

## Dixie Chicks sued for defamation

Written by By CHUCK BARTELS, Associated Press Writer  
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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Dixie Chicks singer Natalie Maines is the target of a defamation lawsuit by the stepfather of one of three 8-year-old boys slain in West Memphis.

Maines spoke out last year at a Little Rock rally for three people convicted of the slayings and alleged Terry Hobbs was instead involved in the killings.

Hobbs, stepfather of Steve Branch who was killed in 1993 with Christopher Byers and Michael Moore, filed suit in Pulaski County Circuit Court on Nov. 25. The suit names all three members of the Dixie Chicks, but focuses on Maines, identified by her married name of Natalie Pasdar.

Hobbs claims he suffered loss of income, injury to his reputation and emotional distress. The suit seeks compensatory and punitive damages.

"While all Americans have the right of free speech, that right does not extend to falsely accusing someone of a triple homicide," Hobbs' attorney, J. Cody Hiland of Vilonia, said Thursday in a news release. "Terry Hobbs had absolutely nothing to do with these murders. His one and only association with this tragedy was that of a devastated father."

Maines attended a Dec. 19 rally, where she claimed Jason Baldwin, Damien Echols and Jessie Misskelley — known to sympathizers as the "West Memphis Three" — were innocent and that supposed new evidence pointed to Hobbs. Her comments echoed a Nov. 26, 2007, letter that was still on the Dixie Chicks' Web site Thursday, in which she claimed that new DNA testing of hair from the crime scene linked Hobbs to the killings and that his behavior after the slayings indicated his guilt. The lawsuit says the claim is false.

Hobbs told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette in a Feb. 1 interview that his reputation was in tatters and he wanted to clear his name.

"I want people to know I haven't done nothing wrong," Hobbs said. "I want them to hear it from me."

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No attorney for Maines was listed in court filings and a publicist didn't immediately return a call for comment.

The lawsuit says Maines' statements were "so extreme in degree as to be beyond the pale of decency and to be regarded as atrocious and utterly intolerable in civilized society." The suit says Hobbs suffered severe emotional, mental and physical injuries and seeks compensatory and punitive damages.

Assertions similar to those made by Maines were also made by lawyers seeking new trials for the three convicts.

The boys' bodies were found by police a day after they vanished from their quiet, tree-lined neighborhood May 5, 1993. Police arrested the three after a confession by Misskelley in which he described how he watched Baldwin and Echols sexually assault and beat two of the boys as he ran down another trying to escape. A jury gave Misskelley a life-plus-40-year sentence for the killings. A later jury gave Baldwin a life sentence without parole. Echols, then 19, the oldest of the three, received the death penalty.

The Arkansas Supreme Court later upheld the convictions, but a later documentary sparked interest across the Internet, as well as among celebrities, including Maines, who felt the teens were railroaded by police for their interest in heavy metal music and the occult. Supporters say they raised more than \$1 million for a legal defense fund for the three, enough to fund lawyers, new DNA testing and a second federal appeal on behalf of Echols.

A judge has since denied defense motions for a new trial. Defense lawyers have said the new evidence included Hobbs' DNA. Echols has an appeal pending on grounds that his lawyer was incompetent.

The lawsuit includes a copy of Maines' letter as an exhibit and says her comments were repeated in numerous media outlets.