

# editorial

## Meredith Herald

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#### Editorial Policy

The *Meredith Herald* is published by the students of Meredith College during the academic year. The paper is funded by the college and through advertising. The *Herald* will not print material containing personal attacks, insults, ridicule, or libelous statements. All letters to the editors must be signed unless otherwise discussed with the editors.

The opinions expressed on the editorial page do not necessarily reflect those of the college administration, faculty, or student body.

The *Herald* welcomes criticism and will respond promptly to any submitted in writing and signed by the writer.

When the staff of a high school newspaper decided to run two articles about teen sexuality and divorce in their publication, their principal wouldn't allow the students to print the articles in the paper.

Outraged, the student staff took their principal to court, and lost. After all, what does a bunch of high school students know about freedom of the press and other Constitutional rights?

Undaunted, the students pleaded their case before the Supreme Court, the highest judicial branch of our government and the guardian of our Constitutional rights. In a landmark decision, the Court ruled that school administrators have a right to decide what is appropriate reading for their students, and can edit school publications accordingly.

Obviously, the Supreme Court doesn't know much about Constitutional rights, either.

The First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees all American people the right to free speech, freedom of the press, and other rights we claim elevate the quality of life in the United States. Now, the Court's ruling says that high school students do not possess the "emotional maturity" to enjoy that Constitutional right by printing articles that deal with the issues that concern them most, especially ones like the runaway teen pregnancy rate and the difficulties of dealing with divorce.

To what degree must the "emotional maturity" of American citizens be developed so that they can claim their Constitutional rights? At what age? Sixteen? Twenty-one? Thirty-five?

Not only has the Supreme Court clouded the issue of when Americans can claim their Constitutional rights for Right-to-Life advocates who base their arguments against abortion on the rights guaranteed to all citizens, they have blatantly furthered censorship in this country.

January has been designated by the federal government as "Freedom of the College Student Press Month." The Supreme Court's ruling, which has serious implications for college papers also, negates the importance of having a free press anywhere. After all, the purpose of having a free press is to allow an avenue for individuals—high school students, college students, labor leaders, Right-to-Lifers—to express themselves freely without fear of censorship. That's one of the freedoms that distinguishes the United States from Russia or other communist or totalitarian governments in the world.

No Supreme Court justice will say that by voting for this ruling (five of them did) that they are advancing communist doctrines in this country. What they will say is that they believe few high school students are mature enough to read frank, but not obscene, stories about birth control, sex, or divorce.

Isn't a high school newspaper a futile place for the Supreme Court to try to protect teenagers from "objectionable" material? If statistics on divorce are accurate, by the time these students get to high school, half of them have most likely experienced the trauma of divorce first hand.

And what teenagers, by the time they've reached high school, don't know more

about sex and sexuality than their parents did at their age, simply because they've been bombarded by advertising, movies, and music videos that sell sex at every opportunity? A thoughtful, well-written article composed by a peer about teen pregnancy and how to prevent it could probably do more to influence teens not to be sexually active than all the lectures given by school administrators and terrified parents ever will.

Student newspapers, whether in high school or in college, are outlets through which young people can speak out about issues that concern them or aspects of administrations with which they disagree. Imagine the wasted potential if they—if we—are forced to work under the shadow of school administrators ready to censor anything they deem objectionable.

The high school journalists in St. Louis are to be applauded for taking their case all the way to the Supreme Court, a move that shows how dear we hold our Constitutional rights, regardless of our emotional maturity.

Here at the *Meredith Herald*, we like to think that our publication is an autonomous one. While we feel a need to uphold the reputation of our institution by not printing libelous statements or yellow journalism, we would not and do not hesitate to print the opinion of students who object to college policies or practices.

And yet, certain administrators remind us often that the *Herald* is not a student newspaper, but rather is only a newspaper published by students. There's a big difference.

## A FREE PRESS IS FOR STUDENTS, TOO

Student Press Law Center



## letters to editor

Dear Editor,

SGA and the Luminary Committee chairs would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who contributed money,

bought luminaries, and helped in selling, filling, and distributing the bags over the Meredith campus. Without the help that was given, the glorious event could not have taken place. Many new ideas and plans

are being made for the 1988 Luminaries, and hope that it will be just as exciting and fulfilled as this year was. Many thanks again! We couldn't have done it without you!