## Speak Your Mind, then Take Off Your Clothes

## By Penn Jillette

EMEMBER A FEW MONTHS AGO WHEN THE Dixie Chicks said they were ashamed of President Bush? A lot of fans turned on them, and radio stations dumped them and some burned their records. So the Dixies took it back and then posed naked for the cover of Entertainment Weekly. They got a lot of press for that and, when all was said and done, their tour did great. During the shows they gave people time to boo them, calling it "Freedom of Speech" — and the crowd cheered. I think it was Lee

Harvey Oswald who said there's no such thing as bad press.

Nashville's Spice Girls are just some of the most recent celebrities to catch heat for something they said. In 1966, John Lennon riled up America by saying the Beatles were more popular than jesus. (I don't capitalize the "J" sometime I'll explain why.) With a big American tour only a few days away, the Walrus backpedaled furiously and his people spun like freaks and they worked their way out of it. And come to think of it, John and Yoko later posed naked.

(I'd like to brag that, when ABC aired "The Beatles Anthology" eight years ago, NBC went against them with an episode of "World's Greatest Magic" that included our "Magic Bullet" stunt. NBC won the ratings so, by transference, Penn & Teller are more popular than — well, I better not say that; I don't want people burning top hats and bunnies.)

But celebrities exercising their Freedom of Speech – and then getting all distressed when other people use Freedom of Speech to speak out against them — has become a big deal lately. Tim Robbins was really upset that some people criticized him for being so anti-war. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) told an AP reporter that he doesn't mind queers, but he does mind queers having sex (which is a cool distinction) — and then complained that he wasn't being given the right to say what he wanted about what those cute nasty gay boys do. Back when Trent Lott got in trouble for praising Strom Thurmond's pre-Civil War racism, his supporters whined that Trent's critics weren't giving him

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The reason certain people get quoted is because they're in the public eye. That's why we know what Ricky whispered from the closet, and what Tim Robbins and the Dixies said. Of course, some people are going to disagree with them — and those who disagree get their Free Speech, too. If, like all us loudmouths say, it's okay for people to burn a flag, isn't it also okay to burn cheesy pop records?

If Robbins can be against the war, can't people be against

his public speaking against the war? If the Dixie Chicks can use TV to make a statement, can't Clear Channel make a statement by not playing their records? Someone saying, "Shut your stinking Krispy Kreme hole, you idiot" is not infringing on the Freedom of Speech unless that someone is the government.

(I do have a word of advice for those protesting against musicians: If you really want to hurt a pop star, don't burn their CDs — give them to people who were going to buy them. Or, better yet, rip them into MP3s and put them on a file server.)

These people are lucky that people still get upset. That means people are listening to them and care about what they say. When Michael Moore says something, even at the Academy Awards, people don't burn movie theaters — they just say, "Oh, it's that nut again; he'll say anything." It's just hard to take Mike seriously, especially after he engaged a diagnosed Alzheimer's patient in a battle of wits.

While I'm talking about Michael Moore's impotence, I should talk about my own — for me let's call it "lack of influence." I've put myself into the "nut" category too. I can pretty much say anything outlandish I want, and that small segment of the public that hears it just shrugs it off with no complaints. I don't even get to pose naked and I'm happy to (maybe that's why no one complains). The Dixie Chicks should be thrilled that people are listening and take them seriously enough to get upset. But I will say that I'm a little bit embarrassed for the USA taking them seriously.

I now conclude by saying that all libertarians suck, and Penn & Teller are more popular than H.L. Mencken and F.A. Hayek. Can I pose naked now?