

**Freedom for Our Nation**

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## Freedom for Our Nation

*None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.*

*--Goethe*

In the current times, one can see many countries undergoing tremendous amounts of changes, countries that have been living under controlling governments for years and whose citizens are demanding change. The uprising in Egypt last February brings attention to the terrible political and economical condition of that country, as well as the fact that many countries in Africa have authoritarian governments or corrupted forms of government that impede the fulfillment of their citizen's human rights. An impressive picture emerged when Egyptians threw themselves into the streets, challenging their government to give up power. They showed the strength of ordinary people rising up together to say "We want freedom for our nation". However, the world must continue its course and, while millions of people fight for survival, for essential human rights, or to end an oppressive government, in other parts of the world, life continues relatively unchanged.

So on the same day that I was reading about the Egyptian uprising, I came across another news story regarding Cristina Aguilera's fiasco singing the national anthem during the 2011 Super Bowl. The same article also offered a ranking of the best and the worst national anthems sung at a Super Bowl game, and as I thought that Cristina Aguilera must have sung really badly, I watched the video of her unfortunate performance. Moved by curiosity I also watched the performance by Whitney Houston from 1991 that the ranking had considered to be the best national anthem song ever performed. I must agree that her performance was very good as I believe that she has an amazing voice and tremendous control changing high pitched notes of the song: however something else from her performance caught my attention. The video I watched

came with an introduction of images of a war and bombings, the comments of a marine who was not in the country during that 1991 Super Bowl, and his mother's testimony recounting the events of that day being so far away from her son. What shocked me from the video was a comment that the marine's mother made as she was emotionally remembering how Whitney Houston had sung the national anthem and had stood for all the words of the song, as she, the mother, was hoping for "freedom for our nation."

As soon as I heard these words coming out from her mouth, I felt my heart skipping a beat as if I had missed something very important. This realization left me with an uneasy feeling and a question: What happened in 1991 in the United States that I had not been aware of until that moment? What tragedy had I missed? 1991 was a long time ago. At the time, I was a senior in a Spanish high school, preparing as any other teenager to go to the university. I was a little bit unruly: I liked to have fun, and I have to admit that my world was pretty self-centered. However, the comment of the marine's mother hoping for "freedom for our country" made me assume immediately that in 1991 the United States was going through distressing times. But why? What had happened? Had the United States been invaded? Who had declared a war on the United States? And why? And more important, how I did not hear about it? Feeling ignorant about the recent history of the United States, I quickly searched on the Internet for the events of 1991. I first read Wikipedia, to get a quick overview on the accounts of the country's history.

Surprisingly, there was no information about the United States being attacked or invaded; on the contrary, there was information about the Gulf War, which started in 1991. Wikipedia described the war as an intervention by the American government justified by economic motives. However, due to the comments of the marine's mother, and the fact that Wikipedia is not always

a reliable source of information, I decided to contrast the facts that I had just read, and find the *truth* about the 1991 events that had put the country in the situation of “needing to be freed.”

As I kept searching for an answer in more reliable sources, I still was not able to come across any reference that showed any indication that the United States, as a whole country, had lost its freedom, or that it was in danger of losing it. The many sources consulted referred to the Gulf War which without any doubt was a great source of distress; but there was no word about any direct or indirect attack on the United States and its freedom. That discovery, of course, prompted another question: Why did the marine’s mother feel that there was the need to ask or to hope for the country’s freedom? In my understanding, one asks or hopes for something when there is absence or necessity, but in 1991 George H. W. Bush was a democratically elected president and, apparently, nothing was threatening the country.

I understand the claims of hope for freedom from a country that has been oppressed, and by default lacks any liberty. Egypt and, now, Libya are very clear cases, but there are many others that fit the same pattern, and it would not surprise anybody if their citizens would rise up and demand freedom at any point in time. Cuba, North Korea or Sudan may be some of the most obvious cases, but certainly not the only ones. The United States, on the other hand, stands and was standing in 1991 in a stable democracy, which makes the comments of the marine’s mother confusing unless she was talking metaphorically. What if she was a pioneer, a brave woman who, being against the Gulf War, was criticizing openly the American government? What if when she said that she hoped for “freedom for this country” she meant that the intentions of the government for taking the United States into a war were unjustifiable, therefore the government was not acting on the best interest of the country and, ultimately, was taking away the liberties of the Americans? Could this be a possibility?

When I read Nick Couldry's (2010) *Reality TV, or The Secret Theater of Neo-liberalism?* something stood out among the ideas that the author was unfolding about neo-liberalism. Couldry argues that neo-liberalism was legitimating the market at the expense of delegitimizing the social, and as I read, I was thinking that the rules of the free market were selling us the idea of freedom, when instead it was making us slaves of this operating system. The normalization of this "common sense" that neo-liberalism tries to introduce to our everyday life comes at a great cost for us, the citizens, as it portrays a fictional image of a *normality* that is far from being normal and "natural.". Simply, it is an irrational system. In my opinion, the government has been also normalizing and trying to make sense of situations that are not normal or natural, and that are beyond our benefit and, often, comprehension..

When the United States decided to go to the Gulf War and fight against Iraq, it was because Iraq was a real threat to the interests that the United States had in Kuwait and the Persian Gulf: Oil. Allowing Saddam Hussein to control any of the oil that was in Kuwait was seen by the United States as a menace to future plans to control access to oil coming out of the Persian Gulf. This economic motive became the whole country's problem when the United States decided to join the war, and was used to legitimize the will of the government without asking its population for their opinion about the rightfulness of the intervention. An internalized speech of normality appeared when the marine's mother hoped for "freedom for the country" while she, most likely, was unaware of or ignored the real reasons for the war. The United States has a long history of interventions in many countries that have internal issues or problems with its neighbors. When this happens, there is an immediate propaganda campaign, coordinated and orchestrated by the government to legitimize its plans. The fact that the United States only intervenes in select

countries should raise a warning as to why the American government chooses some battles and not others, or why it mediates in some countries and not others.

We need to be aware that there is nothing threatening the freedoms that this country possesses and that the government is controlling and manipulating the information and how it is presented in the public eye in order to justify the actions they want to carry out. I started the writing with a quote from Goethe that says “none are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.” I would like to add that continuously believing that the freedoms of the United States are under constant threat also contributes to an enslavement. It also unnecessarily divides the country by not agreeing on key democratic values regardless of political affiliation.

That some citizens blindly believe that the government’s actions are genuinely good, clashes with the fact that another part of the population believes that the government’s actions are genuinely selfish. By manipulating the public to live in a state of constant unfounded fear and not being clear about the real intentions that the government has with external politics, the government places the citizens of the United States at the mercy of their intentions. It also allows the government to justify policies that, little by little, are taking away bits of freedoms from the American population, like thinking and acting critically, to question authority, and the ability to make decisions as democratic citizens of the country. The day that the American population realizes what has been lost, it will be very difficult to recover the real freedoms that have been willingly given up through a lack of resistance to practices that our own behavior has legitimized.

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### References

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