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Solutions To Sexual Harassment

Washington--"Sexual harassment on the job," Phyllis Schlafly testified the other day, "is not a problem for the virtuous woman, except in the rarest of cases."



William Raspberry

There are several ways to take the statement, delivered before the Senate Labor Committee's hearings on what to do about sexual harassment. It could mean that Schlafly doesn't count lecherous attention as an act of harassment. It could mean that Schlafly has never been a target of an unwanted, unappreciated pass, which is a commentary on something,

though not necessarily virtuous.

Or it could mean--and I suspect it does mean--that most women, call them virtuous if you wish, learn

how to deal with unwanted sexual attention in ways

that keep it from becoming a problem.

That is, most men who make passes cut it out when their target makes it clear that the attention isn't wanted and, if they persist, could lead to a good deal of

embarrassment for them.

There are, it seems to me, two main sources of trouble. First, there are women who are reluctant to make crystal clear to their male supervisors that they wish to be left alone, fearing that such clarity could have negative implications for

their careers. Second, there are men, including supervisors who hold supervisory positions, who simply take no for an answer. Some of them seem to believe that their position of authority means they do not have to take no for an answer.

The problem comes in trying to establish remedies for such behavior.

J. Clay Smith Jr., chairman of the Employment Opportunity Commission, told last week's Senate Labor Committee hearing that agency has 118 sexual harassment complaints under investigation. His predecessor, Elliot Holmes Norton testified in defense of the EEOC guidelines, which include holding employers responsible for the boorishness of their workers.

But take a look at the complaints, and some existing remedies suggest themselves. For instance, of the complaints involving unwelcome physical contact--hugging, kissing, patting behinds, and so on. Such behavior--at least a second offense after harassment has been made understand that it resented--could be punished as simple assault, with recourse to seven laws.

Seventy-seven of the complaints involve "demands for a personal or sexual engagement in a sexual employment decision if demand is met or the threat of a negative action if demand is not met." That's extortion, and there are laws against that, too.

Twenty-six of the incidents entail more than one sort of offensive behavior) involve the use of vulgar language of a sexual nature, sexually derogatory comments or the display of sexually explicit pictures. These may be the toughest to deal with in a sensible way. A nude pin-up in an auto repair garage where employees include women is not exactly the same as the same picture on the wall of an insurance agency or a law office. Language that might be inherently offensive in one context may be relatively harmless in another. What is the appropriate remedy in the workplace where male and female employees routinely engage in sex-related banter that some co-workers find offensive?

I have worked in places where blacks and whites traded racial jokes that struck me as tasteless and offensive, but it never occurred to me to demand that the government put an end to it. On the other hand, if only the whites indulged in racial humor, particularly after black workers made it clear the jokes were offensive, doubtless would have taken it as evidence of racism. (Would the racism have evaporated if the joking stopped?)

My point is not that sexual harassment that stops short of assault or extortion is harmless and should be no concern. It is simply not every offensive act capable of legal redress that sometimes the intention of the law can create more problems than it solves.

Smart (not necessarily virtuous) women generally manage to take care of themselves without recourse to the feds. Some find it a threat to report the offensive behavior to the supervisor who will serve. Others have discovered the efficacy of a sharp rap across the face.

Clifton Graves

Mothers Day

Editor's Note: The articles in the Chronicle on Paul Robeson [April 18] and Joe Louis [April 25] were authored by Clifton Graves.

It has been said by some that there are only two viable institutions in the African American community: The Black Church and the Black Woman. Accordingly, as another Mother's Day approaches, it is only fitting that a tribute be paid to the latter. So, on behalf of all Black men who care, I dedicate this piece to our grandmothers, aunts, sisters, daughters, wives, mothers, and mothers-to-be - for without you, we would be a lost cause ...

Thus, let us honor our women, whose eyes have seen kingdoms rise and fall, slavery come and go, and yet freedom remain an illusion ...

Let us honor Black women, queen mother of earth's peoples, whose beauty from Nefertiti to the present has dazzled men of all races for centuries...

Once we honor our women, whose hands now pick senators and punch computers; whose arms still get weary from the heavy load, yet find time to hug that child or to comfort her man...

Let us honor our women, whose minds have been stretched to the limit trying to

make a better life for themselves, our children, and us...

Let us honor our women, whose feet have walked a many mile, whose hearts have felt a many pain...But, women who nonetheless are determined to make it, for they possess the legacy of a Cleopatra, the courage of a Harriet Tubman, the wisdom of a Mary McCloud Bethune, the intelligence of a Shirley Graham DuBois, the compassion of a Miss Jane Pittman, and the strength of a Fannie Lou Hamer...

You see, Brothers, our women, our queens, are the glue that holds our families, our churches, our communities together. But theirs is no ordinary glue for its ingredients are comprised of love, respect, and understanding; ingredients vital in determining how effective and lasting that glue can be.

Thus, on this Mother's Day--and indeed every day--let us truly honor our women: Grandmothers, Mothers, Aunts and Wives, by providing them with love, respect and understanding. Not because "we owe it to them, nor that they 'deserve it', rather because we have been blessed with the most intelligent most courageous, most beautiful women on God's earth, and it is way past time that we appreciated that fact!!

Chronicle Letters

Watch City Ward Realignment

Dear Sir:

The black community must take more than a cursory glance at the new city ward realignment. We must make sure that the Supreme Court's "one-man-one vote" ruling is not manipulated by city planners to eliminate black representation in city government.

The NAACP will be monitoring the Planning Board's action for deceit and political games. We will take every legal step within the law to keep the city from gerrymandering the lines and circumventing the law. Any attempt to usurp the political power of

blacks in city government will be fought and opposed at all cost.

One look at the elected officials in all of the county's county wide elections reveals that the "one-man-one vote" ruling only applies to local blacks in the city wide elections. The ruling in most cases, is a joke. Blacks have benefitted from the Supreme Court's ruling only in instances where ward and district lines are drawn fairly.

The NAACP's Political Action Committee admonishes City Manager Bill Stuart, to direct the Planning Staff to be fair and straight. The legal brief, by City Attorney Rodney M.

Ligon, Jr. stating that race, sex, and political party are illegal when considering realignment, may be correct. However, streets and community lines are so racially identifiable in Winston-Salem until the question of a person's color is moot. Though race should not be a determining factor in ward realignment, the whole question of "one-man-one vote" was racially motivated in many ways.

Now that blacks comprise 41 percent of the city's population, the ward lines must be drawn to reflect that make up. Given the abstract community lines and racial boundaries the job is not a hard one. The NAACP will fight any attempt on the part of the city to dilute or saturate the political rights of minorities in Winston-Salem.

Walter Marshall,
Chairman, Political Action Committee,
Winston-Salem Branch NAACP

To Be Equal

Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.

Ever since the Watergate scandal, when the press spearheaded the investigation into coverups that ultimately led to impeachment proceedings and the resignation of President Nixon, it has basked in its role at the center stage of national life.

But the media coverage of national domestic issues, aside from scandals conducive to investigative reporting, has left something to be desired.

In fact, a case could be made that the media shares responsibility for the severe hardships likely to be faced by poor people in the coming months.

The outlines of those hardships have been splendidly covered by some newspapers and television programs. In recent weeks I've seen some superb stories outlining what the Administration's proposed budget cuts will mean for poor people.

There have been closeup stories of what food stamps mean to the working poor, scholarship aid and loans to the moderate income college student, welfare for the dispossessed, and more.

There have been good stories showing how devastating the cuts will be for cities already struggling to survive. And there have been stories that tell, in vivid terms, how

How The Media Missed The Boat



poor people need federal social programs as temporary aids to becoming independent future tax payers.

But where were those stories when we needed them, years and months ago when the national mood was shifting to its present meanness? Where were those stories while false myths about social programs were spreading like wildfire?

Now we hear about the success of food stamps in ending malnutrition or of the success of CETA programs in putting people to work in essential public services.

But look back over the past few years, and you see that whenever some politician scratching for votes put out a press release blasting welfare "fraud" it got plenty of space. But not until now do we see the beginnings of coverage of actual people in need whose welfare checks allow them to survive.

So it looks like the media missed the boat on one of the biggest stories of our times -- the success of social programs. And in doing so it helped create the atmosphere in which those vital programs are now deemed expendable.

Virtually every newspaper editor and television news producer can probably go back into the files and come up with stories to refute my argument. But if they are honest, they will admit the pattern of neglect of positive stories about the programs now endangered.

Even now, with all the stories about the terrible human impact the budget will have on people, big stories are being missed.

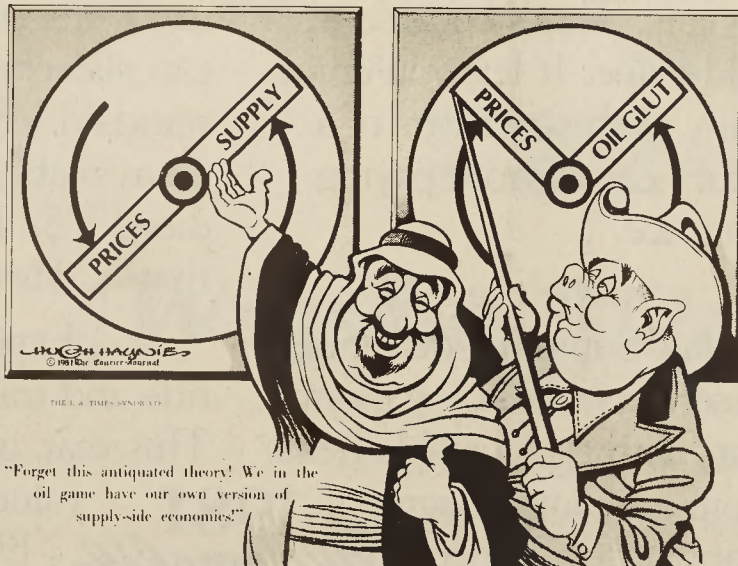
The media blithely accepts the notion that "safety net" programs helping the "truly needy" will be left untouched. I can understand such statements coming out of the Administration, but I would expect the media to tell the truth -- that the "safety net" programs primarily benefit the middle class, and that the programs benefitting the "truly needy" have been slashed mercilessly.

I'm still looking for analysis of that term, "the truly needy." Where are those stories explaining to the public that the poverty line is not an adequate measure of need -- it measures extreme deprivation.

It takes about 170 percent of the poverty line to reach the standard the federal government itself uses as the measure for the absolute minimum adequate standard of living.

And there is plenty more the media could do to explore some of the issues now at the center of national debate. I'm still looking for the stories describing successful school desegregation, the way more whites than blacks benefit from social programs labelled "black," or about the way block grant funds have been used to shift resources away from the poor to the rich.

The news media, which prides itself on its excellence, is just beginning to rediscover poverty. But poverty has been with us all this time.



Little Facing Another Tough Battle For Seat

Dear Editor:

With Larry Little coming up for re-election to the North ward this November, all the forces in this city who didn't want him there in the first place are gearing up again to try and help unseat him again. They feel that they have a good chance after the defeat we suffered in the last local election and the Presidential campaign. This is the last time we cannot afford to lose good Black leadership in City Hall. By failing to vote, a large amount of potential Black voters gave up their right to vote which in return, put us the Black community, at a disadvantage in the coming November race.

At this difficult time, government is turning conservative and is cutting every social program that deals with helping people by trying to balance the federal budget on the backs of the poor, the disadvantaged

and the elderly. They think that in the long run, they will make this a better country, but at the same time, they are damaging this country to the point that we will never recover. Hard times are ahead and you know what that means. We, as Black people, will take the bunk of it all. This trend has filtered down to local government. Large cuts in next year's school budget which means fewer jobs and less quality education for our children are being discussed at this time. I am almost certain that these cuts will effect county and city government as well.

We got to keep our Black officials in office and if possible, obtain even more Black representation in the future. We need to support our Black elected officials and most important, we need to get out and vote come next election.

Sincerely,
Glenn M. Goodwine