

1993

Hackney, Sheldon: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1993): News Article 04

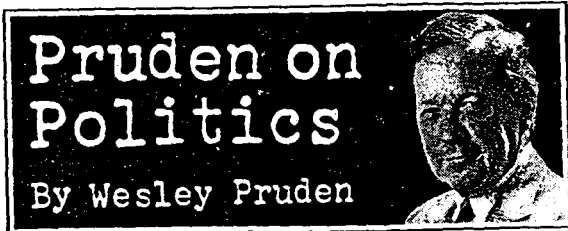
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Moving to the right of good ol' Bubba

Let's have a big hand for the little lady: President Rodham took it to the Politically Correct yesterday in Philadelphia.

It's a sorry commentary on the life and times of the republic that she's the only half of the firm of Rodham and Clinton brave enough to make even the mildest ritual nice noises about the First Amendment. But the First Amendment, like the rest of us, needs all the help it can get.

"Freedom and respect are not values that should be in conflict," Mrs. Clinton (if we dare call her that, even in praise) told the graduating class at the University of Pennsylvania, whose president, the nominee to be chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has so far been too timid to say anything similarly brave against the stamping of little schoolgirl feet where the water buffalo roam.

President Rodham understands Joe College and Betty Co-ed far better than the university president, which won't astonish anyone who reads newspapers. College students in particular, she notes, have the freedom — the responsibility, you might say — to take nine different philosophical positions on a single subject in a single evening as they "try out" their values and beliefs.

"What we have to do here at this university and in this country," she told the Penn class, "is to find a way to celebrate our diversity and debate our differences without fracturing our community."

"We must always uphold the idea of our colleges as incubators of ideas and havens for free speech and free thought.

"We cannot debate our differences nor face our mutual challenges unless and until we respect each other, men and women, young and old, across the ethnic and racial lines that divide us."

She might have said, but didn't, that there's more



genuine respect for free inquiry at the Toad Suck Ferry Theological Seminary & Institute of Cosmetology and Hair Dressing than you'll find at Stanford, more tolerance for undiluted fascism in the faculty lounges of our so-called premier universities than at any brush-arbor Ku Klux Klan rally. The faculty lounges are all the more dangerous be-

tenure, and half the people at any Klan rally are FBI spies and informers. Still, President Rodham's speech was interesting stuff, if not necessarily tough stuff, for what it may say about what she's really up to.

President Clinton, who ran as a New Democrat but who is behaving as a Democrat in the mold of Mr. McGoo and the little Duke, is widely thought to have been brought to ideological heel by President Rodham. She's the evildoer at the White House, so many conservatives and befuddled Democrats think, and Bill Clinton is really just good ol' Bubba, banging into the furniture and puddling the rug like an amiable but disoriented ol' blue tick hound suddenly set loose in the house. He wants to do better, only Hillary won't let him.

So now President Rodham, who everyone says has the family smarts, deftly darts to the right of President Clinton, paying homage to what used to be the only part of the Constitution that liberals really liked, but which now has to be cut loose to make room for victim theology.

Just when everyone else had begun to despair, here comes President Rodham, saying the kind of things that only the bravest of the right-wing crazies are willing to say anymore. Maybe President Rodham really has had enough of intolerance. Maybe she, too, has a finite capacity for poisonous fascist brew.

Or maybe the genius in the family recognizes a moment she dare not let pass. Soon someone must unwrap the great health-care miracle, shrouded in (illegal) secrecy and hidden from view like the bastard baby in the back bedroom, and President Rodham must husband whatever good will she can while the husbanding is good.

If this makes her look good now at the expense of that other president in the White House, well, it's not her fault that she has convictions, and he doesn't. And if she risks doing to Bill what Bill did to George, well, that's just a risk she'll cheerfully take.