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Politics of Abortion: An American Entertainment

Barbara Kraft · Tuesday, August 4th, 2015

Today millions of women, including an increasing number in the United States, have no real access to clinical abortions and resort to home abortions with pills provided by organizations such as Rebecca Gomperts' Women on Web located in Amsterdam.

Anti-abortion protagonists have again raised their 'battle cry.' It wasn't too successful last time around in 2012 when Missouri Senator Todd Akin's made his absurd and absolutist anti-abortion remarks regarding what he called "legitimate rape." At the time I wrote a piece asking what he meant by legitimate rape? There is no legitimate rape. Rape is rape! That aside, Akin went on to say that he believed that in cases that were really legitimate rape, the female body had ways "to try to shut that whole thing down." But let's assume that maybe that didn't work or something? He went on to say that he thought there "should be some punishment, but the punishment ought to be of the rapist, and not attacking the child."

Now the issue of abortion has reemerged in a more subtle manner, which involves the selling of fetal tissue for profit, which is illegal. In recent weeks, anti-abortion groups have accused Planned Parenthood of selling fetal tissue for profit, which Planned Parenthood has denied doing. According to a recent article in *The New York Times* Science section in July of this year, scientists at universities have been quietly using fetal tissue for decades in their laboratories in research involving eye diseases, diabetes and muscular dystrophy. Their research using fetal tissue has received grants supporting this research from the National Institutes of Health to the tune of $76 million in grants to 50 major universities throughout the country in 2014.

Many years ago, convinced that Roe v. Wade would be resurrected and challenged over time, I wrote a play called *The Politics of Abortion: An American Entertainment*, which was 'inspired' by an actual abortion-related incident that occurred in Bowling Green, KY in the late '70s. In the case I refer to, a 22-year-old woman was indicted on charges of performing an illegal abortion and manslaughter. She was approximately 20 weeks pregnant and within the time period for a legal abortion (in those days), but was refused an abortion by the doctors at a clinic who told her that she was more than 20 weeks pregnant and it was too late in their opinion to have an abortion. At the time, the law allowed abortions up to 24 weeks or the third trimester. The girl was accused of using a knitting needle to perform an abortion on herself, a crime in Kentucky that could have brought her a minimum 10-year prison term. The manslaughter charge was dismissed subsequently on the ground that a fetus has no legal standing as a person. But the abortion charge stood because according to a section of the Kentucky abortion statue: "No person other than a licensed physician shall perform an abortion." The law imposed a 10-20-year sentence for violations. The

Commonwealth attorney insisted he knew little about the abortion controversy and had no opinion about abortion but that it was his job to uphold the law. “All I know is that this is a law,” he said. “It may be right or it may be wrong. The grand jury returned an indictment and it is my duty to try it.” (This story ran in the *L.A. Times* on Aug. 28, 1976.)

The Politics of Abortion: An American Entertainment is written as a theater piece and centers on the trial of Noelle, a 17-year-old girl charged with performing an illegal abortion — that is practicing medicine without a license (only licensed doctors were allowed to perform abortions in all but seven states.). Having been turned down for a legal abortion by her physician, even though her request was within the legal time period for such a procedure, Noelle goes home and self-aborts the old fashioned way with a pair of knitting needles.

A carnival atmosphere is the prevailing tone of the work. The action takes place in a courtroom set in a circus ring reminiscent of the kind used by old-fashioned European traveling circuses. The raggedy troupe of characters includes The Ringmaster, The Author, Noelle, The Mother, The Father, The Lawyer, The Grandmother, The Judge and The Doctor. The Pro-Choice and Pro-Life Representatives are played by the same actor using masks. The Media Two, a TV News Team of a woman and a man, report on the mayhem as it progresses. The Four Greek Chorus Girls double as the PRO-LIFE and PRO-CHOICE CROWDS.

The Ringmaster announces at the beginning of the play that the ‘subject’ would lead one to expect a tragedy, but that “when all the parts came together, we saw the comic possibilities were equal to the tragic, running neck to neck as it were… We decided ‘so much the better… a laugh sheds more light than a tear in these times of moral and social discord.'”

Near the end of the play the Grandmother dies on stage by dissembling herself — she removes her hearing aid, her false teeth, her eyeglasses, and her heart. Her very existence and her public death are a nuisance to all concerned; no one cares when she dies. The point of her death is to juxtapose this real death of a real human being with the termination of a fetus.

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