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FERRARO AND THE NEWS MEDIA

The credibility of the media in covering Geraldine Ferraro is one of the most interesting issues in the 1984 presidential campaign.

For a couple of weeks after her nomination in San Francisco, she received massive, laudatory, uncritical coverage. That's probably to be expected because, as the first woman on a national ticket, she is certainly a news event.

But what was not proper in this coverage was the blatant advocacy of the false notion that the nomination of Ferraro would deliver the "woman's vote" to Walter Mondale. The "woman's vote" is a figment of the imagination of the liberal media -- women are simply not a voting bloc as racial, ethnic, economic, or geographic groups can be. Women as a group are as diverse as men as a group.

Then came the matter of Ferraro's financial problems, her Congressional disclosure inconsistencies, the suspicious circumstances of her illegal campaign loan, and the embarrassment of the pornography tenant in her husband's building. Small, conservative papers scooped the big liberal newspapers (which had achieved such fame for their investigative journalism about Watergate). The major electronic and print media delayed covering the stories until at least a week after these news items were originally published.

On August 21, Ferraro held a 90-minute news conference that was supposed to explain all. Crucial questions were unasked and unanswered, such as how she could expect to get by with substantially the same nondisclosure about a spouse's finances for which Congressman George Hansen faces a prison term.

Yet, the media have since then attempted to portray that event as a brave woman standing up to tough, no-holds-barred questioning. The media are generally trying to convey the impression that Ferraro should be granted her request that no more be written about those matters because, paraphrasing the old Total cereal commercial, "today is the first day of the rest of this campaign."

Now comes the New York Times with a front-page article headlined, "Ferraro's Finances: Is the Press Being Fair?" The gist of it is that the press has been unfair to

Ferraro and unduly "overblown" her problems. The New York Times, the oracle of established liberalism, is telling the media to lay off of additional investigative reporting or discussion of Ferraro's financial problems.

But, shouldn't Ferraro be subject to the same kind of scrutiny of her financial records as were Edwin Meese and other government officials? Shouldn't we have a "sex-blind standard" when dealing with compliance with the law? No, says the New York Times, because Ferraro is a "a pioneer in the pursuit of very high public office by women at a time of shifting relations between the sexes."

When Ferraro is listed in corporation and government reports not only as a one-third owner of John Zaccaro's company but also as a company officer, shouldn't she (like any man) be held responsible for the company's actions? No, says the New York Times, because she is entitled to fall back on the "sexist" notion that "it is the man who is supposed to know about such things" and that she really didn't know or understand her husband's business.

Now really! The New York Times and other liberal publications have been trying for a decade to lead our nation toward a sex-neutral society in which women must be treated exactly like men. We have been repeatedly told that it is "sexism" to treat women differently from men. Yet now, when the going gets tough, the Times wants to shield Ferraro from the realities of the controversy and treat her deferentially like a lady.

But Ferraro isn't "just a housewife." She's a lawyer and member of Congress running for the second highest office in our land and should be held responsible for her actions in politics, law, and business.

The New York Times thus rationalized the shifting postures which Ferraro assumed in her 90-minute news conference. She alternately postured as the lawyer-candidate for Vice President (a "take-charge" type of woman) and then as a petulant little victim who didn't understand her husband's business affairs (and so has to call on her lawyer or accountant to explain such complicated matters).

At the 90-minute news conference, one reporter was booed by the other reporters for being too aggressive in asking questions, and reporters applauded Ferraro when she ended her news conference. When was the last time you saw the White House press corps applaud President Reagan at the end of his news conference, or boo a reporter who asked an aggressive question?