

In 1997 Daily News columnist Joe Gelman wrote some nasty articles criticizing the feminist movement's response to the Paula Jones affair. I submitted this riff to the Daily News sometime in June 1997. It was not printed, nor did I expect it to be printed.

Where's Joe
by
Bill Becker

Well, Joe, I waited and waited ... and I finally gave up. Gave up hoping that you might have something to say about the virulent sexism that infected the Los Angeles Police Department for these many years, and that only now appears to be on the run. I read your vicious January attack on Ramona Ripston, Susan Estrich, Tammy Bruce, Gloria Allred, and "other esteemed Southern California feminists," and I was impressed by the exquisite sarcasm in your contrast of their vocal support for Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment, against then Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, with their alleged silence regarding Paula Jones's sexual harassment lawsuit against President Clinton. ("Feminists: I know Paula can count on you, right?" January 19.) You convinced me that you were a champion for all women, Joe, and I just naturally figured that you would jump at any chance to defend our sisters against sexual harassment. It seems I was wrong.

Remember when Los Angeles Police Department officers Mary Elizabeth Hatter and Kristine Kenney charged the department's top spokesman, Commander Tim McBride, with sexual harassment in February? Why didn't you speak out, Joe? Not to call for McBride's head, of course, because due process had yet to run its course. But, you certainly could have added your voice to the growing demand for more professional behavior from the male complement of "LA's finest." Frankly, I thought your article about a possible Senate bid by Palm Springs Mayor Sonny Bono was pretty trivial compared to the stern admonition against sexual harassment at the LAPD you could have written. You're not fishing for a job with *Senator* Bono, are you, Joe?

You missed another golden opportunity to speak up after the LAPD's Mark Fuhrman Task Force released its report in early May. You did get a copy, didn't you, Joe? If not, let me assure you it's an interesting read. The task force confirmed that in the mid-80s, a small but powerful clique of male West Los Angeles Area officers created a club, Men Against Women, dedicated to shunning and harassing female officers, and generally hindering them as they carried out their duties. MAW was investigated in 1985, but the task force found that "the allegations, investigation and management review addressed the problem in a narrow and superficial manner." So, none of the allegations could be sustained, and no one was disciplined in any way. Predictably, the gender discrimination issue surfaced again in 1993, leading to the 1994 Environmental Audit of WLA. "Unfortunately," said the task force, "it was glaringly apparent that much of the conduct described in 1985 had endured." Nine years, Joe, and no change. What an opportunity to direct your acerbic wit against the cretins who created a work environment where female officers feared they would be ignored if they called for backup in a life threatening situation. Worse yet, the task force determined that gender discrimination wasn't unique to WLA.

We all know that peer pressure sometimes makes it hard do the right thing. The task force identified two male officers who were themselves MAW victims, presumably for supporting the

female officers--or perhaps simply for refusing to make life miserable for them. Just imagine, Joe, how a few words from you, commending these men for their courage, might have inspired more such enlightened behavior from the other men in the Department.

Why haven't we heard so much as a peep from you on the subject, Joe? Is the Paula Jones case merely an excuse for more liberal-bashing? Do you get the jitters at the thought of criticizing your gender-mates an the force. Are you afraid of getting more traffic tickets? If newly appointed Commander Betty Kelepecz, the first LAPD female officer to hold the rank, is accused of sexual harassment by a score of male officers--a plausible scenario, I might add--will you continue to be silent on the subject? Will Cmdr. Kelepecz escape your caustic prose, as the men have so far, or will your word processor be smoking with indignation at the "liberals" who convinced top LAPD brass that women are capable of filling all the ranks. (I'd bet on the latter, myself.) On the other hand, maybe you're really a closet feminist, supporting our sisters in secret, trembling at the thought of being "outed" and taunted by your readers for being "politically correct." If that's the problem, Joe, don't worry. Come on out. We'll stand by you.

You're no dope, Joe. You know perfectly well that women deserve support from all of us in their efforts to overcome thousands of years of physical and psychological harm caused by men. Considering your total silence on sexual harassment and gender discrimination in your own back yard, your nasty January criticism of those in the forefront of feminist struggle looks pretty shallow. By the way, the ACLU went on record supporting Jones's right to pursue her lawsuit against the President before your article came out. Shoddy research, Joe.