

INTERVIEW

Anita Hill: 20 Years Later

Despite the indignities she suffered during her historic sexual harassment testimony, Hill affirms her belief in justice

This month marks the twentieth anniversary of Anita Hill's brave disclosure during Clarence Thomas's Senate confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court about the sexual harassment she said she had endured while working for him. Hill's courage in testifying helped raise awareness about sexual harassment in the workplace. Two decades later she is a practicing attorney and a professor of social policy, law and women's studies at Brandeis University. ESSENCE asks Hill about her life then and now.

ESSENCE: Did you experience any long-term consequences from testifying in front of the Senate committee in 1991?

ANITA HILL: During the hearing, members of the



Hill appearing before Congress in 1991.

Senate verbally attacked my credibility, intellect, morality and professionalism. That continued long after the cameras had left. Once I returned home, thousands of people wrote me in support. I had faith in God—but also faith that I had done the right thing.

ESSENCE: What role do you believe you played in adding awareness to employment-based sexual harassment?

HILL: People tell me their workplace has changed because of my testimony. Our nation began to have a new conversation where people talked about sexual harassment and became outraged that it was happening, which led to a host of complaints being filed and then new legislation being passed.

ESSENCE: What did you think when you received the voice mail message from Clarence Thomas's wife requesting an apology last year?

HILL: I thought, *This has to be a prank*. It didn't matter whether it was Clarence Thomas's wife or some prankster: It was wrong, it was inappropriate, it never should have happened. This was a failed attempt at intimidation.

ESSENCE: How can we encourage more Black



Hill recently accepted a position in the civil rights practice at a law firm in Washington, D.C.

women to speak out and fight for justice?

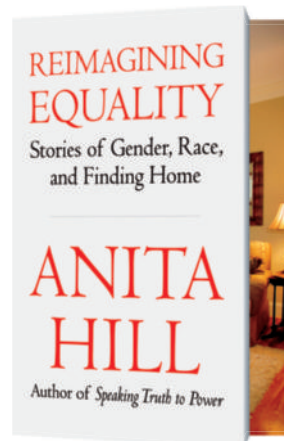
HILL: There have been some brave pioneers for us to look to for courage and as role models. And some of those women did ultimately prevail. The only way that we will ever change the system is to engage in it and challenge it. There's more support now, so this is our time to make things better.

ESSENCE: What inspired you to write your new book, *Reimagining Equality: Stories of Gender, Race, and Finding Home*?

HILL: It was the late 1990's when I started thinking African-American women have all these rights and achievements, but there was still a search for equality. Then the housing crisis hit. I thought about the impact that would have on those

of us trying to achieve equality now. And I wanted to know how future generations will obtain this promise of the American Dream.

—Bené Viera



In *Reimagining Equality: Stories of Gender, Race, and Finding Home* (Beacon Press, \$25.95), Hill examines the possibility of living in a country where everyone enjoys all the opportunities and privileges America has to offer.