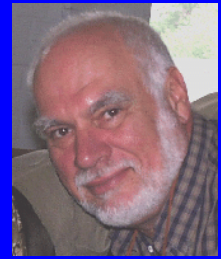


## PATRIOTS AT HOME

April 2004



George F. Simons

There are moments when one is particularly proud of one's friends. This is one of them.

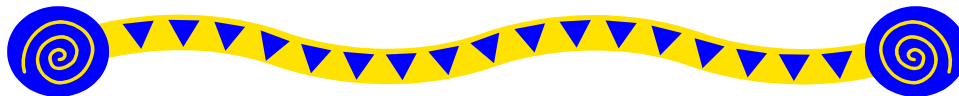
Back in March, patriotic and insightful US colleagues demonstrated their love of country by protesting the impending war in Iraq. They were arrested and brought to court for their activities.

One of these defendants, Bob Abramms is a close colleague and friend of mine for many years. He has consistently lived and worked for peace, justice and intercultural understanding. The organization that Bob founded and directs, ODT, Inc. is one of the distributors of our DIVERSOPHY games as well as of consciousness raising maps and books. You can see an article about these at <http://www.numag.neu.edu/0303/world.html> or visit <http://www.odt.org>.

On March 17th, Bob was sentenced for his participation in the March 2003 demonstration. The judge did not allow any motions related to first amendment rights, or freedom of speech. And, his instructions to the jury specifically omitted language that would have made it much more likely to find a NOT GUILTY verdict on the one count he and others were convicted of (Unlawful Assembly). Unlawful Assembly applies, by statute, to riotous and tumultuous activities, but that interpretation was excluded by the judge's ruling before the proceedings even began. The jury was not allowed to hear that legal definition.

If you would like to read Bob's statement to the judge at sentencing, it is below. If you would like to see pictures of the March demonstration and a listen to a live interview, go to <http://traprockpeace.org/noho.html>.

As the fruits of our bellicose administration continue to mount worldwide, Bob's ideals and actions stand as a reminder to me of the courage we need as citizens to love and support our nation as well as critically steer its course in world affairs. Men are at their best when courage, clarity and compassion drive them to act to foster and protect the well being of their countries and their families as Bob has done.



Bob Abramms' Statement after a Northampton Jury of Six rendered a Guilty Verdict on One Count of Unlawful Assembly. The jury deliberated over seven hours, and acquitted all three defendants of two of the three charges against them. The charges they were found "NOT GUILTY" of were "Disturbing the Peace" and "Obstructing a Passageway."

The Statement....

Your honor, last March I was terribly concerned about the US invasion of Iraq. I felt it was immoral. I felt it was a violation of international law. It was, in fact, a violation of numerous international treaties the US had signed. It was a violation of the UN Charter. From all perspectives...moral, religious, and political...I was deeply opposed to the actions of my government.

I would like to take this small amount of time, prior to my sentencing, to explain the factors that influenced my decision. They include the kind of work I do, concerns for my children and grandchildren, my position in the community, my religious beliefs, and what I feel it means to be a patriotic American.

First let me explain my actions from the point of view of my work. My occupation is a publisher and consultant. I publish materials that help people see the world in new ways. This includes maps of the world, books, and a video called MANY WAYS TO SEE THE WORLD. As a consultant I work with organizations to address issues of workforce diversity, and teaching people how to respect others who have differing cultural values, different backgrounds or different points-of-view.

As a publisher, I have occasion to deal with customers around the globe. In the week prior to the US invasion, prior to my arrest, I talked with many of these international clients, who ON THEIR OWN, brought up the topic of politics (which was a bit unusual for them) and they unanimously expressed a deep concern for the pending US invasion action. They were all deeply disturbed about President's Bush's statements and our military posturing. In reply, I explained that a large number of people in my community in Western Massachusetts were strongly opposed to the war, and that we all hoped that we could create a groundswell of opposition that might prevent it.

At that time, there was a huge outpouring of international demonstrations protesting against the US intention to wage war. Even though these events were not widely reported in the US media, over 5 million people around the globe protested the US plans for an invasion. World opinion, including the governments of most of our allies, was strongly opposed to this war. At that time I resolved to do everything I could as a responsible citizen to prevent the momentum towards waging a "pre-emptive" war.

I am a parent, a grandparent and an uncle. My grown children are ages 36, 35, and 28. My grandchildren are ages 10, 5 and one. My nephew is 2.

Being a parent, grand-parent, and uncle dramatically influenced my willingness to be part of the March 28, 2003 action. I expect that when my grandchildren grown up they'll ask me how I could have delivered them a future so fraught with turmoil and peril. To face them, in that future, I need to be able to say that I participated in events such as this demonstration in order to prevent the escalation of violence we see happening all around us...violence that the policy of our government will surely perpetuate and fuel. I would need to be able to explain to them why it was that I didn't do everything in my power as a law-abiding citizen to prevent the initiation of a pre-emptive war. So how this war effects future generations, and specifically my children and my grandchildren was a conscious part of my motivation.

Last May, a group of 7 of us decided to forgo the opportunity to submit to a DEFENDANT'S CAPPED PLEA. Seventeen of my codefendants accepted the lenient capped plea...a suspended

sentence and 10 hours of community service and one month's probation. Why was it that I decided to carry this through to a jury trial leading to my possible conviction and sentencing?

I felt the message of our protest was so urgent and important, that I was unwilling to submit to guilt of any kind. Further, I felt it was important to represent the hundreds of my friends and neighbors who, like me, had grave concerns about the moral footing of this war. I have no regrets about my actions of March 28th, 2003. If I had the opportunity to go back, I would do the same thing again.

This is a way that I've been a responsible citizen. I have had the good fortune and flexibility in my life to be able to take the time to engage in this protest. I consider my actions to be a form of community service. Hundreds of people have thanked me for expressing their views on the immorality of our invasion of Iraq. I am part of a tiny group that represents hundreds and thousands of others, who because of the kinds of jobs, raising children, working two jobs...simply did not have the opportunity to participate in the action.

I'd like to tell you a bit about my religious motivations. I'm Jewish. But you don't need to look at these issues from the perspective of my religion. All the world religious traditions have common themes, and common moral principles. Even if you don't profess to have a religious practice, I would ask you to consider the moral compass that you use to guide your life, when considering these events.

There is a Jewish teaching called TIKUN OLAM. It has to do with doing what we can do to repair the world. It's a form of shorthand for doing what we believe God would want us to do to leave the world a better place, to the best degree we can understand. In Judaism there are also 613 mitzvot (or good deeds we're encouraged to perform). Among these is "Do not stand idly by" (Leviticus 19, verse 16). There is also a saying, "Just because you cannot complete the task, does not exempt you from trying." I didn't think it was likely that I alone, or acting in concert with 23 others, or with 400 others might actually change things. But neither could I walk away and not try. By acting as I did, I was acting on these religious convictions, which have a lot in common with many other traditions...Christian, Buddhist, Islamic and others.

Some people would have you believe that the world is a safer place because the US has invaded Iraq. I believe the opposite. I think it is MUCH more dangerous. Our pre-emptive invasion of Iraq has turned the tide of world opinion against us. Anything that a potential terrorist may have believed about our evil intentions and motives, is now IN THEIR EYES confirmed. We have added fuel to fire, and motivated those who see the world quite differently than we do to feel even more threatened. Threatened people are more violent people. We need an active anti-terror campaign. Invading Iraq is not only irrelevant to that...but, in my opinion, is significantly counter-productive.

This arrest has affected my life in significant ways. I feel more patriotic, and more involved in the future of this country than I have ever felt before. There have been plenty of times when I've felt hopeless or apathetic, and felt like I couldn't change anything. I was just one person. This protest activity has touched thousands of people. They are more willing to stand up for what they believe in, whether they agree with me (or with our position) or not.

The essential thing is that as a civil society we need to engage each other, be willing to speak our truth, and be willing to listen. If I cannot protest in a law-abiding way, we have lost a very important right in this country. Our protest destroyed no property. No one was injured. At the

most, the government asserts that some people may have been inconvenienced. What's more important? Expressing my deeply held convictions, engaging others in a dialogue...or having the traffic flow smoothly?

Previously, I mentioned that I have been a diversity consultant. Earlier this month I was Texas, doing consulting work at a Christian seminary. I conducted and produced videotaped interviews on issues of campus and theological diversity. I just got an email from the client there. It said "Thank you and the others for doing what I have heretofore had too much reticence to do. I'll be thinking about you and praying that the judge makes a wise decision."

3/17/04  
Bob Abramms  
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