

Dylan MacIvor
Boiling Springs High School

“Without freedom of thought there can be no such thing as wisdom, and no such thing as public liberty without freedom of speech, which is the right of every man as far as by it he does not hurt or control the right of another; and this is the only check it ought to suffer, and the only bounds it ought to know.”
- Benjamin Franklin

Patriotic Dissent

Ask any American about whether or not he or she agreed with Ben Franklin's words and the majority would almost certainly respond with an immediate and emphatic “Yes!” However, looking back a few years at the actions that the United States government has taken to support the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, many would be surprised to find that government leaders would often dismiss any opinions made in opposition to the war and would label the speakers as “unpatriotic”.¹ Yet, is our society not founded on the belief that all people should be entitled to their opinions? If anything, these people, who were willing to voice their concern for the troops situated in the Middle East, are the patriotic ones. The government officials, who use their positions and the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan to silence critics of the wars, should be the ones who are considered unpatriotic.

Whether they were aware of it or not, these government officials were conveying a message that it was not acceptable to have an opinion on a controversial topic which disagreed with their own viewpoint. That, however, is exactly the kind of thinking which should be rejected. People who freely voiced their opinions against the United States

¹ Leopold, Jason. “Six Months Before the War” Counter Punch Magazine. 13 June 2003. Counter Punch. 2009. Six Months Before the War. 5 October 2009.
<<http://www.counterpunch.org/leopold06132003.html>>.

government's policies were not rebelling against America, but they were rather showing their devotion to its ideals.

Freedom of speech is the basis for new ideas and wisdom. Because the government is not allowed to hinder the political discourse of the American people, there is no absolute paradigm of accepted thought. People can have different views on various subjects. An example could be found with two of our founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. These are two men who served as key political allies and helped to write the Declaration of Independence. Yet, in actuality, when the pen was set down and the declaration sent to England, these two “founding fathers” became bitter rivals who often disagreed on many topics.² But that is the great thing about freedom of speech in a democratic society. One person can voice change. In the case of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, each had his own political views which differed to such a degree that they wrote a series of virulent letters to each other, criticizing each other's politics.³ In addition, each man had his own style of approaching different political and social issues as presidents. Yet neither man considered the other to be anything less than an American patriot.⁴

In many other countries, there are governments which limit their people's ability to think and speak freely and have different social and political views. History is full of examples of countries that claimed equality, yet denied their citizens the rights to freely voice their dissent of the government.

² Cappon, Lester J. *From the correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson on Life, Religion, and the Young Republic*. 2009. National Humanities Center. 5 October 2009.
<<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/livingrev/religion/text3/adamsjeffersoncor.pdf>>.

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

But this voice is what makes America so great and unique. We have no such hindrances because our government, by law, protects what the American people can say or do, so long as it follows the laws set forth by the Constitution. Because our country's beliefs are so supportive of free thinking, changes in the way we perceive accepted ideals are common. It is the right of free speech and dissent which makes our American democracy so strong. The idea that leaders would attempt to quiet this voice is perhaps one of the least patriotic notions conceived and certainly would not be supported by Benjamin Franklin's concept of liberty.

Bibliography

Cappon, Lester J. *From the correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson on Life, Religion, and the Young Republic*. 2009. National Humanities Center. 5 October 2009.

<<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/livingrev/religion/text3/adamsjeffersoncor.pdf>>.

Leopold, Jason. "Six Months Before the War" *Counter Punch Magazine*. 13 June 2003.

Counter Punch. 2009. Six Months Before the War. 5 October 2009.

<<http://www.counterpunch.org/leopold06132003.html>>.