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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

3/21/75

March 24, 1975

MR. PRESIDENT:

The latest Reagan column for your  
reading.

Don

*DRF*

THE RONALD REAGAN COLUMN

(For Release In Papers On Friday, March 21, Or Thereafter)

By RONALD REAGAN

Copley News Service

The press called it a fetus.

The defense lawyer called it a fetus.

The jury called it a baby.

And, after they did, they convicted Dr. Kenneth C. Edelin of Boston of manslaughter. He had delivered, by Cesarean section, a male child to a patient with whom he had agreed to perform a legal abortion. The jury ruled, after lengthy deliberation, that the baby was alive when it was removed from the mother.

The press had described it as "a fetus of 20-24 weeks." The jury was shown photos and described it as a 6-month-old baby.

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The juror who held out longest against conviction said--after the verdict--that most of the jurors believed that the baby "was alive during the operation when it was taken out of the mother and that the doctor was negligent for not checking for a heartbeat. They thought his examination was too short."

Dr. Edelin was frustrated and angry at the outcome, not surprisingly. That he momentarily charged the jury with racial prejudice (he is black) can be attributed to the heat of the moment. There is no evidence to suggest that the jury based its decision on anything other than the charge put to them and the facts presented. In fact, most of them expressed personal sympathy toward the doctor.

One can give Dr. Edelin the benefit of the doubt and suppose that he harbored no malice toward the baby; he only performed his duty to abort the birth, both earnestly and professionally. He's now appealing the case and the final outcome cannot be predicted.

Meanwhile, it has given the right-to-life forces a great deal of encouragement. And, according to reports in the media, the verdict seems to have discouraged (at least temporarily) medical research into abortion and related life-control measures.

While we await the appeal and its decision, I have become increasingly concerned that there is a subtle, but nonetheless effective, move afoot to dehumanize babies unwanted by their mothers.

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The latest chilling symptom: Dr. Edelin's lawyer says that he will argue in his appeal that a women's legal right to an abortion presumes that the aborted baby will be dead. If it isn't, as in the Edelin case, then it would have no right to live, under the law. What next? Euthanasia on a grand scale? Or, putting mentally retarded infants "to sleep?"

Before, during and after the Dr. Edelin case there has been--with increasing frequency--the use of the term "fetus" to describe a baby the mother wanted to abort. Fetuses, after all, aren't people, they're "things." If it's inconvenient to convert one into a "baby," then dispose of it.

Babies, on the other hand, are warm, lovable and cuddly. Altogether human. A fetus becomes a baby when it leaves the mother's womb alive.

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Even if it doesn't, it certainly looks like a baby when it is 6 months old.

One is reminded of all the pejorative terms applied to various enemies to rob them of human qualities, in order to make belittling them, ostracizing them or killing them more easy: wops, frogs, spics, micks, polacks, gooks and slopes, to name a few. Add now the "fetus." No human qualities. A faintly repulsive sound to the word. Easily disposed of by serious-looking physicians and their patients.

What can be done to combat the growing tendency to dehumanize infants in the womb?

If you're pregnant and thinking of abortion, think of adoption instead. If you're not in that situation, write a letter to the editor every time he publishes a story describing a baby as a fetus.



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It is time to say to all the world: we are not talking about a slug or a snail or a salamander. We are talking about a real, live baby, whatever the shortness of its life. Write that letter. The squeaky wheel gets the grease.

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3/17/75

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