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LIFE DURING WARTIME

BACK IN BLACK... Absolutely nothin' remains the definition of what war's good for, but the current conflagration in the Middle East at least establishes once-and-for-all why opposing domestic censorship is essential. The women behind the PMRC are married to the men who promote the Gulf slaughter: Susan Baker's husband, Secretary of State James Baker, conducts the phony diplomacy that prevents a negotiated solution; Tipper Gore's husband, Sen. Albert Gore, Jr., is one of ten key Democrats who voted to end the peace process and allow the bloodletting to commence. Meantime, George Bush has appointed Florida's ex-Governor Robert Martinez, the man who set Nick Navarro on 2 Live Crew, as his new "drug czar." Navarro will serve as the spearhead of America's other open war, even though the Martinez reelection campaign (chaired by Jeb Bush) was partly financed by contributions from drug smugglers, according to Jeff Morley's report in *Spin*.

These connections are fundamental to understanding the how and why of attacks on free speech in America. Metallica, Robert

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Mapplethorpe, and N.W.A. are targets of opportunity, establishing the context for criminalizing any journalist who mentions facts inconvenient to the government--even if they're as mild as Peter Arnett's reports from Baghdad.

The government also needs music censorship because rap and hard rock will be the soundtrack for opposition to the war. Certainly, other musicians will also get involved. But rap and hard rock are the only media voices directly available to those who will do the dying. Not surprisingly,

it was Aerosmith who made the least ambiguous anti-war statement at the Grammys, saying they supported the troops by wanting to bring them back home immediately. You have to wonder if fear of an even more militant anti-war statement was CBS's reason for keeping the Best Rap and Best Metal categories off-camera.

Sound conspiratorial? A week into the war, I was contacted by a Baltimore *Sun* reporter, who wanted to know my reaction to U.S. bomber pilots listening to Van Halen to pump themselves up for sorties. "It's repulsive. I think it defiles American pop culture to use rock and roll to murder people," I said.

Reporter Randi Henderson had the guts to print that comment, as

FEAR AND LOATHING IN THE ROCK PRESS... *Newsweek's* new music critic John Leland wasted no time in letting his editors at the right-wing anti-rap newsweekly know he'll play the game on their terms. "Johnny B. Goody-Goody" (Feb. 25) attacked any rock star whose life-style in any way conflicts with his or her ideals or activism. They're just pious hypocrites, Leland claims, a gang of "hall monitors." But who's the hypocrite? In the grand tradition of *Newsweek* reportage, Leland omits all the battles in which musicians have played an indispensable role in recent years. Hey, John, were the references to Public Enemy, Bonnie Raitt, Living Colour, Stevie Wonder, "Sun City," "We're All in the Same Gang," and "Stop the Violence" edited out, or did you just save your bosses the trouble?

the final paragraph of her story, which also moved on the Los Angeles Times/Washington Post wire service, much to my amazement. The first we knew that it had made the paper was when contributing editor Ben Eicher sent us a clip from the Rapid City (S.D.) Journal. A few days later, though, Eicher sent a clip from the "highly-respected" Omaha World-Herald. It was exactly the same story--minus my comment.

More tellingly, no reporter has asked the PMRC and other music censors to back up their horror of rock-related violence by opposing this use of the music. I challenged Robert DeMoss of Focus on the Family to join me in condemning rock as a war tool at the Gavin Convention on Feb. 15, but he declined to do so. Mrs. Baker, Mrs. Gore and their friends also maintain silence.

The picture of America as a nation content to kill and keep on killing is exaggerated. While there is mass support for the war, it's the proverbial mile wide and inch deep. On Feb. 18, I spoke to over 1,000 people at Northeast Missouri State University in Kirksville, equidistant from St. Louis, Kansas City and Des Moines. Every attack on the war and war censorship in my lecture was met with applause.

So Americans are willing to listen to another side of the war story, especially when it involves links to the demise of free speech. Since the media is reluctant to tell that side, the rest of us need to pick up the slack. You should speak out; write, perform, buy and request anti-war songs and videos; and pass out anti-censorship material at anti-war rallies and teach-ins,

and distribute anti-war material at concerts.

The people who need accurate information most desperately are the troops. So if you're in the record business, get free goods to send to the troops--and don't spare the radical stuff. Everyone should join the Military Family Support Network (MFSN) at Box 11098, Milwaukee, WI 53211 (414-964-3859). If you don't have a friend or relative in Desert Storm you can write to, MFSN will help you adopt one.--D.M.

"I don't see any reason why blacks should go to the Mideast and die. I don't see any reason why Hispanics should go, and I don't see why poor whites should go. Let the rich go over there and die."--Ice Cube

THIS AIN'T NO DISCO.... The first destroyer sent to fight in Vietnam, the John W. Thomason, was filled with music fans. Supply Division was dominated by soul music fanatics; hard core rockers were concentrated among the helmsmen and lookouts; psychedelic heads came from the ship's office. Country & western was strongest among the radiomen and jazz with the stewards who waited on the officers, while the guys slaving away in the engine room were mostly into Top 40.

Wherever we worked, we all had a big problem: How were we going to listen to our music? It's easy to forget, in this era of Walkmans and wristwatch TVs, that our only means of entertainment back then were huge "portable" record players. We had to find ways to hide them because top brass had outlawed record players, supposedly because they were "electri-

cally unsafe. Not many were willing to go to the trouble and risk of keeping a suitcase-sized stereo away from prying eyes.

But I was, and consequently I became a very popular guy. I took my music box wherever the records were: After supper up on the bow of the ship with the Stones, lunchtime with Buck Owens, weekends in the supply office with Aretha and Curtis Mayfield, after midnight in the officers mess with Jimmy Smith and Cannonball Adderly. And everybody took turns hiding "The Box," the monstrous record player that made it through two Vietnam tours without being confiscated.

We went through all that hide-and-seek for the enjoyment of the music itself, for the memories it jogged, and the closeness of being with people you didn't have to explain things to. But the most important reason we kept our underground railroad running was simply to keep from going insane. Keith Richard's guitar and Aretha Franklin's voice kept your mind from falling out of your head and breaking open on the deck, spilling everything from football scores to the feel of a woman's touch into the South China Sea. It wasn't just the lonely horniness of the days on end without sleep that drove you toward Iron Maiden's game of playing with madness. For me, peace of mind got even harder to come by with the beginning of gnawing doubts about my own eagerness to help kill people I had seen as a threat to my way of life.

The pressure was often unbearable but music kept me from cracking until I could figure out what was wrong. But even after I real-