

September 12, 2003

DICK CHENEY COMES TO CALL

When two entertainers die in one day, other news has to take a back seat. And so it was this morning as CNN featured reports on Johnny Cash's death and the later reported demise of TV comic John Ritter. At first, I thought their priorities were wrong. But after a hurried cup of coffee, I realized how their logic goes. Give the public what they would be interested in, and don't mention that it has been the relentless celebration of news that got them so interested in them so interested in show biz stars in the first place. So, yes indeed, John Cash's 50 million records sold has given the "man in black" well deserved admiration and a place in our hearts. And Ritter has given us some well needed laughs.

I guess it makes a certain sense for what is now an entertainment medium to feature deaths in the entertainment industry. After all, how many CD's has Yasser Arafat sold? Or, who ever heard of the now dead Swedish Foreign Minister. And, yes, it was tragic as Walter Rogers explained that the US military opened up and killed 14 US trained Iraqi policemen in hot pursuit of some gangster types. He called the dead, "friendlies." Friendlies? No, not the New England Ice cream chain. "Friendlies" is a military term which has, like many other such terms that soldiers use, become news parlance.

UNREPORTED CASULTIES

IF we want to do more justice to our "friendlies,"

Walt, how about a follow up on this recent Washington Post report (vis WSWS): "Citing the US military Central Command as its source, the Washington Post reported that "more than 6,000 service members" had been medically evacuated from Iraq since the launch of the war. At the time, the number of combat wounded stood at 1,124. A further 301 personnel had been injured in non-combat incidents such as vehicle accidents. The figure of "more than 6,000" supplied to the Post therefore implies that over 4,500 US troops have required evacuation from Iraq for medical reasons other than combat or non-combat injuries.

"The Washington Post article did not include any further information on what is a staggering admission by the military. At no point in the last six months have the American people been told that for every soldier who has been killed in Iraq, at least another 15 have fallen so ill that they had to be flown back to the United States. The Post described the unexplained evacuations simply as the "thousands who became physically or mentally ill".

<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/sep2003/wia-s09.shtml>

DEAD IN THE STREETS

NOW what about "those other "friendlies, (eg. The OTHER), the people we were there to liberate? The Baghdad Burning Blog by a still unidentified Iraqi woman has some stories to tell on that score. I was moved by what she wrote because I

have been talking with 9/11 families about their struggle for a proper memorial for their loved ones. Their accounts were heart breaking. So is this:

“As the tanks and Apaches invaded the city, they shot left and right at any vehicle in their path. The areas that got it worst were Al-Dawra and Al-A’adhamia. People in residential areas didn’t know what to do with the corpses in the burnt vehicles that had come from other parts of the city. They were the corpses of people and families who were trying to get away from the heavy fighting in their own areas, some of them had been officially evacuated.

“The corpses sat decomposing in the heat, beyond identification. Some people tried asking the troops to help deal with them, but the reaction was mainly, “That’s not my job.” Of course not, how silly... your job is to burn the cars, we bury the corpses. Finally, the people began to bury the corpses along the roadside – near the burnt vehicles so that family members looking for the car would find their loved ones not very far off.

“For several weeks, you could see little piles of dirt all over Baghdad, and along the highways leading outside of the city, marked with bricks, or stones, or signs and, always, with palm leaves. The drying, wilting palm leaves were buried, standing up, to mark the graves. Some of the graves had little cardboard placards stuck carefully under a pile of stones to help family members: Adult male, adult female, 2 children in black Mercedes. Adult male, small boy in a white pick-up. Sometimes the graves were marked by the license plate of the car the victims were in. But most of them were marked with the palm leaves.” This is written by someone who calls herself “River.”

DICK PAYS A CALL

YESTERDAY, your news dissector sat about fifty yards away from the Vice President of the United States. Some readers may remember my writing about the fact that Dick (Richard to me then) and I were in the same government “intern” program years back and spent a weekend together wrangling at a conference. Yesterday, we never spoke. In fact Cheney said nothing, nothing at all, not to the people of New York, not to the press. Nada. He was a “special guest” of the Port Authority of New York which held a memorial service at the Riverside Church for the 84 people they lost on 9/11. He stood like a mannequin with a blank face. He was the first one to leave. He was there with the Mayor of New York and Governors of NY and NJ and other dignitaries.

They stood on stage where Martin Luther King Jr. once stood before delivering his famous speech denouncing the war in Vietnam that Dick and co supported then and are recreating now. The best speaker was the Church’s poetic and charismatic senior Minister James A Forbes who, you just knew, was bursting to say something critical. Prophetically he quoted from Isaiah who called for the turning of swords into ploughshares. Afterwards, he shared with me in a most eloquent way his feeling that it is time to ask questions, to challenge the exploitation of 9/11.

All of the press was there for this event. None stayed for the meeting three hours later devoted to raising the unanswered questions of 9/11. Present were many of the people who were being dismissed as “conspiracy theorists.” Researcher John Judge told me that it is actually President Bush who has a conspiracy theory blaming 9/11 on Al Qaeda and Osama. He pointed to many disturbing issues that suggest foreknowledge on the

part of the Administration, but stopped short of suggesting complicity.

A controversial former LAPD investigator Michael Ruppert was the most outspoken in suggesting the latter, blaming it ultimately on the depletion of oil. My head was swimming with details, names, connections, timelines, associations, suggestions, innuendos and the like. But it is clear that just as in the WTC, fire and smoke intermingle. And yes, as Cynthia McKinney the personable and dynamic former member of Congress from Georgia, explained there is so much being covered up. I will return to the specific issues in the weeks ahead because 9/11 is not going away.

THE PRESS LESS "SHY" SAYS KRUGMAN

MAINSTREAM media outlets are finally demanding answers, too, as Paul Krugman explained in the New York Times today. "The press has become a lot less shy about pointing out the administration's exploitation of 9/11, partly because that exploitation has become so crushingly obvious. As The Washington Post pointed out yesterday, in the past six weeks President Bush has invoked 9/11 not just to defend Iraq policy and argue for oil drilling in the Arctic, but in response to questions about tax cuts, unemployment, budget deficits and even campaign finance. Meanwhile, the crudity of the administration's recent propaganda efforts, from dressing the president up in a flight suit to orchestrating the ludicrously glamorized TV movie about Mr. Bush on 9/11, have set even supporters' teeth on edge."

William Beach asked yesterday in the Philadelphia Daily News: "why after 730 days do we know so little about what really happened that day?"

"No one knows where the alleged mastermind

of the attack is, and none of his accomplices has been convicted of any crime. We're not even sure if the 19 people identified by the U.S. government as the suicide hijackers are really the right guys. Who put deadly anthrax in the mail? Where were the jet fighters that were supposed to protect America's skies that morning? And what was the role of our supposed allies Saudi Arabia and Pakistan? There are dozens of unanswered questions about the 2001 attacks..."

THE DISCUSSION CONTINUES

WE will return to these questions in the weeks ahead as the campaign for answers mounts. Judging by the large turnout at the event, many, many people are unsatisfied with the official narrative. Panels on these issues will continue through Sunday at the church. I will speak again on Saturday morning on the media dimension of all this. Is the media coverage really improving? The Indy media and many overseas outlets were at the church last night, but few mainstream US outlets. I met a reporter from Atlanta, but not New York. Sometime media critic James Fallows has been discussing US media coverage in New Zealand.

"It's true to say that in the three or four months after the initial attacks there was a kind of wartime patriotism in the American media in general," he told The National Business Review. "New York, which normally would've been a locus of cynicism and skepticism, became the locus of this more extreme patriotism among some reporters. And yeah, I think there are parts of the media of which that's still true now. The Fox News channel would be the leading case in point and a number of regional publications as well.

"But if you talked to the Bush administration

over the past year, they would tell you that the media collectively have been a huge pain in the ... um, neck. Even the Wall Street Journal, whose editorial page is rock-solidly right-wing, has carried coverage of the latest foreign policy in Iraq that's been very skeptical.

"Any fair reading of the major American newspapers over the past few months would reveal they've been diligent, skeptical and even trenchant – the general tone of their front-page coverage at the moment is like, another-day-another-death, another-day-another-\$10-million, that kind of thing." Ok James, but please recall, Americans get most or all of their news from TV. Are they getting skeptical coverage there? Actually, Nightline did do some real reporting from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan last night on the progress of the GWOT. That stands for Global War on Terror, my most favorite new Acronym. Koppel and Co concluded: we ain't winning folks. Far from it.

REMOVING ARAFAT

THE Israeli cabinet has now vowed to "remove" Yasser Arafat, a move that is likely to inflame the Middle East even more. The Jerusalem Post is urging he be killed. The US, officially, anyway is counseling restraint. (eg: "It won't be helpful.") Is that the best they can say or the strongest they can do? They know well what will happen if the elected President of the Palestinian people and the symbol of their aspirations, capable or not as a lead is killed.

On the right, here in the US, The Ayn Rand Institute wants blood too: "While there has been no shortage of excuses and rationalizations to leave Arafat alone, the fact remains that no solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is possible with Arafat alive. Exiling him would be a mockery

of justice and would not stop him from inciting further terrorism against Israel."

Funny isn't it how these views are never considered conspiracy theories since they posit it one man with diminished capacity can press a button and direct all these terror attacks like some Dr. Evil in the movies.

Danny Rubenstein writes from Israel in Ha'aretz"

"IS ARAFAT EVEN IN CONTROL?"

THE killing of leaders and top field operatives from Hamas and Islamic Jihad will probably damage these movements' organizational ability. There will be less rallies featuring masked, rifle-toting men in Palestinian cities. The number of conferences and other types of demonstrations will decrease. The financial network which delivers money to families of suicide terrorists will be hurt, as will be the social-educational functions carried out by the extreme Islamic movements.

"On the other hand, the liquidation of these leaders will significantly heighten the motivation harbored by militants in Hamas' military wing to seek revenge. Thirst for revenge and the desire to retaliate after assassinations are themselves highly important factors in what is called the terror infrastructure. Even without Hamas' political leaders, terror wrought by suicide strikers is liable to continue – and it might even accelerate. Cells belonging to Hamas' military wing have organized in every neighborhood, village and refugee camp. A clear sign of their presence is the omnipresent graffiti: Paeon of praise for suicide bombers can be found on every corner of the West Bank and Gaza Strip."

THE PAIN IN ISRAEL

IN recognizing the futility of Israeli attempts to impose a solution from the bomb doors of an F16, we should also recognize compassionately the pain and anxiety in Israel that lends itself to demands that sound almost Jihadic in reverse. Daniel Gordis writes;

“What do you say to your teenage daughter who’s still awake at 11:15 p.m. when the bomb is so loud, and so close, that the house shakes, and the windows rattle? And when the news gets turned on (because a noise like that in a place like this can only mean one thing) and it turns out that they just blew up the main street that’s a five minute walk from here, and on the TV she sees her favorite cafe shredded, decimated and flowing with blood. What do you say?”

“And how do you wake up your younger kids the next morning? What do you tell them before they head off to school? When it’s this close, there’s no lying. They’re going to find out anyway, and the news that they hear during the day could be so bad that it would be unthinkable not to prepare them. So what do you say? That the war’s come even closer, that the people (or whatever one calls those who would do this) who want to kill them are closing in? That we don’t yet know the names of the dead and wounded, but it’s not unlikely that we’ll know someone, or of someone? That Cafe Hillel is gone? That the block where our kids rent their videos, buy their falafel and go shopping for school supplies is now undeniably what we’ve long known it is – a place where they might be blown to bits?”

SENATE DEBATES FCC RULES, BUSH THREATENS VETO

THE New York Times reports today: ‘The Senate opened debate on a resolution that would repeal all of the new media ownership rules adopted three months ago by the Federal Communications Commission. The sponsors of the resolution say it will be approved next week.

“Shortly before the debate began, the White House issued a statement threatening to veto the resolution, saying the measure would create “significant regulatory uncertainty” by repealing rules “which will improve the quality of local news and support free over-the-air broadcast television.”

QUOTE OF THE DAY

FROM Italy, “Old Europe,” from the Guardian: “Even some of Silvio Berlusconi’s own supporters and allies were last night squirming with embarrassment at their leader’s latest extraordinary gaffe.

In an interview published yesterday by the Spectator, Italy’s prime minister appeared to defend the actions of his country’s fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini. “Mussolini never killed anyone,” the magazine quoted him saying.

“Mussolini sent people on holiday to confine them [banishment to small islands such as Ponza and Maddalena which are now plush resorts].”

“Italy’s fascist leader ordered the brutal 1935-36 occupation of Ethiopia, led Italy into the second world war and headed a Nazi puppet government which rounded up and dispatched Italian Jews to Hitler’s concentration camps.”

QUOTED IN COPEHAGEN

I WAS honored to hear from Pia Raug, a Danish

MEDIA DIARY DANNY SCHECHTER

composer who has been fighting the good fight for cultural diversity and the rights of artists in Denmark. She writes from Copenhagen: “Tonight I quoted your piece (About the murdered Chilean singer Victor Jara) at the concert in the full concert

hall with the Chileans and most of the dedicated left wing Danish politicians before singing my threesongs – performing with a full band for the first time in 10 years”
Go Pia.

