

Talk Truth To Power!

by Mike Hersh © 2002

James Madison, the Father of the First Amendment wrote: "A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy or perhaps both."

This is our highest principle as a free society, because as Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black explained: "In revealing the workings of the government, the newspapers nobly did precisely that which the founders hoped and trusted they would do."

As a free people, it is our right and our duty to hold our leaders accountable, this according to Supreme Court Justice William Brennan: "Debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide open. It may well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials."

John Ashcroft proved he doesn't support the First Amendment when he threatened dissenters in his testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee: "Your tactics only aid terrorists, for they erode our national unity and diminish our resolve. They give ammunition to Americas enemies," he accused.

In the face of this assault on our most basic liberties by the chief law enforcement officer of America, the media should have screamed outrage. Instead, they cowered in fear. Some say we cannot afford freedom during time of "war." Talking truth to power must wait for a kinder, gentler time, they warn. They're wrong.

Dissent demonstrates strength, but repression signals weakness. Patriotism requires courage to defend our first principles. Our nation is strong enough to withstand "vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks" on government officials like former Governor George W. Bush. This despite his diffident dismissal of his critics: "Who cares what you think?"

Mr. Bush better learn to care what we think, because no one will silence us. Not even Dick Cheney and Bush press agent Ari Fleischer who issue "reminders to all Americans that they need to watch what they say."

I know what they mean. The Secret Service "visited" me just after New Year's 2001 to question me, demanding to search my home and see my medical records after I launched the Bush Occupation website.

The Bush Administration's attempt to silence dissent is not just un-American and unconstitutional. It maliciously steals knowledge and insight from the future and the present. As John Stuart Mill wrote: "The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation."

As Mark Twain explained: "The liberty of the Press ... means, in these days, the liberty of being deceived, swindled, and humbugged by the Press and paying hugely for the deception."

Twain's sentiments ring true today more than ever. We cannot rely on the mass media to serve as our watchdogs. Often they get the story wrong even when they try, and they don't try hard enough often enough.

The mass media squanders their rights and shirks their duties, betraying the legacies of Black and Brennan. Their craven capitulation to threats and crass commercialism undermines the ideals of Madison and Mill. We need a new news medium.

We cannot trust the media to do their jobs, or trust the Bush Occupation to respect the Constitution. We the People must become the watchdogs of liberty. We must secure and exercise our important right to dissent.

Together, we can do the job the media shirks. We've begun our TTTP project. Please visit our sites and contribute as much as you can afford. Using your computer and printer, you can join with us as news publishers.

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