

Abroad at Home;
It's Gender, Stupid

The New York Times
February 8, 1993, Monday, Late Edition - Final

Copyright 1993 The New York Times Company

Distribution: Editorial Desk

Section: Section A;; Section A; Page 17; Column 1; Editorial Desk; Column 1;; Op-Ed

Length: 717 words

Byline: BY Anthony Lewis

BY Anthony Lewis

Dateline: BOSTON

Body

Can anyone still doubt that underlying the troubles of President Clinton's first two choices for Attorney General was the attitude of a male-dominated society toward women? Can anyone doubt that the politics of the business is steeped in hypocrisy?

Judge Kimba M. Wood was forced to withdraw because she employed an undocumented alien for child care when it was legal to do so. Judge Wood paid all taxes due and filled out all the forms required. But after the Zoe Baird flap her entirely lawful actions were deemed politically dangerous.

That standard punishes an entire generation of professional women. Because, gentlemen, a woman with children who has been successful enough in the law to be considered for Attorney General had to have help with child care along the way. And the chances are good that she used an undocumented alien at some point.

Why? Because it is very hard to find Americans who want to do live-in child care and will make a long-term commitment. That is true now, and it has been for a long time.

Twenty years ago it was learned that the then-Deputy Attorney General, William Ruckelshaus, had an alien woman with an improper visa working in his home. The arrangement was attributed to his wife, Jill, and the story quickly died.

Child care is the issue. It makes life much tougher for women who want to be professionals. And now they are told that on top of the extra burden they already bear, they are to be punished for doing what a mother -- and father -- should do: finding the best person to help with a child.

And it is not just highly paid professional women with live-in help who are involved. What about the millions of working women who leave their children with neighbors or relatively informal day care arrangements -- are those Social Security taxes all nicely paid? Please be serious.

And how about the men who are so censorious toward Judge Wood, the politicians and the commentators: Have they paid the Social Security taxes due for every person they have hired to mow lawns or shovel snow or paint the house?

Abroad at Home;It's Gender, Stupid

When Judge Wood was forced to withdraw, the male politicians involved also put it out that when she was a student in London years ago she trained for five days as a Playboy bunny. That was said to be a political burden because people would giggle at the thought.

Can anyone doubt the **gender** tilt in that excuse for dumping Judge Wood? If so, let us now question every male nominee for a top legal job about whether he was ever in a Playboy Club, or saw a pornographic movie.

Then the leakers came up with another excuse: Judge Wood had never been a criminal lawyer. That is the lamest reason of the year. Edward Levi had been dean of the University of Chicago Law School and president of the university. Robert Jackson was a great Solicitor General, a lawyer's lawyer, and then Attorney General. Greatness in the job does not require criminal law practice, and no one would think of demanding it of a man.

Senate Judiciary Committee members were said to be worried about confirming Judge Wood. Worried about their own necks, you mean. Not one of them has the courage to say to his or her constituents that the arguments raised against Kimba Wood are irrelevant and disgraceful.

Yes, female Senators were no better. Dianne Feinstein of California lectured Zoe Baird instead of, perhaps, explaining to the men what life is like for a professional woman.

And where is the women's movement? Its organizations were silent during the Baird affair. Are they going to wake up and understand that what is happening is a way to disqualify huge numbers of women from high government service?

It is time for all sensible people to wake up and stop this witch hunt. It is time to focus on the real problem: the laws that make it so hard to find good and legal child care. It is time to stop snickering about the politics of all this and understand the real issue, bias against women.

Judge Douglas Ginsburg paid a high price when he was found to have smoked marijuana: withdrawal of his nomination to the Supreme Court. Americans grew up after that and understood that smoking pot a few times is not important. Let us hope that Kimba Wood's loss -- our loss in her -- will do the same to the non-issue of aliens and child care.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: WOMEN (90%); LAWYERS (90%); SOCIAL SECURITY (89%); CHILDREN (89%); TAX LAW (89%); US SOCIAL SECURITY (89%); MEN (89%); POLITICS (89%); WOMEN WORKERS (78%); ATTORNEYS GENERAL (78%); TAXES & TAXATION (77%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (76%); PRIVATE HOUSEHOLD EMPLOYMENT (76%); UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION (73%); PORNOGRAPHY (50%)

Company: JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

Organization: JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

Industry: LAWYERS (90%); PRIVATE HOUSEHOLD EMPLOYMENT (76%)

Person: BILL CLINTON (58%)

Abroad at Home;It's Gender, Stupid

Geographic: LONDON, ENGLAND (51%); CHICAGO, IL, USA (50%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: February 8, 1993

End of Document