge piece in its Style section attempting to bolster Anita Hill's claims against Justice Thomas with the claims of a disgruntled former Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) employee whom he fired. The ABC News program “Turning Point” last night did the same. The New Yorker and the Los Angeles Times have run major articles trashing him. Even the Wall Street Journal has devoted several pages of excerpts from the book. It has already (strangely) been nominated for a National Book Award, though unseen by any reviewers apart from the award judges.

The media's sudden hyperventilation over the subject has revived Anita Hill's lucrative career as the Patron Saint of Harassment Victims. She has already made more than a million dollars from her own book deal alone, despite disavowals at the hearing that she intended to write a book. She already commands over \$10,000 per speech. Expect to see her regularly on the talk circuit. All this hype stands in stark contrast to the treatment given David Brock's “The Real Anita Hill,” which generated few new stories concerning its major revelations casting doubt on Miss Hill's account — much less excerpted and seconded, despite its long ride on the New York Times' best-seller list.

The press push for the book is not the only thing strange about

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“Strange Justice.” The choice of subject matter is curious as well. There are many similar, and more well-founded, accounts of sexual misconduct among public figures. If the authors and their cheerleaders in the press are really concerned with the question of sexual harassment, why haven't they offered a similar treatment of the rich harassment histories of Sens. Bob Packwood and Ted Kennedy; of charges including pornography, sex with a minor, and obstruction of justice being leveled against Rep. Mel Reynolds; or especially of Paula Jones' sworn and seconded allegations against our sitting president?

In each case, the aforementioned stories are better grounded and more timely than the stale rehashing of old accusations against Justice Thomas. Why, then, the relentless pursuit of substantiating old allegations — particularly considering that the press has taken pains to ignore or dismiss the mounting evidence against President Clinton, in part because it is “old news”? In 1992, Anita Hill was presented the American Bar Association's Woman of the Year Award by Mrs. Clinton herself. Will the First Lady or the ABA be as accommodating to Mrs. Jones?

The prudishness of media decision-makers regarding most of these sex scandals stands in stark contrast to their prurient interest in the dead-letter question of Anita Hill's allegations. There are only two major differences between all the aforementioned stories and that of Justice Thomas. One is that all the above cases involve either or all of the following: numerous corroborating witnesses; a probative, verifiable history of sexual misconduct; or enough evidence to substantiate actual legal charges.

The greater substantiation for all these allegations ought to make them more worthy of a book and extensive media coverage, yet there are no books, and precious little ink, being spilled over the misdeeds of these high elected officials. The only other difference between their stories and that of Justice Thomas is one of politics. The press shares the social and political views of the others.

The book and all its publicity really are not about Anita Hill or Angela Wright or the truth about sexual harassment. They are about the left using all the means at its disposal to maintain its power and the dominance of its ideology. One can only understand the disparities involved in the media's treatment of the individuals and the two books on Anita Hill's claims in the microcosm of media thinking. It is purely, merely, political. Justice Thomas has stubbornly refused to “grow,” as have other justices, under media goading. He has committed the sin of refusing to read and respond to the press. This has made the press gods angry. The wrong-thinking negro must not defy them with impunity. He must be punished.

Justice demands that the same standards be applied by the news and publishing industries when scrutinizing and “exposing” public figures, regardless of their political stripe. Clearly, a double standard has been applied. “Strange Justice” indeed.