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group of men, convey exhilaration while giving viewers folks with whom to identify. The men we meet (there is one woman we hear from fleetingly) are indeed patriotic, gutsy and altruistic, but it is clear they have been carefully vetted for the show. No one is afraid. Everyone is thrilled to be in Afghanistan. ("We're going out catching bad guys," notes one soldier. "I'm having a good time doing that.") No one gets hurt. No one gets sick. Everyone is efficient and extremely careful. Everyone sees violence as a last resort.

The *cinéma vérité* techniques insist that everything we are seeing is "real." So it is especially dismaying to hear the discredited assertions that Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda are in cahoots parroted without any contradiction. The USS Hue City, a guided-missile cruiser in the North Arabian Sea, stops an Iraqi freighter to see if it's smuggling oil in violation of UN sanctions. As we see Petty Officer Matthew Klemm searching one Iraqi's effects, he says, "I don't feel funny about going through anybody's personal stuff, 'cause they wiped out how many thousands of people's personal stuff at the World Trade Center.... If this stops it from happening again, so be it." He then finds an address book, which he declares could provide contacts with Al Qaeda, and he suggests that the shipping company "is part of a bigger picture."

To leave viewers with the right levels of testosterone, the first episode ends with the broad-grinned, cocky John "Champ" Killen, maintenance supervisor for the top-gun planes on the Kennedy. "I love what we do. It's high-paced and action-packed... I loooove it!" he exclaims. He warns that it is "payback" time. "When we say it's over, that's when it's going to be over. Until then, better stay home and run, son. We're comin' to get ya.... Getting ready to drop some hot iron, is what we like to say." He then gives us a big thumbs-up.

Assessing the immediate impact of such propaganda is not easy. After all, *Profiles* (5.9 million viewers) didn't stand a chance against *Friends* (17.5 million). Nonetheless, what should be of utmost concern here is the creep of such meticulously scripted DOD-sponsored cant into prime time. Last spring, the Pentagon vetted a script for *JAG* that cast military tribunals as cozier than a *Matlock* courtroom. The deployment of high-end production values by television's entertainment divisions provides especially effective camouflage for the selling of militarism and empire-building that will result not in broad grins and high-fives but in real-life death and destruction. SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

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## Dissent and Basketball

**D**uring the Vietnam War the heavyweight boxing champion of the world, Muhammad Ali, refused to serve in the Army. During the Gulf War, Craig Hodges, a journeyman player for the championship Chicago Bulls, spoke out against the war and American racism. And in the lead-up to a potential second war on Iraq we have... Toni Smith, senior captain of a Division III

women's basketball team at Manhattanville College, a small school in the suburbs of New York City, who spent her last season in the crossfire for refusing to salute the flag. She issued only a brief statement explaining her actions: "For some time now, the inequalities that are embedded into the American system have bothered me," she wrote. "I can no longer, in good conscience, salute the flag. The war America will soon be entering in has reinforced my beliefs."

Incredibly, Smith's silent, solitary, nonviolent protest resulted in a huge number of sports-page articles, furious letters to the editor, rants on sports talk-radio and more than a million hits to the college's website. We have to wonder whether an obscure 21-year-old would have caused the media storm she did if this country weren't so divided, anxious and fearful about the threat of war—and if dissent among big-time athletes hadn't become so exceedingly rare.

One Vietnam vet ran onto the court to wave the Stars and Stripes in Smith's face, saying, "She didn't earn the right to disrespect the flag." Three hundred merchant marine cadets showed up to chant, "Leave our country!" Mets superstar Mike Piazza criticized Smith, saying, "You shouldn't disrespect your sport to catapult your political views." The *Boston Herald* called her, not atypically, a "silly, dour ingrate."

But as Filip Bondy, who covered Smith sympathetically for the New York *Daily News*, wrote, "If sports events are inappropriate forums for political statements, then what exactly is 'The Star Spangled Banner'?" So Piazza's recent comments to *Newsday* expressing support for Bush and the death penalty spark no sports-page furor; regular displays of militarism at sporting events, such as the Air Force flyovers at Super Bowl time, go without comment; and a minor college athlete becomes an antiwar celebrity for breaking ranks.

"Who would care about a Division III basketball player?" Smith said to *The Nation* at the close of her stormy season. "If I wanted to make a public statement, it would not be this way. I wasn't trying to advance my political views, and I gave it a lot of thought. It's personal. I won't salute the flag anymore because the flag means certain things I have issues with."

Smith told *The Nation* that students and faculty at Manhattanville were supportive, likely because of the stand taken by college president Richard Berman. Where many of his peers might have pressured a dissenter to tone it down (as it appears administrators did at one basketball powerhouse, the University of Virginia, calling a freshman ballplayer in for a meeting after she briefly followed Smith's lead), Berman risked offending trustees, alumni and prospective parents by standing with her. "Her right of expression is fundamental," he said, "and we support her."

Toni Smith and her critics are miles apart, but her protest should remind her far more cautious fellow athletes that it's their country too, in bad times as well as good. MURRAY POLNER

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