

Celebs Draw Fire for Speaking Out on War

With war against Iraq looming, celebrities are talking. And some folks don't care for it.

Thompson, who plays the district attorney on NBC's "Law & Order," says in the ad, "Thank goodness we have a president with the courage to protect our country."

The relationship between celebrities and war fascinates people. Bob Hope performed for the troops. So did Marilyn Monroe. Jimmy Stewart left Hollywood to don a uniform. So did Elvis Presley.

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At the Grammy Awards, singer Sheryl Crow wore a peace symbol necklace and had the words "No War" emblazoned on her guitar strap. Bonnie Raitt and Fred Durst even made comments during the ceremony.

Actor Viggo Mortensen drew media attention last December when he appeared on "The Charlie Rose Show" wearing a self-made shirt that said, "No More Blood for Oil."

Actor Martin Sheen has spoken out against war on numerous occasions, often citing the Gospel's emphasis on peacemaking.

Lori Bardsley, a mother of three from North Carolina, had all she could stand and started "[Citizens Against Celebrity Pundits](#)." Her petition begins, "We the undersigned American Citizens stand against Wealthy Hollywood Celebrities abusing their status to speak for us."

Bardsley's page indicates that over 88,000 people have signed the petition. And her efforts aren't isolated.

There's also "[Celiberal](#)," the "Celebrity Liberal Blacklist." The site says it "was made for folks who are just sick and tired of hearing these celebrity liberals do their bellyaching just to get some press coverage."

Celiberal also provides a list of "Righties"—celebrities who lean to the right. Perusing the list is ... okay, it's fun. Every other name is a sports figure or country-western singer. In fairness to the latter group at least, Steve Earle, Emmylou Harris and Lucinda Williams have joined [Musicians United to Win Without War](#).

Remembering "Hanoi Jane" helps interpret the dislike of celebrities who question war. Likewise, remembering Joe McCarthy helps interpret the celebrities' point of view.

The Screen Actors Guild released a [statement](#) on free speech March 3. The statement was intended to defend those who have spoken up about war and caught flak for it. The statement referred to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) that produced the "blacklist" under Sen. Joe McCarthy's able leadership.

In a rhetorical twist, the statement then said, "Our industry, perhaps more than any other, understands the necessity of guarding and cherishing those rights for which Americans have fought and died." The Writers Guild of America issued a [statement](#) supporting the SGA two days later.

In some ways, this all may seem like a tempest in a teapot. Over 80 percent of Americans said entertainers' political opinions didn't affect their own, according to a recent CNN/USA Today/Gallup [poll](#).

However, actor-turned-politician-turned-actor Thompson has said, "I had to get back into show biz in order to get my political views heard."

Nevertheless, while most of us settle for a letter to the editor, the fact that actor Sean Penn doesn't have to angers people. Penn paid a reported \$56,000 for a nearly full-page ad in the *Washington Post*. The "ad" was his [open letter](#) to President Bush.

The tangled nature of this issue has one thinking that war and celebrities mix about as well as, let's see, oil and water. But this is important, and we can extract several things from the ongoing story.

For starters, history stays with us. For example, the poll mentioned earlier also asked Americans if there were any celebrities "you personally feel are anti-American." Jane Fonda, who has received scant attention lately, tied with Sean Penn as the top vote-getter.

And as the SAG statement makes clear, the Hollywood types haven't forgotten their history either.

It's tempting to proffer some theory about actors and peace, as if one engenders the other. It may sound good to some people, but it doesn't hold up.

First, actors seem just as likely to behave violently as the rest of the population (we can all think of examples). Second, thanks to the work of Celiberal, we know plenty of actors aren't necessarily opposed to this war.

Third, some of those who've been labeled as "anti-war" aren't necessarily that; they just think the current circumstances warrant different action.

All the hubbub also provides an opportunity to see and appreciate the fine lines in our American way of life.

Being criticized for exercising a right isn't the same thing as being stripped of a right—though it may feel like it. And exercising a right isn't the same thing as usurping a right—though it may seem like it.

Cliff Vaughn is associate director for EthicsDaily.com.