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“Very Conservative” Supreme Court Pick Portrayed as a Confederate, Racist and Male Chauvinist Pig

Preparing the Battlefield for a Roberts Ambush?

The big three broadcast networks have been mostly silent during the run-up to the Senate’s hearings on Supreme Court nominee John Roberts, with just a handful of evening news stories over the last five weeks. But big papers such as the *Washington Post* have been busily poring over Roberts’ writings, hunting for the legal brief or memo that might put his seemingly-assured confirmation in doubt. No “smoking gun” has emerged, but that hasn’t stopped some journalists from trying to tar Roberts as a kooky extremist.

■ **On July 20**, the day after President Bush announced he’d picked Roberts, ABC’s Barbara Walters suggested the judge’s Catholicism might be a problem for pro-abortion liberals. “How important to him is his religion?” she wondered on *Good Morning America*. “Do you think it might affect him as a Supreme Court Justice?”

■ **On July 25**, ABC’s Jessica Yellin tried to make an issue out of Mrs. Roberts. “The spotlight has turned to his wife. Opponents are examining her political activities, and especially her involvement in a group that opposes abortion,” Yellin warned on *Good Morning America*.

■ **On August 17**, the Associated Press smeared John Roberts’ boyhood hometown of Long Beach, Indiana: “Like many towns across America, the exclusive lakefront community where Supreme Court nominee John G. Roberts Jr. grew up during the racially turbulent 1960s and ’70s once banned the sale of homes to nonwhites and Jews.” But Roberts was a teenager when he last lived in the town AP denigrated as “insular” and “Mayberry-like.”

■ **On August 19**, the *Washington Post* tried to cast Roberts as an old-fashioned chauvinist. “Roberts Resisted

Women’s Rights,” claimed the headline over a front-page story. The loaded lead: “Supreme Court nominee John G. Roberts Jr. consistently opposed legal and legislative attempts to strengthen women’s rights during his years as a legal advisor in the Reagan White House, disparaging what he called ‘the purported gender gap’ and, at one point, questioning ‘whether encouraging homemakers to become lawyers contributes to the common good.’”

That last line was a lawyer joke, but Roberts’ humor was lost on the *Post*, which demanded a reaction from NOW’s Kim Gandy, a leader in the anti-Roberts camp: “‘Oh. Wow. Good heavens,’ she said. ‘I find it quite shocking that a young lawyer, as he was at the time, had such neanderthal ideas.’”

■ **On August 26**, the *Post* got even smarmier, as reporter Jo Becker built a story around an instance when Roberts, ghost-writing an article for Ronald Reagan, “scratched out the words ‘Civil War’ and replaced them with ‘War Between the States.’” Becker found an expert to say some people use that wording “because they believe the Confederacy was right to secede.” So Roberts is a rebel?

Are these pre-confirmation potshots just the opening salvos of a full-scale media war against Roberts? Or are these just examples of the kind of nasty treatment that the so-called mainstream media reserves for conservatives? — *Rich Noyes*

Warning: John Roberts Is a Conservative

“Democrats say they are under no illusions, he is a very, very, very conservative person.”

— *Legal affairs correspondent Nina Totenberg on NPR’s All Things Considered on July 19, a few minutes after learning of Roberts’ nomination.*

“People who know him know that John Roberts is a really conservative guy....He’s a conservative Catholic....a hardline conservative.”

— *Totenberg on Inside Washington, July 23.*

“When I spent five hours reviewing all of his documents from when he worked at the Justice Department, I was actually quite surprised at how very, very conservative he was.”

— *Totenberg on Inside Washington, July 30.*

“In these documents, he is much more conservative than I ever would have guessed.”

— *Totenberg on Inside Washington, August 20.*

“I have no idea what kind of justice he’s going to end up being, except for the fact that I’m pretty sure he’s going to be very conservative.”

— *Totenberg on Inside Washington, August 27.*

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; **Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Tim Graham**, Editors; **Geoffrey Dickens, Brian Boyd, Brad Wilmouth, Ken Shepherd, Megan McCormack and Mike Rule**, Media Analysts; **Michelle Humphrey**, Research Associate; **Michael Chapman**, Director of Communications. See daily *CyberAlerts* at www.mrc.org.