

*Africa*, Sharon A. Sykora (Slippery Rock U), *Political Cultural Characterizations of Second-Wave Vietnamese Refugees*, and David E. England (Arkansas State U) and F. David Levenbach, *Cognitive Structures in Citizen Appraisals of Municipal Services*.

## **Research in Progress:**

### **Clarence Thomas vs. Anita Hill**

*Deconstructing the Political Spectacle: Sex, Race, and Subjectivity in Public Response to the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill "Sexual Harrassment" Hearings\**

*Project Directors:* Dan Thomas and Craig McCoy, Department of Social Sciences, Wartburg College, Waverly, IA 50677; and Alan McBride, Department of Political Science, Grambling State University, Grambling, LA 71245.

Extending Murray Edelman's analysis of the constructed, phenomenal nature of political spectacles, this research employs Q methodology as a means of interrogating the range of meanings implicit in public reaction to televised hearings held by the U.S. Senate in connection with Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. Results based on n=50 subjects (26 black, 24 white, with approximately equal numbers of men and women within the two races) disclose a range of five alternative constructions of the same set of events, which closely follow racial and gender lines.

*Factor A* contains mainly females, both black and white ("Anita Hill was telling the truth; however, the way she was brought into the limelight to testify against Thomas was wrong"). *Factor B* reflects a concentration of black females who defended Thomas ("Anita Hill's coming to testify against Judge Thomas after ten years of silence shows me how vindictive she was to try

---

\*The manuscript from this study has now been accepted for publication in the *American Journal of Political Science*.

and destroy a man's reputation in order to thwart his appointment to the Court"). *Factor C* is mainly white males who were detached in attitude and emphasized legal principles ("Even though the statute of limitations would have long run out if this had been a legal claim of harassment, the importance of Judge Thomas's character warranted this kind of hearing"). And bipolar factor D is all male, with blacks at one end ("My gut feeling is that Clarence Thomas is guilty of sexual harassment and should not have been appointed to the Supreme Court") and whites at the other ("Thomas never wavered from his denial, never made inconsistent statements; his testimony was consistent with what we learned about him in his real confirmation hearing -- a testament to his strength, his character, his integrity").

| Effects                | Levels                      |                           |                           |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Evaluative orientation | pro-Thomas<br>(a)           | mixed, null<br>(b)        | pro-Hill<br>(c)           |
| Frame of reference     | actor<br>disposition<br>(d) | actor<br>situation<br>(e) | broader<br>process<br>(f) |

Commentary on the Thomas-Hill affair was sampled from magazine and newspaper articles, letters to the editor, talk shows, and so forth, and eventually N=54 statements were sampled in terms of the accompanying balanced design.

### *Selected Bibliography*

- Edelman, M. (1988) *Constructing the political spectacle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Franklin, C.W., II (1984) Black male-black female conflict: Individually caused and culturally nurtured. *Journal of Black Studies*, 15, 139-154.
- Norment, L. (1992, January) Black men, black women, and sexual harassment. *Ebony*, pp. 120-122.

### ***Selections from the Thomas/Hill Q Sample (N=54)***

Space precludes publication of the entire Q sample, which can be obtained from the project directors.

1. Clarence Thomas represents a new kind of role model, one that won't walk in lockstep with the established orthodoxy. He is a challenge to the status quo, and certain "special interest" groups are threatened.
2. The whole confirmation process was stupid. I have no doubt in my mind that Clarence Thomas said those things to Anita Hill. The real question is, should we judge Clarence Thomas on the testimony of a single individual in considering him for the Supreme Court?
3. Anita Hill was telling the truth. However, the way in which she was brought into the limelight to testify against Thomas was wrong.
4. I don't believe Anita Hill because it supposedly occurred 10 years ago. And how can she remember it in such detail? I think she was paid to say it by someone who opposes him. Someone was behind her.
5. We have just witnessed what Congressional vultures will do to
- destroy the characters of both Anita Hill and Judge Thomas.
6. My gut feeling is that Clarence Thomas is guilty of sexual harrassment and should not have been appointed to the Supreme Court.
7. While morality and politics seem to be ever more exclusive, smear campaigns like the Thomas hearings insure that only the incompetent or the amoral will hold the most important offices in this country.
8. A matter as serious as this -- namely, alleged sexual harassment charges against a nominee for a seat on the highest court in the land -- cannot be withheld from the American public.
9. I was looking for reasons as to why Judge Thomas would be a good Supreme Court Judge. Instead, I heard nothing. Therefore, I conclude he was simply appointed for political reasons.
10. Talk about grace under pressure, courage, and self control -- Professor Anita Hill is the one who should be on the Supreme Court.