



How the Media Failed the Dixie Chicks and Us

The years go by in a blur. Perhaps that is why we seem to learn so little from history. Years ago there was a popular tune sung by Joni James, among others, that asked a plaintive question: "How Important Can It be?" There was a very melodic line that can, when you are not thinking, cause you to nod your head in agreement:

"Let the past just fade away: why get lost in yesterday?"

But a clear-eyed view of yesterday can help us see our way through the fog of today. Take the Cold War, for example. At the end of World War II, the United States and our allies embraced wholeheartedly the concept of collective security. The free nations of the world must act in concert against tyranny and aggression anywhere in the world. We denied that we were the "policemen of the world," but that is, in fact, what we became. When the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, we continued to dominate and police the world. Now it has reached the level of near-insanity.

The al-Qaeda terrorists could never inflict the damage on the United States that we have inflicted on ourselves as invaders, occupiers, nation-builders, etc. The monetary costs alone are staggering. The strain on our overextended military is alarming. Yet it goes on, despite the change in administration and change of the party in power.

So what were we doing in the Bush administration and what are we now doing in the "Bushama" regime? Why, we are defending freedom, of course. It is as though the al Qaeda terrorists attacked us because they hate our Bill of Rights. Yet our liberties need more defending from our domestic tyrants than from foreign tyrants or terrorists. The Bill of Rights was written not as a restraint on foreign governments, but on our own.

You might not realize that, though, when listening to the self-styled patriots who have been cheerleading the Bush League Wars. Consider, for example, Zel Miller, who was governor of Georgia when he gave a rousing speech at the Republican National Convention in 2004 against his fellow Democrat John Kerry, the Democrats' nominee for President. Miller maintained that it is not the publisher, editor, or reporter who defends freedom of the press, but the soldier. So, of course, that must be what our soldiers have been doing in Iraq and Afghanistan — defending the Bill of Rights.

"Let the past just fade away... " In other words, forget the fact that you can't remember when Iraq or





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Afghanistan attacked our freedom of the press or of speech or of religion or the right to vote or any of our other precious freedoms. We are overseas fighting, so we must be defending freedom. "Ipso fatso," as Archie Bunker used to say.

Yet as theories go, that one is rather easily slain by the facts. Was it a company of Marines that prevented the Nixon administration from stopping publication of the Pentagon Papers by the *New York Times*? No, it was the United States Supreme Court. Did soldiers stop the U.S. government from imprisoning Eugene Debs and others during World War I for agitating against the draft? No, they did not and neither did the Supreme Court. Did soldiers stop semi-honest Abe Lincoln from shutting down newspapers and jailing editors in the loyal Union states during the Civil War? No, they carried out his orders. Did soldiers stop Franklin D. Roosevelt from imprisoning Japanese-Americans, some of whom may have been journalists, during World War II? The question answers itself. That is not the job of the soldier, the confused Zel Miller to the contrary notwithstanding.

How about some more recent history? Okay, here is something even a recent high school or college "grad" may remember, though someone with an advanced degree may have a harder time with it. On March 5, 2003, two weeks before George "Decider Guy" Bush struck his much telegraphed blow on Iraq, the Dixie Chicks were performing in London, where antiwar fever was extra hot. Lead singer Natalie Maines told the crowd that the three young women, all from Texas, were ashamed that President Bush was also from the Lone Star State. From the reaction on this side of "the pond," you might have thought the girls were doing a benefit for Saddam's reelection.

Immediately, radio stations stopped playing records by The Dixie Chicks, just as their mega-seller smash "Travelin' Soldier" had reached the top of the charts. Suddenly it was as though the three women had disappeared or, worse, had never been. Their Grammy award-winning hits, their gold and platinum singles and albums were not heard from again. It was nearly as thorough as a "disappearance" as any in the old Soviet Union.

Few, if any, of the supporters of the great Bush War II spoke up against the irony of allegedly fighting for freedom, including the freedom of speech, in Iraq while effectively denying it to performers in and of the United States. Surely the radio stations have as much right to stop playing Dixie Chicks records as the women had in voicing their opinion of "Herr" Bush. But an economic boycott is not something to be undertaken lightly. And when one corporation owns 400 or more stations and gives the word that a certain act is not to be heard from again on any of them, may we at least have some editorials, please, on the "chilling effect" on the freedom of speech?

Perhaps there were some. I don't remember them. They must have been very few and far between. Did anyone call for a Justice Department investigation into the possibility of a violation of antitrust law? Was there any effort in Congress to bring about such an investigation? Did anyone suggest to those real good, 110-percent American patriots out smashing Dixie Chicks CDs (most of whom could park a lot of cars in the vacant lots between their left and right ears) that being for freedom for the Iraqis did not require them to be against it in the United States? Again, I don't remember.

And were Gov. Zel Miller's soldiers out marching for The Dixie Chicks and their freedom? Hardly. Nor did Gov. Miller ask them to. The Dixie Chicks are, of course, entertainers. But suppose it had been a news columnist or commentator that had been subject to the same kind of corporate shutout for the same reason. Where would Zel Miller and his soldiers have been?

Freedom of the press? Of speech? How about the right to urinate? I don't mean in public view. I am



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referring simply to the right of someone to leave his seat at an arena or stadium and go to the nearest restroom. Well, someone who attempted to do just that during the seventh-inning stretch at a ballgame at Yankee Stadium a couple of years ago was escorted out by the stadium police. Why? Because he was supposed to remain stationary during a playing of "God Bless America" — and because he did not — he offended George "Herr" Steinbrenner's nationalism and was denied not only his opportunity to use the facility, but to see the end of the game. His purchased ticket was among the souvenirs of a night when America took another turn toward fascism.

It might have been better all around if Miss Maines had not made that comment and people kept hearing "Travelin' Soldier" on the radio. It was about a young man killed in the Vietnam War. The comparison to Vietnam might have been more damaging to the war plans of Lyndon Baines Bush than any comment about being ashamed the president hails from Texas. Texas became free and independent when Texans fought rather than submit to Mexico's trampling on their rights as free men. In America today, we call that trampling "patriotism."

And the "mudstream" media? They would rather frighten us with lurid tales of would-be airline bombers in flaming underwear. America may yet fulfill the prophecy of Mark Twain, who said Americans have freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the good sense never to exercise either one.



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