

1993

## Hackney, Sheldon: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1993): Speech 02

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Don't think. What do you think, Cokie?

Ms. ROBERTS: Well, again, the House of Representatives tried to do one of its little—

Mr. BRINKLEY: Tricky little—

Ms. ROBERTS: —sleights of hand, where they were voting a sort of modified line item veto. I don't think that it has much chance of passage in the Senate, and as far as I'm concerned, it shouldn't. The idea that a president of any party can sit down at his end of Pennsylvania Avenue, and just say, "Well, I don't like Montana, let's cross it out of this package, it didn't vote for me, anyway" — the political games that could be played with the line item veto are legion.

Mr. DONALDSON: I thought it was interesting that the Black Caucus helped lead the fight against the tough line item veto, feeling that its own interests would be mis-served.

Mr. BRINKLEY: I have a question for Cokie. Are you in favor of women in combat, and does the idea appeal to you? What— and if so, why?

Ms. ROBERTS: Well, appeal to me, it does not, and I certainly would not want to be a woman in combat, other than in this room. But the fact is that the women who are in the position of being in the military think that it's something that they very much want to have open to them, because it is the career ladder, and now it's open to them. It took a scandal to do it, but they're on their way.

Mr. DONALDSON: There is no reason why a woman should not be in combat in any position. Now, if you say "Well, what about the physical strength of the SEAL's," or something like that, we could argue a little bit on the margins. But to say because women have— you know, every month, their hormones, that is just nuts. Women should be in combat if they want to be, and if they're in the armed forces, they ought to be, because it's an obligation.

Mr. BRINKLEY: Can you see women slogging in the mud, an infantry rifle company?

Mr. DONALDSON: You bet.

Ms. ROBERTS: But they do.

Mr. BRINKLEY: I haven't—

Ms. ROBERTS: They do that already.

Mr. DONALDSON: David, they do.

Ms. ROBERTS: That's the point.

Mr. DONALDSON: Absolutely.

Ms. ROBERTS: They're already in— they're already in dangerous positions—

Mr. WILL: I sympathize with all of that, particularly about the blockage of careers, by having a two-track system within the military. On the other hand, before we plunge ahead in this on some abstract principle of equality, it's worth reflecting the civilization has for a very long time flinched from having women in combat, and there may be some deep truth and some profound wisdom in that—

Mr. DONALDSON: Well, civilization—

Mr. WILL: —and we shouldn't casually overthrow it.

Mr. DONALDSON: —for a very long time believed slavery was the way to go. I mean, and finally that was overthrown, George.

believed are trivial.

Mr. DONALDSON: Nor are they true.

Ms. ROBERTS: Of course, there's— there would be some hope to the beliefs that women are civilizing influences, and that therefore perhaps combat would not exist as often if women participate.

Mr. WILL: Or perhaps they are more fierce.

Mr. DONALDSON: Now, wait a moment. Now that is a sexist remark, if I ever heard it, Cokie.

Ms. ROBERTS: It certainly is.

Mr. BRINKLEY: Well, she's entitled to make them.

Mr. DONALDSON: No! She's no more entitled to make a sexist remark than I am.

Mr. BRINKLEY: All right. Let's go on. Two of our more respected colleges in this country, Pennsylvania — universities — and Wellesley [sp?], have what is called a speech code, certain things that cannot be said. Does that disturb you, George?

Mr. WILL: Well, Penn certainly does. They have— speech codes on campus tend to establish a new entitlement, and it is the entitlement of certain preferred groups not to have their feelings hurt. Now, once you start doing that, you start writing very broad language that establishes, of necessity, thought police and speech enforcers, and you get into constitutional problems. And as soon as they get to court, they're always thrown out, but it keeps people happy on campus, at least happy of those who want to enforce a kind of political correctness.

Mr. DONALDSON: Well, I think a school has a right to say no vulgarity, no real ethnic slurs, or you want to say it, fine, but you can't be in this school. But what happened when this freshman yelled down— because five African-American members of a fraternity were making noise, and yelled at them, "Shut up, you water buffalo," and was then accused of an ethnic slur — I think that's silly. I mean, that's carrying it too far.

Ms. ROBERTS: Well, it's the double standard.

Mr. BRINKLEY: Cokie, you went to Wellesley.

Ms. ROBERTS: I went to Wellesley, but what's happening at Wellesley is the opposite. There it is a case where a black professor is using, in his course work, a book that is anti-Semitic, and the college is saying that they don't like it, but that he is entitled to do it because of academic freedom. I think that the same—

Mr. BRINKLEY: Even his book— his point on that is 100 percent wrong.

Ms. ROBERTS: And a lot of people say that the whole—the whole course that he teaches is wrong, in terms of it—

Mr. DONALDSON: Wrong in what way, Cokie?

Ms. ROBERTS: Wrong—

Mr. WILL: False.

Ms. ROBERTS: —in its view of history — false.

Mr. BRINKLEY: He's saying the Jews were prominent in the slave trade. It was the Portuguese who did that.

Ms. ROBERTS: And— but I think that—

Mr. DONALDSON: Well, then shouldn't the university say to its professor, "You're teaching something which is not fact, you've got to withdraw it from your course?"

Mr. BRINKLEY: Oh, he will claim that his—

Ms. ROBERTS: I think if you got into that, you would have many, many, many universities—

Mr. WILL: He's a tenured professor, so—

Ms. ROBERTS: —doing things that you would find very uncomfortable.

Mr. DONALDSON: I'm arguing not for restriction on free speech, but I'm arguing if you're going to teach students, you ought to teach them things which are arguably semi-true, rather than things which are false.

Mr. WILL: Oh, my. You really want to go plowing through every curriculum—

Ms. ROBERTS: You're going to be the truth squad?

Mr. BRINKLEY: Sam—

Mr. DONALDSON: No, because I don't have the sense to be the truth squad.

Mr. BRINKLEY: Well, the—

Mr. DONALDSON: But are you saying, for instance, that if I want to teach a course in mathematics, say, "Two and Two are five," that the school shouldn't come to me and say, "Well, Sam, maybe two and two are four, you ought not to tell the students they're five, if you want to, go teach someplace else"?

Mr. WILL: Well, trouble is, in the humanities, there are very few propositions quite as lucid as two plus two equal four.

Mr. DONALDSON: All right, I agree.

Mr. WILL: And you would get into an endless swamp. I mean, the principle is he's tenured, and he has a right, within certain very broad parameters, to make a perfect ass of himself, which he's doing. That's Wellesley's problem. It becomes a problem for the rest of us when we begin to say, "This group says it's offended"—

Ms. ROBERTS: Right.

Mr. WILL: —"and they have an entitlement to a certain degree of sensitivity." And then you get an awful lot of meddling with the intellectual life of the community.

Mr. BRINKLEY: So we don't like what he's teaching, what do we do about it?

Mr. WILL: Stay—

Ms. ROBERTS: Let him teach it, and then let students not take the course, and at some point, he becomes a reason not to have him there on the campus, because nobody wants to take his course.

Mr. BRINKLEY: Well, at the risk of being flunked out of the course, you could stand up in the classroom and argue with him, and point out he's wrong.

Ms. ROBERTS: That, too.

Mr. BRINKLEY: If you want to do that.

Mr. DONALDSON: Well, if he's a great teacher, you may improve your grade by having done so.

Mr. WILL: If he's a great teacher, he's not teaching from a book commissioned by Louis Farrakhan [sp?].

Ms. ROBERTS: The problem is is that he can do this, and yet, I think that if he did exactly the same thing teaching something about black Americans that was considered offensive, that he would be in a lot more trouble—

Mr. BRINKLEY: Okay—

Ms. ROBERTS: —and I think that that's the problem

Mr. BRINKLEY: Time's up. We'll have to deal with this another time, or maybe forget it for one case to the other. We'll be back in a moment.

*[Commercial break]*

Mr. BRINKLEY: I'm sorry, that's all the time we have. There will be more on the peace movement in— peace agreement in Bosnia and western reaction to it this evening on World News Sunday. For all of us here, until next week, thank you.

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