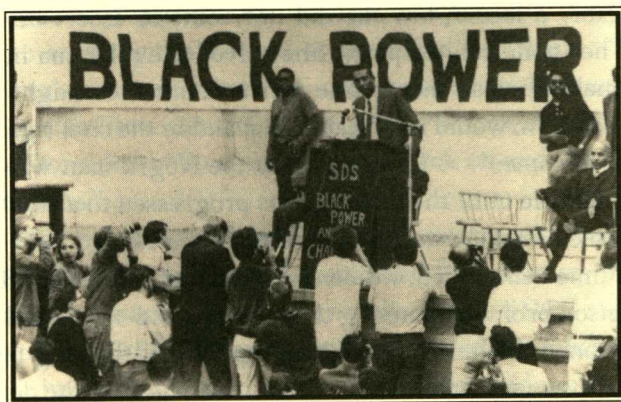


"[W]e Were Asked to Deny a Part of Ourselves"



Stokely Carmichael speaks at 1966 Black Power rally

IN OCTOBER 1966, *EBONY* PAID homage to women civil rights activists in a special issue devoted to women. One of the women featured in the civil rights story was twenty-five-year-old Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, who earlier that year had been elected executive secretary of SNCC, replacing James Forman. Robinson was the first and only woman ever to hold a top formal leadership job in SNCC—or, for that matter, in *any* major civil rights organization—in the 1960s. Yet in the *Ebony* article, she raised the possibility that women might someday withdraw from the civil rights arena: “In the past, Negro women had to assert themselves so the family could survive. Fortunately, more men are becoming involved with the movement, and the day might come when women aren’t needed for this type of work.”

At first glance, it seemed a strange thing for this famously indepen-

dent, strong woman to say. But given the mood of the times, Robinson's comment was not really odd. While white women were starting to assert themselves, black women had begun to pull back, to downplay their assertiveness. Within the black community, there was a growing sentiment, promoted by advocates of black power and popularized in black publications like *Ebony*, that black men needed to step forward and that black women were obligated to support this male ascendancy. With black male leaders like Martin Luther King and Stokely Carmichael the targets of criticism and investigation by the federal government and some of the leaders' erstwhile white allies, black women were sensitive to the need for racial unity. Many were prepared to fall in step behind their men.

As a result, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson was in a delicate position. She was undeniably a leader, but she did not want to assert herself at the expense of her male counterparts. She solved the dilemma in the *Ebony* article by making clear that, while men's dominance might be a goal, women, in her view, would not be able to abandon the civil rights fight for many years to come: "... I don't believe the Negro man will be able to assume his full role until the struggle has progressed to a point that can't even be foreseen—maybe in the next century or so."

For the time being, then, women were needed in the fray, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson prominent among them. In the mid-1960s, Robinson was the unquestioned linchpin of the SNCC operation, fighting hard for the organization's survival while at the same time juggling the demands of a husband and a baby. Robinson had been with SNCC from the beginning; she'd gone to jail in Rock Hill and had been one of the first Freedom Riders sent to Parchman penitentiary. Despite SNCC's later divisions and seemingly insurmountable problems, she remained committed to the organization and its mission with a passion that few, if any, could match.

After her stint in Parchman, Robinson had returned to school at Spelman but continued her association with SNCC. She first started working as James Forman's unofficial assistant, but it soon became clear that she was, in fact, the one running the show day to day. By early 1962, "you got your money from Ruby; you got your orders from Ruby," said SNCC activist Reggie Robinson. According to Ivanhoe Donaldson: "Forman was sort of above it all. . . . He would come in and cruise through. . . . But Ruby had to deal with the nuts and bolts of what made things work. Jim might take credit, but Ruby was in there, actually doing it."

Known for her ferocious energy, Robinson was also noted for a drill-sergeant demeanor that could cow the most intrepid organizer. "Inside SNCC there were these men who would take on ten sheriffs, and if they

had to take on Ruby, they were terrified," Dorothy Zellner remarked. Stanley Wise, who worked closely with Robinson in Atlanta, said, "She absolutely did not tolerate any nonsense."

Still, for all Robinson's work and fierce dedication to keep SNCC together, the task facing her was incredibly daunting. "As Ruby Doris received more power to govern . . . SNCC became progressively less governable," noted Cynthia Griggs Fleming, Robinson's biographer. The young woman was in charge of a national civil rights organization, with responsibility for dozens of local organizing projects, a substantial payroll, a sizable car and truck fleet, not to mention fund-raising, lecturing, and printing operations. But it was also an organization on the brink of financial collapse. An organization torn by anger and conflicts, filled with people who wanted to "do their own thing," who insisted they were not responsible to anybody, least of all to the office in Atlanta. "Ruby was always juggling someone's 'creativity' against someone else's urgency, and involved were class issues, racial issues, gender issues, education issues," said Ivanhoe Donaldson. "So she was easy to pick on and she had to deal with all that stress."

She was seen by many in SNCC as hating whites, particularly white women. Mary King, for example, remembered Robinson as "bristl[ing] with antagonism" toward her and other white female SNCC staffers. But, according to others, Robinson, by the mid-1960s, had lost much of the hostility she once had borne toward white women. She told writer Josephine Carson that she had decided to try to rid herself of that hatred when "I realized what I was doing to myself. I was losing my self-respect and even losing my looks. I finally had to work myself out of it. I had to find a new sense of my own dignity, and what I really had to do was start *seeing* all over again, in a new way."

Robinson was, however, unquestionably hostile to the issues raised by King and other white women regarding the role of women in SNCC. That didn't mean she was oblivious to women's complaints: In fact, she was one of the participants in the 1964 sit-in in Jim Forman's office. But her single-minded focus was on the survival of SNCC and its task of organizing black people to fight for freedom and equality. Any other issue, including the question of women's rights, she considered irrelevant and divisive.

She felt the same way about Stokely Carmichael, the man viewed as the architect of black power, and his incessant calls for what she termed "the destruction of Western civilization." Carmichael and his cohorts were so busy goading the white establishment, she believed, that they had given up the job of organizing. At one meeting, Robinson insisted that Carmichael

be prevented from holding a press conference at which he, as SNCC chairman, planned to oppose the draft. "Ruby called for the organization to silence Stokely on the grounds that what he was saying was contrary . . . to what the organization had been putting forward," recalled James Forman. "And . . . she felt that if we didn't silence him the organization ran the risk of not being in existence."

Robinson was noted for her toughness and aggressiveness, but she was a far more complex woman than her public persona indicated. When SNCC organizers were arrested and thrown in jail, it was Robinson who showed the greatest concern about their welfare, Ivanhoe Donaldson recalled. "You knew that if anybody in Atlanta knew you were alive, it was Ruby Doris. . . . Ruby was concerned about your psyche, how you were handling the situation. Were you eating? Were you getting beat up? Were you on a hunger strike? Were you going to survive it internally? She'd write you these long letters, telling you how to be strong, how to deal with things. She was very much into people."

She also revealed a wistful vulnerability at times, as she tried to cope with the inhuman pressures of her SNCC job while struggling to be a good wife and mother. At the end of 1963, she had married Clifford Robinson, the brother of her sister's husband. Although Robinson became a mechanic on the SNCC staff, servicing the organization's cars, he had not been involved in the movement. A couple of years later, Ruby Doris told Josephine Carson that she sometimes thought the main reason she married Robinson was because he was the only man she'd met "who is stronger than I am." She loved him, she hastened to add, but "we aren't very much alike. . . . [A] man has to be powerful to handle a woman. We're smarter. There's no question about that. . . . And Negro women can be pretty hard on a man. I mean, white women don't do so much of this as far as I know, but we *fight*!"

In 1965, Robinson became pregnant and worked until the day she gave birth. Two weeks after her son was born, she went back to her job. The already frenzied pace of her life became even more frantic. During the day, Robinson's mother took care of the baby, and Robinson was concerned that her son would become more attached to his grandmother than to her. "He's getting more of her nature than he is of mine . . .," she fretted to Carson. "But I hope I can stay very close to him. . . . Sometimes I worry about it, though. My mother is a . . . strong woman and she could influence my son if I'm not with him enough. She's good, but he *is* my son." At night and on the weekends, she did most of the child care and housework. Robinson may have been a radical in the fight for racial justice, but she never chal-

lenged society's view—a view embraced by her husband—that a woman's main responsibility was to her family and to her home. She was always rushing, always trying to juggle a multitude of concerns at once. Sometimes, a ball was dropped: One day, on the way to her mother's house to drop off her son before going to work, she realized she had left the baby back home.

At SNCC, the stresses were intensifying. She fought a demand from the Internal Revenue Service to provide the agency with its complete financial records, including a list of SNCC contributors—a demand that she and other SNCC leaders considered to be a harassment campaign. According to James Forman, who remained close to her, she also endured “vicious attacks” from certain male SNCC staffers who fought her attempts to impose discipline on the organization. They justified their verbal assault on Robinson, Forman said, “by the fact that their critic was a woman.”

Robinson, who had suffered from various ailments since her jailing in Rock Hill, was mentally and physically exhausted. “I have a feeling of . . . death, but it strengthens my feeling of life somehow,” she told Carson in 1966. A few months later, she fell ill after attending a fund-raiser in New York and was rushed to a hospital. After extensive tests, she was diagnosed with lymphosarcoma, a rare and deadly type of cancer.

On October 7, 1967, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson died. She was twenty-five years old.

Later, Bernice Johnson Reagon would say about Robinson: “With her life she kept SNCC together. And I think it took her life. That's all. I don't think it's complicated.” Kathleen Cleaver, an activist in the Black Panthers, agreed. “What killed Ruby Doris was the constant outpouring of work, work, work, work, with being married, having a child, the constant conflicts, the constant struggles that she was subjected to because she was a woman. . . . [S]he was destroyed by the movement.”

As early as 1964, Pauli Murray was warning of a “backlash of a new male aggressiveness against Negro women.” She viewed the later black power movement as a “bid of black males to share power with white males” in a world “in which both black and white females are relegated to secondary status.”

While black militants might question other values of white culture, they were not averse to the idea of patriarchy. And while they might oppose most actions of the federal government, they, and other black men,

would use a report by a white government official to bolster their call for the subordination of women.

One morning in late 1964, Daniel Patrick Moynihan found himself awake at four o'clock. He knew what had roused him at that ungodly hour—his growing worry over the Johnson administration's attitude toward civil rights. Moynihan was an Assistant Secretary of Labor in the administration, a thirty-seven-year-old liberal intellectual with a Ph.D. in political science. What concerned him was the complacent belief of many government officials that the Civil Rights Act, passed just a few months earlier, was the main answer to the civil rights problem. Moynihan, however, was firmly convinced that the act—and other legislation ending legal racism—would not, by themselves, allow blacks in America to reach full equality. The government, he believed, had to mount a major national effort to deal with the more complex, more intractable problems of black inequality, particularly those dealing with unemployment. Moynihan was remarkably prescient in his views: His sleepless morning occurred before the events in Selma, and, at that point, few people, including civil rights activists, were looking much beyond the immediate goal of a bill to guarantee voting rights.

Moynihan decided to write a paper about the issue, which he hoped would serve as an alarm bell for the administration. He wanted, he said later, "to explain to the fellows how there was a problem more difficult than they knew and also to explain some of the issues of unemployment and housing in terms that would be new enough and shocking enough that they would say, 'Well, we can't let this sort of thing go on. We've got to do something about it.'" Those terms focused on the disintegration of the black family, and they would indeed shock—but in ways that Moynihan never anticipated.

In "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," Moynihan argued that generations of white racism had resulted in the black family's unraveling, which he saw as the underlying reason for many of the economic and social problems that blacks faced. "[H]ere is where the true injury has occurred: unless this damage is repaired, all the effort to end discrimination and poverty and injustice will come to little," Moynihan wrote. In his view, it was a vicious cycle: Because of racism, black men were not able to find decent jobs and support their families properly. As a result, families often broke up, and women became household heads—their families' sole means of support as well as the sole parent of their children. Such situations led to widespread poverty, to an increased reliance on wel-

fare, and to children of these fatherless homes dropping out of school and getting into trouble. In his views on single-mother families, Moynihan did not mince words: "Negro children without fathers flounder—and fail."

His primary purpose in writing the report was to encourage the government to come up with policies that would strengthen black families. But his intentions got lost in the *Sturm und Drang* that arose after the report's release in March 1965. Many blacks accused Moynihan of making the black family a scapegoat for problems directly attributable to racial discrimination. He was also seen as blaming black women for the fix that their men and their children found themselves in. Moynihan protested that he had no such intention, that he was merely describing a situation that existed, not affixing blame to any blacks, women or men. The blame, he said, belonged to the racism of white America.

But the wording of his report contributed, rightly or wrongly, to such an interpretation. Moynihan viewed the problems of black families in this country through the filter of his experiences and attitudes as a white Irish-American male who came of age in the late 1940s and early 1950s. His report, for the most part, was male-centered, focusing on the need to help black men achieve equality in a society dominated by white males. (The need for black women's equality was never mentioned.) Because the "matriarchal structure" of the black community is so at odds with the rest of American society, Moynihan argued, it "seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well." He added: "Ours is a society which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. The arrangements of society facilitate such leadership and reward it. A subculture, such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage."

Throughout the report, Moynihan viewed black men as victims, not as autonomous individuals who should take any responsibility for themselves. He repeatedly emphasized the need to help black men claim the manhood that had been denied them since slavery. Moynihan speculated that the introduction of Jim Crow segregation after Reconstruction was more psychologically damaging to black men than to black women because, he erroneously concluded, men used segregated transportation and other public facilities more often, and because "segregation, and the submissiveness it exacts, is surely more destructive to the male than to the female personality." And why was that? Because, explained Moynihan, "[t]he very essence of the male animal, from the bantam rooster to the four-star general, is to strut. Indeed, in 19th century America, a particu-

lar type of exaggerated male boastfulness became almost a national style. Not for the Negro male. The 'sassy nigger' was lynched." In his paper, Moynihan urged that more black men be encouraged to enter the armed services, in part, he said, because it was "an utterly masculine world . . . a world away from women."

The Moynihan report sent a shock of seismic proportions throughout black America. Even as Moynihan was attacked for the paper, "black matriarchy" became a catchphrase in a deluge of attacks on black women for allegedly dominating and emasculating black men. "Although [the report] can't be held responsible for the intense Black male chauvinism of the period, it certainly didn't discourage it, and [it] helped shape Black attitudes," wrote historian Paula Giddings. At the very least, it transformed a simmering, generations-long tension between black men and women into what writer Michele Wallace termed a "brainshattering explosion." Forced by history to be assertive and self-reliant, black women throughout the years had found themselves chastised by black men for being "more masculine than feminine," as Atlanta Baptist College president John Hope put it in the early 1900s. Strong black women kept their families and communities together, but they were often seen by black men, including their sons and other male relatives, as domineering, even suffocating presences. According to Septima Clark, black mothers, alert to the dangers facing their sons if they challenged white society, tended to force their male offspring into docility, which resulted in their sons' considerable resentment and a "feeling that women should not have a say in anything."

Burdened with the image of sexual wanton, black women now had to cope, too, with the tag of castrating matriarch. But the term "matriarch" suggests someone with great power, which was not the reality for black women. They might have jobs, but the jobs tended to be low-paying, without any authority over others. At home, they might be heads of the household (often forced into that position by default), yet were still considered second-class citizens by most of society, including many of their own men. "Men may be cruelly exploited and subjected to all sorts of dehumanizing tactics on the part of the ruling class," declared a woman who joined SNCC in the mid-1960s, "but they have someone who is below them—at least they're not women."

Nonetheless, the black media, along with other institutions in black America, picked up the "matriarchy" drumbeat. In the same issue of *Ebony* that carried the paean to women in the civil rights movement, an editorial declared that, while black women had made great contributions to their people in the past, "the past is behind us." Now, the editorial asserted, "the

immediate goal of the Negro woman . . . should be the establishment of a strong family unit in which the father is the dominant person." Indeed, black women might consider following the example of the Jewish mother "who pushed her husband to success, educated her male children first and engineered good marriages for her daughters." In another article in that issue, called "A Look Beyond the 'Matriarchy,'" the author fired an additional shot at black women. "The truth is that despite the fact that the Negro woman has done so much to bring the race so far, it has been done at the expense of the psychological health of the Negro male who has frequently been forced by circumstances into the position of a drone."

Even black women's magazines joined the attack. In 1970, *Essence* ran a piece that read as if it came from the pre-feminist-consciousness *Ladies' Home Journal*. Entitled "Make Your Marriage an Affair to Remember," it gave the following bit of advice to newly married black women: "Now that it is just the two of you, you have discarded your independence and you must rely on him. Even if you don't feel that way in the beginning, show him that you do. Make him feel ten feet tall!" (Ten years later, the magazine took it all back. Commenting on the earlier story, a 1980 *Essence* editorial noted wryly: "Many women who followed this philosophy ended up worn out, broke and confused when their husbands got bored and left them for white women, which was another burning issue of the seventies decade.")

The advocates of black power were in the vanguard of the "matriarchy" campaign, using the Moynihan theory as ammunition to ensure women's subservience. Black women had been the mainstays of the civil rights movement, but now they were told they should not exert any kind of leadership role. "The black woman is being encouraged—in the name of the revolution no less—to cultivate 'virtues' that if listed would sound like the personality traits of slaves," declared black feminist writer Toni Cade Bambara. After Ruby Doris Smith Robinson's death, SNCC, approaching its own end, was completely dominated by men, most of whom had not been around in the days when the organization called itself "a circle of trust." Almost all the women from that heady early time were gone, too, many profoundly disillusioned by what had happened to their beloved organization. But a number of the early SNCC women, who had repeatedly demonstrated their leadership skills, spoke out, during this time of turmoil, in favor of black women giving way to black men. Racial loyalty, in their view, was far more important than the question of gender.

Joyce Ladner, who had returned to school and eventually received a doctorate in sociology at Washington University, wrote in 1971, for example, that the strength of black women served as a brake on black men's

ability to deal with a male-controlled white society. "What is clear . . . is that an alteration of roles between Black males and females must occur," she declared. "The traditional 'strong' Black woman has probably outlived her usefulness because this role has been challenged by the Black man, who has demanded that the white society acknowledge his manhood and deal directly with him instead of using his woman—considered the weaker sex—as a buffer."

Marian Wright Edelman, who had been a founding member of SNCC, one of the leaders of the Atlanta student movement, and later a powerhouse civil rights lawyer in Mississippi, also was intent on pushing black men to the forefront. In the early 1970s, she met with Roger Wilkins, a former Assistant Attorney General in the Johnson administration and an old friend of hers. She told Wilkins she was starting a new national advocacy group for children called the Children's Defense Fund. He thought it was a good idea and told her so. Since that was the case, she said, "I want to step down and let you run it."

"Marian," a surprised Wilkins said, "I don't understand." Edelman replied: "Among other things our children need, they need the image of a strong black man running things, changing the course of events." Wilkins couldn't believe what he was hearing. "She had invented this organization, and now she was ready to let somebody else take all the credit," he said later. "Well, I declined, but it was one of the most remarkable conversations I've ever had." (Edelman went on to take charge of the Children's Defense Fund herself.)

Younger black women, who joined SNCC, CORE, and other organizations that had turned to black militancy in the middle and late 1960s, found themselves constantly on the defensive. Angela Davis, who started her radical activist career with SNCC in Los Angeles, tried to organize a rally in 1967 and was told by her male counterparts that her job was to inspire men, not lead them. "Some of the brothers came around only for staff meetings (sometimes)," Davis wrote, "and whenever we women were involved in something important, they began to talk about 'women taking over the organization,' calling it a matriarchal coup d'état." Even women who had already proven themselves as leaders were not exempt from such treatment. When Gloria Richardson, leader of the Cambridge, Maryland, movement, tried to address a Cambridge rally in the mid-1960s, she was shouted down by male CORE members, who called her a "castrator."

In some black militant circles, violence against women was accepted—and even encouraged. Black writers and activists, including Amiri Baraka (the former LeRoi Jones) and Eldridge Cleaver, supported the rape of

white women as "a justifiable political act." Cleaver said he himself had raped white women, after "practicing" on black women. SNCC activist Cleveland Sellers wrote about beating up his girlfriend, Sandy, at a New Year's Eve party in the late 1960s, after he found her sitting next to H. Rap Brown, who had replaced Stokely Carmichael as SNCC chairman. Sandy had had an affair with Brown, and Sellers, incensed that she was talking to Brown at the party, called her outside and pummeled her on the face, chest, and back of the head, nearly knocking her down. A few years later, Sellers wrote: "I realize now that I was terribly unfair to Sandy at the time. But then I thought she was being unfair to me. I thought she was being unfair to SNCC. I rationalize that I struck her because I was angry, because I was hurt, because I was frustrated, because I was tired." He noted, almost as an afterthought, that Sandy left him two months after the party.

Hit by a barrage of male charges and demands, most black women did not fight back. Unlike turn-of-the-century black women leaders, who asserted themselves unequivocally as women, the majority of black women in the late 1960s and in the 1970s "did not see 'womanhood' as an important part of our identity," observed bell hooks. "... [W]e were asked to deny a part of ourselves—and we did." Many women, accepting the "matriarchy" premise, felt a sense of guilt that they had profited from America's racist white society at the expense of their men. Some began seeking out psychiatrists like Alvin Poussaint to help them "suppress their aggression and dominant personalities." Said Poussaint: "These women, who were victims of black matriarchy propaganda, were erroneously blaming themselves for problems in the black community which were in fact due to and the result of institutional racist practices."

Even if they did not fully agree with the propaganda campaign being waged against them, black women were wary about expressing disagreement for fear of betraying their men and their community, for fear, too, of providing further fuel for white attacks against black male leaders. "The tendency to close ranks, to keep silence in order to protect the community, was strong, too strong for most black women to oppose," wrote historians Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson. "Dissemblance had proved a very positive survival skill in the past, and it was difficult for most women to recognize that it might have outlived its usefulness." So once again, black women were left by the wayside, with the black movement and the women's movement generally ignoring their interests.

The relatively few black women who did publicly voice their opposi-

tion to male chauvinism within the black community and who did speak out for women's rights were often subjected to a furious onslaught of criticism for being "traitors to their race." In 1973, a group of black women, including Eleanor Holmes Norton, created the National Black Feminist Organization, whose goal was the political, social, and economic equality of black women. The black community must stop thinking of black women "only in terms of domestic or servile needs," the NBFO declared. "[T]here can't be liberation for half the race." That view, however, was attacked by black militants and resisted by most black women. Accused of dividing the black movement, the NBFO survived only until 1975.

Young black women writers like Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker, and Michele Wallace were also targeted for criticism. "I will not be part of this conspiracy of silence. I will not do it," declared Shange, whose award-winning play, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, touched on black men's violence toward women. Male violence and abuse also played major roles in Alice Walker's short stories, poetry, and novels, including her Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Color Purple*.

In her short story "Advancing Luna and Ida B. Wells," Walker wrote about the rape of a white female civil rights volunteer by a black male coworker, then imagined a conversation between herself and Ida Wells about what she had just written. "Write nothing," she visualized the antilynching crusader as saying. "Nothing at all. It will be used against black men and therefore against all of us. . . . You are dealing with people who brought their children to witness the murder of black human beings, falsely accused of rape. People who handed out, as trophies, black fingers and toes. . . . No matter what you think you know, no matter what you feel about it, say nothing. And to your dying breath!"

"Which, to my mind," Walker declared, "is virtually useless advice to give to a writer." It was advice, nonetheless, that most black women heeded.

The perils of violating that code of silence were underscored once again in 1991 when Anita Hill accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexually harassing her several years earlier, when Hill worked for Thomas at the EEOC. Sexual harassment had become a major workplace issue: More and more women were speaking out against harassment and were taking cases to court. Yet the idea of a black woman calling into question the sexual conduct of a black man was, in the eyes of many blacks, as unforgivable in the 1990s as it would have been a century earlier, when Ida Wells was waging her antilynching campaign. Although black men

had not refrained in the past from leveling sharp public criticism against black women, it was unacceptable for black women to castigate black men, particularly where sexual issues were concerned.

In his testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Thomas played on the unease felt by many blacks—and whites—in regard to the attacks against him. He described Hill as a vengeful former employee who resented his preference for light-skinned women, and portrayed himself as a black man whose masculinity was being used by racists as a weapon against his nomination. Thomas's skillful use of racial imagery and symbols, particularly his depiction of himself as the victim of "a high-tech lynching," deflected and defused Hill's sexual harassment charges. Once again, emphasis was placed on the physical and psychological harm suffered by black men as the result of slavery and racism, while the damage done to black women was largely ignored.

In the end, Thomas—a conservative Republican whose tenure as EEOC chairman had been marked by a reduced enforcement of laws against workplace discrimination—was confirmed by the Senate and supported by much of the black community. Anita Hill was considered a traitor by many, if not most, blacks. Such an outcome profoundly disturbed a number of prominent black women, who decided they could remain silent no longer. On November 17, 1991, *The New York Times* carried a full-page ad signed by 1,603 black women, most of them writers and scholars. The "malicious defamation" of Anita Hill, the ad declared, was just the latest example of how black women had been maligned throughout American history, "stereotyped as immoral, insatiable, perverse; the initiators in all sexual contacts—abusive or otherwise . . ." Such an "attack upon our collective character" must be met with "protest, outrage, and resistance."

But in making this fight, the ad made clear, black women can expect no outside help. "No one will speak for us but ourselves."