

I Am Un-American

By Lyla Miklos

Letter to CNN

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Last night I was flipping the dial on my boob tube and stopped when I hit CNN. I usually avoid watching CNN – a station I have dubbed the 24 Hour US Propaganda Network – at all costs. Still, the words “Misunderstood Martina: Navratilova Labeled UnAmerican for Criticizing Bush Government” both horrified, shocked and titillated me. Not because I was appalled that someone could be deemed UnAmerican, but that criticizing your government would automatically categorize you as UnAmerican.

In a short, but mind numbingly loathsome interview by Connie Chung, Martina Navratilova was attacked for daring to say: *

1. “The most absurd part of my escape from the unjust system is that I have exchanged one system that suppresses free opinion for another. The Republicans in the U.S. manipulate public opinion and sweep controversial issues under the table. It's depressing. Decisions in America are based solely on the question of how much money will come out of it and not on the questions of how much health, morals or environment suffer as a result.”

2. “The Bush administration [is] making a lot of environmental decisions, again, based on money pandering to the people that perhaps help put Bush in the office. There was a vote that was about education. It was a good bill. And then they try to sneak in that Alaska Wildlife Refuge drilling. It's like, by the way, we're going to drill but we don't really need to know that we're going to do it. . . . I wish people would make their decisions based on their hearts, not on their wallets.”

3. “Well, obviously, I'm not saying this is a communist system, but I think we're having -- after 9/11, there's a big centralization of power.

President Bush is having more and more power. John Ashcroft is having more and more power. Americans are losing their personal rights left and right. I mean, the ACLU is up in arms about all of the stuff that's going on right now. I certainly didn't mean that I'm here in a communist country and that I can't be what I want to be. However, when it comes to personal freedom as a lesbian, I am getting more squished here than I would be in Europe."

For these perversely self-evident statements Connie Chung said the following to Martina Navratilova: *

1. "Can I be honest with you? I can tell you that when I read this, I have to tell you that I thought it was un-American, unpatriotic. I wanted to say, go back to Czechoslovakia. You know, if you don't like it here, this a country that gave you so much, gave you the freedom to do what you want."

2. "But you know what? I think it is, OK, if you believe that, you know, then go ahead and think that at home. But why do you have to spill it out? You know, why do you have to talk about it as a celebrity so that people will write it down and talk about what you said?Got you. But sometimes, when you hear celebrities saying something, do you ever say to yourself, I don't care what so and so thinks, you know. Yes, go ahead and say whatever you want to say. But you're not a politician. You're not in a position of government power or whatever."

3. Oh and by the way if you decide to adopt a child please make sure you call me personally and let me know.

* All quotes are from the CNN transcript of the Chung/Navratilova interview, which can be found at <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0207/17/cct.00.html>

Welcome to the second coming of The McCarthy Era. Now instead of labeling you a Commie we just call you UnAmerican. UnAmerican,

because you dare to question the decisions and policies of your elected officials!?! Apparently I missed the definition of democracy that said you can have an opinion as long as it's the opinion of the government.

George W. Bush who used to have websites dedicated to the stupidity and absurdities that came out of his mouth on an almost daily basis has now been anointed to sainthood. The man who was able to win an election because luckily his brother happened to be the Governor of "Faulty Ballot" Florida can now do no wrong. Declare a "WAR" against terrorism and now no one can question anything you say or do!?!

September 11th, 2001 was a horrible and awful and tragic day. At the time I thought it was going to be the start of World War Three. I was prepared to kiss my ass good-bye, and it wasn't because I was afraid of terrorists attacking me. No, I was afraid of the reaction of the US Government. Someone just picked a fight with the World's only remaining "Super Power". No matter how you looked at this, the end results were not going to be pretty. The proclamations from the Bush Government immediately after their declaration of war of "If you're not with us, you're against us" we're equally alarming. Thankfully ten months later "We" are all still here, but at what cost?

The U.S. Media prophesized immediately following the events of September 11th, that irony was dead. Well, it would seem irony wasn't the only thing that died post September 11th – so did Democracy.

According to the Connie Chung definition of UnAmerican – someone who dares to question the policies of their elected officials – there are quite a few UnAmerican Americans who have made the United States the symbol of freedom that it is today. If it weren't for some UnAmericans the citizens of The United States would not be enjoying many of the rights and freedoms that they have today; rights and freedoms that the American public seems to be freely giving away in

the name of safety. Democracy only works if we empower ourselves by questioning those who are in power. Democracy only works if we speak out and fight against injustice, not if we complacently agree with whatever political decisions come down the pike.

Martina Navratilova is an immigrant and a queer woman who has lived, worked and paid her taxes in the United States for nearly 30 years. As a queer woman there are a ton of rights denied to her, that wouldn't be if she identified as straight. As a woman there are a myriad of inequalities that she must battle with almost daily. And yes she is a queer woman living in the United States, not the Middle East. As much as the United States likes to claim that it is the "land of the free" it would seem that America's definition of freedom leaves a lot to be desired.

I find it sickeningly funny that the US Government and media like to bandy about the term Islamic Extremists when referring to suicide bombers and "those people, over there". Yet when they talk about anti-abortionists who burn down abortion clinics or anti-gay protestors who hold up signs that say GOD HATES FAGS at gay funerals they are labeled "The Religious Right". Kind of makes you smirk with scorn when the word right is used to describe that kind of deplorable behavior. Why don't we ever hear the term Christian Extremists when referring to "those people"? It was "Christian Extremists" that first colonized the United States. The Pilgrims were Puritans whose interpretation of the Bible was considered so extreme in Europe that they were shunned and persecuted and eventually shipped off to the other side of the Atlantic where they were free to be a repressive as they wanted to be. How quickly we forget and ignore our own pasts.

There is an inherent superiority complex that seems to be imbedded into the American psyche. As an American you are not suppose to doubt that superiority, because if you do you might have to admit that everything isn't as perfect as it seems. So questioning the decisions of your government when apparently its "ideals" are being

attacked is in a sense questioning your very existence. Well, if it weren't for people questioning the existence of the inequalities and injustices of The United States – sexism, classism, racism, ageism, homophobia, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, abortion rights the list is endless – then the “ideals” of present-day America would have been dramatically different.

The constitution of the United States of America opens with the words “We The People of The United States.”. It's the people, yes every single citizen with a voice that have made and ensured that The United States became the idealistic nation that it is today. Whether those citizens are politicians, celebrities or the person who runs the corner store down the street from you, everyone is entitled to and should freely express their opinions as fiercely and as loudly as they want. In the American Bill of Rights it says “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances”. Renowned American Benjamin Franklin once said “Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty or safety.” So apparently in this post-September 11th world The US Constitution, The American Bill of Rights and the immortal words of Benjamin Franklin are all UnAmerican. Well if that's the case, I'm proud to say that I'm UnAmerican too.