



Anna Myczek-Wroblecki

## Taking America Back

by Christine Haynes

### The Musical Front of the P.C. War

The music business is the latest battleground in the p.c. war—and recent events indicate that dissident or controversial musicians have no defenders in the media establishment that now controls the industry. In yet another instance of censorship by the “free-speaking” left, singer Steve Vaus has been stifled in his efforts to “Take America Back,” even in a musical sense.

Vaus’s song “We Must Take America Back,” a response to deteriorating conditions in his adopted hometown of San Diego, was pulled from the airwaves in late July 1992 by RCA, which had signed a contract with Vaus for the rights to his ten-song album less than one month before. RCA was initially enthusiastic about the tune, which had risen to the top of call-in request charts in cities around the United States following its release last spring. But objections from programmers at major radio stations to the “controversial philosophical content” of the song led RCA to dump Vaus’s album, cancel his contract, and prevent him from rereleasing or even recording

his material for five years. As Vaus himself phrased it, “RCA backed down with its tail between its legs.”

But for what? In comparison to much of the music released today, “We Must Take America Back” is remarkably tame. Its opening line, “The American Dream has become a nightmare,” for instance, is a truism by all but George Bush’s standards. And the chorus, a stirring, patriotic call to popular action, differs from the message of such “socially conscious” artists as Tracy Chapman and Sting only in the specific political solution it offers to commonly recognized problems:

Put an end to the gangs and the  
drugs in the streets  
And the fact that the bad guys  
most always go free,  
That is wrong.  
We need leaders who lead us, not  
stick us and bleed us,  
Then take all our money and send  
it abroad.  
We must take America back,  
We need prayer in the schools  
and more things  
“Made in USA”;  
It’s the least we can do, for the  
red, white, and blue  
We must take America back.

This is hardly a song about revolution, yet the barons of the music business evidently believe Vaus’s lyrics are not “correct” enough for American ears. Like his video, which intercuts shots of Vaus singing with newspaper headlines cataloguing the troubles of contemporary America and which aired on The Nashville Network and Country Music Television before being pulled as well, Vaus’s single is blasphemy to the reigning cultural elite.

If RCA had canned the deal because his song was not popular, Vaus—a writer and producer of musical projects who has long been committed to civic action—would not be quite so bitter. But the single had a substantial following in states like Maryland, West Virginia, Washington, North Carolina, and South Carolina. In Spokane, Washington, for instance, country station KCDA received *immediate* positive reaction to the

song. According to station owner John Rook, the song had mass appeal because it struck a chord with ordinary people, who shot it into the station’s top-ten request list within one week. While KCDA introduced the song by playing it three times a day, after one week station programmers had to increase its airtime to once every three hours, or seven times a day. Rook reported that there were absolutely no negative responses. On the contrary, there were numerous demands for copies of Vaus’s album.

Even Real Country Network in Phoenix, Arizona, which has more listeners (one and a half million) than any country station in the United States, picked up the song, which once again became a top-ten request within a week. But in Phoenix, as elsewhere, Vaus’s success was hampered by the unavailability of his hit. Because there was no stock in the stores at the time of the song’s release, demand for “We Must Take America Back,” as well as for Vaus’s follow-up single “I’ll Remember in November” (a reproof of corrupt House of Representative members), soon decreased. In an effort to gain national distribution Vaus turned to RCA. But despite the fact that his song fit (as Rook phrased it) “the mood of dissension sweeping the electorate,” the “monkey-sec, monkey-do people in the music business” succumbed to pressure from their politically correct “friends” in radio and blacklisted Vaus. (RCA reportedly even called radio stations and asked them to stop playing the song.) As Vaus commented in response to the affair, “I believe radio’s self-appointed gods censored me, and RCA buckled under their pressure.” “Since when does a record company allow anyone to dictate the content of its releases?” he added. “Ice-T’s singing about killing cops, and Sister Souljah’s rapping for genocide, and I can’t sing about God and country?!”

As this episode makes clear, Congress and criminals are not to be criticized, but the violence and obscenity advocated by “artists” like Ice-T and Sister Souljah, as well as 2 Live Crew, Public Enemy, Madonna, and most recently 2Pac, are protected under the First Amendment. From 2 Live Crew’s graphically and misogynously sexual 1990 album *As*

*Nasty As They Wanna Be* to Public Enemy's 1991 video for the rap "By the Time I Get to Arizona," which depicted the shooting and poisoning of public officials who declined to approve a public holiday honoring Martin Luther King, Jr.; from Madonna's fall 1992 release of the aptly named "Erotica" to Ice-T's infamous "Cop Killer," which Time Warner, the parent company of his record label Sire, pulled from his album *Body Count* only after Ice-T himself gave into popular pressure—these examples of "creative expression" make any protest about the "controversial philosophical content" of Vaus's lyrics seem absurd. Indeed, in comparison to the words of "Souljas Story" by rapper Tupac Amaru Shakur, known as 2Pac, Vaus's ditty is mere child's play. "Cops on my tail so I bail till I dodge 'em / They finally pull me over and I laugh / Remember Rodney King and I blast on his punk a-- / Now I got a murder case." These lines, which incited one Ronald Howard to fatally shoot a state trooper who had pulled him over for a routine traffic stop near Victoria, Texas, last year, are controversial.

The typical reaction among the media to what Ice-T terms "intelligent hoodlum" material is to denounce censorship and uphold free speech. Barbara Ehrenreich, a 60's feminist who refuses to grow old gracefully, argued in a July 1992 essay about Ice-T for *Time* magazine that "this is our free market of ideas and images, and it shouldn't be any less free for a black man than for other purveyors of 'irresponsible' sentiments, from David Duke to Andrew Dice Clay." And Gene Santoro wrote in a July 1990 issue of the *Nation* regarding 2 Live Crew's arrest on obscenity charges: "Certainly the dramatic increase in obscenity prosecutions by the Bush Justice Department . . . is creating a chilly climate for any form of sexual expression." Even if we buy these arguments, why don't they apply to Mr. Vaus?

For all their rhetoric about creative freedom, liberals are the most puritanical censors of all: they will defend to the death their right to silence anyone who disagrees with them. The ACLU protested Washington State's law (passed in the spring of 1992) against the sale of albums judged "erotic" to minors; yet this guardian of civil rights was nowhere to be found when country singer Holly Dunn was attacked for her summer

1991 release "Maybe I Mean Yes" (about a woman who reevaluates her decision to turn down a date), which was misconstrued by feminists as encouraging date rape. According to leftists, lyrics like Dunn's "When I say no, I mean maybe, or maybe I mean yes"—unlike Ice-T's lines "I'm 'bout to bust some shots off / I'm 'bout to dust some cops off . . . / Die, Die, Die Pig, Die!"—promote violence and therefore have no place on the current music scene. Unfortunately, Dunn caved in to this pressure and asked radio stations everywhere to stop playing her hit, even though it was rising to the top of the country charts. As Janet Scott Barlow noted, "When a sweet-looking and boring country singer makes the front page of *USA Today* for being 'insensitive to women' at the same time Madonna is scoring feminist points for wearing underwear as outerwear, you know things are out of hand."

Even Rich Bond—the RNC chairman who tried to kick Pat Buchanan out of the Republican Party—had to draw the line somewhere. Bond wrote Vaus a letter encouraging him in his efforts: "Isn't it ironic," he asked, "that liberals cry 'censorship' when concerned policemen or mothers want to stop obscenity from being aired, but none of these same activists are anywhere to be found when a song promoting values contrary to theirs is blocked from the air? This is the hypocrisy of institutional liberalism which we face on a daily basis." The left has in effect grown fat by having its cake and eating it, too. Free speech for pathology but not for political dissent: this is *not* what the First Amendment is all about. Barbara Ehrenreich is, in more ways than one, Tipper Gore distorted by a fun-house mirror. Both want to dictate America's taste and morals; both should mind their own business. Americans neither need nor want government agencies or corporate executives to determine what they (or their children) should or even can listen to. As Vaus himself argues, "In order to take America back, we need to regain control of her art forms and airwaves. Otherwise the battle is lost before it has begun."

Copies of Steve Vaus's song "We Must Take America Back" may be obtained by calling 1-800-HIT-SONG.

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## Tune In, Turn On, Turn Out

by John J. Miller

### The Lollapalooza Concert Fest

"Please visit all the booths, sign your name where needed, and look up to the sky and enjoy yourself," said Eddie Vedder, the lead singer of Pearl Jam, just before his group finished performing at the seven-band Lollapalooza concert festival in Fairfax, Virginia, last August. All day long the sky was grey, and the rain-dampened ground, sloshed about by the feet of over 22,000 alternative music fans, became a vast pool of mud. The soft, wet earth ruined wardrobes as hordes of concertgoers played in the brown slop. They had come to frolic and dance to their favorite songs. The show's organizers, however, had intended to hold not a concert but a gigantic awareness-raising seminar.

The combination of politics and music is hip again—a mini-caravan of left-wing activist groups accompanied the bands on their sold-out North American tour, which concluded last September—and the soiled crowd in Fairfax represented what many people are calling a politically concerned youth counterculture. Huge murals decorated the venue, asking "Why Do You Glory In Our Subjugation?" and insisting "The Ruling Class Had Better Wise Up." Comparisons to the 1960's were everywhere, but the politics of Lollapalooza turned Woodstock on its head. Performers encouraged voter registration, not rebellion. They sold an attitude of disenchantment to the supposedly alienated, yet the disenchantment was entirely nonthreatening. It appeared in the form of a \$23 souvenir T-shirt that read on the front, "Choices," and on the back, "9 out of 10 kids prefer crayons to guns." The musicians ordered adolescent angst into the voting booth. Censorship was a central point of interest, especially for the vulgar lyricists who continue to scream endlessly about the First Amendment every time somebody suggests that they should tone down their enthusiasms. Various demands for rights—for cattle, for weeds, for gun-control lobbyists—circulated freely about the crowd, but the political wrath