

JONI'S
CORNER

Patriotic duty includes questioning government, not blind loyalty

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JONI SMITH
Foreign Correspondent

I was saddened to learn that some of the Meredith community still has the misconception that although our country is in the midst of a war, all Americans should be supportive of the hostilities and should bow down to every misguided syllable uttered by George W. Bush. If everyone in our country thought this, the U.S. would look similar to Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia and even Iraq under Saddam. It is our right as Americans to express our opinions and to disagree with each and every branch of the government if we wish to do so.

I certainly hope that not

all Americans feel compelled to accept Bush's policies simply because we are at war. If they do, we might as well not even have a

democracy because the foundation of a democratic government is freedom. I hope some of you in the Meredith Community maintain your determination to have your own opinion concerning the war without feeling it is your patriotic duty to support it. I actually think quite the opposite: I see it as every American citizen's patriotic duty to constantly question the government to insure that the freedoms we so

often take for granted are never taken away from us.

It also seems to me that now that the regime in Iraq has been toppled, many Americans see the war as

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being won by the Coalition, but I hesitate to be so optimistic because the real test of our endurance has only just started. Now we have to see if our country has the patience and resolve to see this operation in Iraq

through.

Will we simply get what we want and leave? Will the media cease to cover the daily happenings in Iraq like it did in Afghanistan?

Or will the United States actually see something through from start to finish?

As for what I have been doing in Russia, since some of you seem more interested in that than the war, I have

had the opportunity to meet

many foreign students and teachers as well as to converse with some Russians I have had the privilege to meet. Unfortunately for some of you who will continue to read my column

until the end of the semester, my political opinions have not wavered a bit after living here for four months, although many people told me before I left that they probably would.

Russia is such a different place with such fascinating people that I cannot possibly describe all my experiences within the confines of a page in the *Meredith Herald*. However, I will say this--and I actually think there are lots of people on campus who will back me up on this one--studying abroad is an experience no student should pass up. It is truly an experience that helps mold you into a more complete person with a better understanding of the world around you.

Two sides of the issue: *The Vagina Monologues*

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The other side of the issue appeared in last week's Herald.

What is wrong with a little talk about our vaginas? The recent *Vagina Monologues* phenomenon has caused a huge uproar, including both mass applaud and criticism. Critics argue that it stereotypes men and heterosexual sex, relating it only with violence. They question its level of liberation, asserting that it is really widening separation gaps between genders. But *The Vagina Monologues* is wonderful. It has created a sexual emancipation for women, causing women everywhere

to breathe a sigh of relief knowing that they no longer need be ashamed of or feel uncomfortable discussing their vaginas or sexuality.

It is about women celebrating women's bodies--their own bodies. It is an alternative to the constant objectification of the female body, where the media, men, and even other women only celebrate or criticize women's bodies as a sexual entity. It encourages women to love their bodies, every part of their body, including the unspoken vagina because if it is part of a woman, it is beautiful. This does not mean *The Vagina Monologues* is encouraging the replacement of men with masturbation or other women, it only means women have

the right to be proud of their sexuality.

The Vagina Monologues is trying to dispel the taboo behind the word "vagina." In the play, the women address the common referral to vaginas as "down there." They continue to list the infinite number of names all sorts of people have given vaginas. *The Vagina Monologues* is questioning why women feel the need to verbally hide their vaginas, speaking in code or so-called euphemisms because the actual word is too obscene or shameful or honest or real. It is questioning why women seemed so ashamed of their vaginas. Just as men are proud of their penises, women need to know that they can and should be proud of their

vaginas as well.

In addition to desensitizing women to the words "vagina," "cunt," and sadly enough for today's society, even the word "sex" needs a little bit of a push, the *Monologues* try to bring about awareness for violence against women. Interspersed between the monologues there are women who will relate facts of horrible acts of violence that occurs to women around the world - from female genital mutilation in Africa, to the rise of female gangs in the United States, to sexual assault against women everywhere in the world. By showing us what happens, maybe someone who is listening will be motivated to act.

And that's the entire point! *The Vagina*

Monologues wants a response. It wants you to feel horrified about the terrible things that happen in the world. What are you going to do about it? It wants you to feel a little uneasy when the woman on stage is crying for you to chant "cunt" with her or when another woman wants to tell you about her first sexual experience. Why do you feel uneasy? Think about it... these things are natural and part of our bodies and our experiences. We shouldn't feel shame - we should be proud that this is who we are.

The Vagina Monologues is harmless. What is wrong with trying to increase female self-esteem about

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