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'The Nation' Owes TSA Critics an Apology

by [Charles Davis](#) November 26, 2010 09:38 AM (PT) Topics: [Criminal Justice in the Media](#), [Grassroots Activism](#)

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Oppose the TSA's new policy of getting groped by a highway patrol reject or submitting to a full-body (i.e. naked) X-ray body scan before boarding a plane? Then you just might be a right-wing corporatist, or at least that's what a recent article in *The Nation* magazine suggests.

In a [piece](#) entitled, "TSAstroturf: The Washington Lobbyists and Koch-Funded Libertarians Behind the TSA Scandal," authors Mark Ames and Yasha Levine suggest the "grassroots" opposition to the routine trampling of rights at airports -- they liberally employ "scare quotes" throughout the article -- is largely the work of well-paid Washington lobbyists and their useful idiots:

Does anyone else sense something strange is going on with the apparently spontaneous revolt against the TSA? This past week, the media turned an "ordinary guy," 31-year-old Californian John Tyner, who blogs under the pseudonym "Johnny Edge," into a national hero after he posted a cell phone video of himself defending his liberty against the evil government oppressors in charge of airport security.

Ames and Levine then go on to not-so-subtly imply "ordinary guy" John Tyner -- the man who famously told a TSA agent "[if you touch my junk, I'll have you arrested](#)" -- is part of a broad swath of "suspicious fake-grassroots outrage" and possibly a paid tool of the Koch brothers, the billionaires who fund a various assortment of conservative, libertarian-leaning groups like the Cato Institute and the Reason Foundation. The authors demonstrate these ties entirely through innuendo, evidence-free conjecture and good 'ol fashioned stereotyping, but pointedly little in the way of evidence.

But then, letting the article speak for itself is more damning than anything I could say:

So far, all we know about "ordinary guy" John Tyner III, the freedom fighter who took on the TSA agents, is that, according to a friendly hometown profile in the San Diego Union-Tribune, "he leans **strongly libertarian** and doesn't believe in voting. TSA security policy, he asserts 'isn't Republican and it isn't Democratic.'" [Original authors' emphasis]

Tyner attended private Christian schools in Southern California and lives in Oceanside, a Republican stronghold next to Camp Pendleton, the largest Marine Corps base on the West Coast.

And that's ... it. The dude lives in the wrong neighborhood and has political views -- gulp, *principles* -- that don't fall within the confines of the two-party system. The horror of it all, I know. Why didn't we know this about Tyner years ago? Where, I ask, were the investigative reporters?

The article And Salon's Glenn Greenwald lays out what's this is really all about: [partisanship](#).

These are Tyner's actual crimes in the eyes of these Nation writers, at least judging by the accusations they make: (1) he's not a good, loyal Democrat; (2) he did something that politically harmed Barack Obama; and, most and worst of all (3) he failed to submit meekly and quietly to Government orders like any Good, Patriotic "ordinary American" would and should do. That is what has created their "sense" that he's something other than an "ordinary guy" -- a "fake."

Indeed, co-author Ames -- best known as once being the substantially less talented partner of *Rolling Stone's* Matt Taibbi -- has given plenty of evidence that what he finds most damning about Tyner is his stated political

beliefs. "Libertarians are by definition enemies of the state," Ames [wrote on his blog](#) last month. "Like Communists before them, they are actively subverting the Constitution and the American Dream."

Ignored by Ames and Levine is that it's not just libertarians speaking out against the TSA's tactics, nor is there any evidence the grassroots resistance being manufactured by the Koch brothers, who represent the staid, conservative brand of libertarianism; the one more likely to sponsor a forum on currency devaluations during the Austro-Hungarian empire than the type of mass civil disobedience endorsed by the good folks at [WeWontFly.com](#). A more plausible explanation is that Americans -- Republicans, Democrats and yes, even a few of those crazy Greens and libertarians -- are outraged by the TSA's sudden implementation of tactics many feel is an invasion of privacy and a violation of constitutional protections against unreasonable searches.

It's sad albeit predictable that some self-styled lefties feel the need to defend violations of civil liberties that you damn well know they would've raised hell about when that other guy with the faux-Texas accent was in charge. But it's also encouraging that few seem to be taking the Ames/Levine bait, with *The Nation's* own Jeremy Scahill denouncing the piece as a "[shameful smear](#)."

The authors themselves, however, are unremorseful, penning an [embarrassingly lame response](#) to their critics that I could probably spend another 1,000 words on -- suffice to say, when you invoke the yeah-well-my-granddad-escaped-from-a-prison-camp-in-Soviet-Russia defense, well, you've pretty much lost the debate.

Outside of those who wrote it, though, only other person who doesn't seem to have recognized the glaring flaws with the piece is *Nation* editor Katrina vanden Huevel, who of course allowed a smear on a grassroots activist -- albeit one of those dastardly, civil liberty-loving "libertarians" -- to be published in her magazine. Everyone makes mistakes, but running the piece is one for which vanden Huevel ought to issue an apology.

Opposition to government overreach and violations of privacy should not be turned into a phony left vs. right issue. *The Nation* should be an ally in the fight to protect our civil liberties, not a foe.

[*Ask The Nation to retract and apologize for its smearing of an American who did what few do anymore: stand up for his rights.*](#)

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