

Opinion

Smoking is a big part of American history

Kurt Waldheim is president of Austria, despite charges by Jews that he participated in Nazi atrocities during World War II. Forty years ago, such accusations would have been enough to get him out of the country — or worse. But as years pass, so do our vivid recollections of what comes to be known as history. Individual accounts may remain intact, but overall, time dulls the memory of past events. When it comes to accurately recording the past, time is not on our side.



Loren Steffy

While visiting my grandparents-in-law over the holidays, I saw an article in the *Tulsa World* about a book publisher's request for a color transparency of Sequoyah from the Gilcrease Museum, which is the primary source of Indian art for textbooks. Although the publisher wanted the painting reproduction for a spelling book, a pipe that appears in most paintings of the Cherokee scholar was not welcome. The

World article quoted the publisher's representative as asking: "Can we airbrush the pipe out of the picture? We don't want to show anyone smoking in a textbook."

Apparently such requests are not uncommon to the museum. Another publisher wanted a transparency of some cowboys in a corral touched up to remove the cigarette one of them was smoking in the original painting. The assistant museum director, Tom Brayshaw, was quoted as turning down requests on the grounds that the museum isn't going to "airbrush history."

In this case, parts of our national heritage were protected from mindless alteration in the name of the latest national concern. But the publishers' attitude represents a dangerous sentiment that threatens to permanently distort our interpretation of history.

It is becoming socially unacceptable to smoke in our society. While I'm not sorry to see the change in national attitude, it doesn't mean that smoking always was viewed with such contempt. Yet publishers are afraid to portray Sequoyah, regardless of his true smoking

habits, with a pipe in his mouth. It's as if they believe a picture of a long-dead Indian will override the peer pressure children face every day. Few kids are going to base their decision to smoke on a picture of Sequoyah in a spelling text.

Unfortunately, smoking is part of American history. Tobacco was one of the nation's first cash crops and was practically the sole economic base for the southern colonies. The tobacco industry is still a major economic and political force in this country. If publishers are worried about promoting smoking among the young, they should start by combating the efforts of the tobacco companies that use the power of peer pressure to their advantage in smoking advertisements. These tactics certainly have a larger influence on children than references to tobacco use — written or illustrated — in textbooks.

The publishers' concern about printing what is considered inappropriate behavior is nothing new. Textbooks have a way of glossing over the elements of history that our society doesn't feel comfortable with, and at the same time, perpetuating untruths that may elevate national heroes to near godhood. Many children graduate from high school not

realizing that the tale of George Washington and the cherry tree is a myth and oblivious to the fact that our first president owned slaves. Having a leader who cannot tell a lie would be nice, but having a history text that doesn't tell or support one should be imperative.

In Alabama, fundamentalist Christian groups are waging a court battle over the absence of religion in school books. While the groups obviously would like to see their beliefs reflected in the books, their outrage uncovers an area of deeper concern. Faced with the fear of violating church-state separation, many textbook authors and publishers are hesitant to mention the role religion played in our history. But advocating religion is not the same as acknowledging it as a major influence in this country's social and political background.

Individual religious convictions don't change the fact that the Pilgrims were devout Christians fleeing persecution. Similarly, individual views — or even a national attitude — against smoking don't change the fact that Sequoyah enjoyed a pipe.

Sequoyah was a great man, and his

place in history is duly deserved. He developed a system of writing for his tribe and became a representative of the Indians to Congress. He was respected by the white man as well as his own people. Ironically, he also was a historian, dedicated to recording and preserving his tribe's culture.

But now publishers want to alter — or conveniently ignore — in their own attempt to preserve the past, a side of the man that they deem inappropriate. The problem with great men of history, though, is that they can't be forgotten for their bad habits. Perhaps it's unfortunate that Sequoyah smoked a pipe, but that doesn't lessen his accomplishments. Instead, it shows that, like most human beings, he wasn't perfect.

If we attempt to record history in a less than objective framework, influenced by the mores of the day, then we are not recording what happened, but rather what we wanted to happen. We need to leave intact what few reminders of the past we have left. As we saw with the Waldheim election, time will distort our recollections soon enough.

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Condoms making a big comeback

OK, now that I have everybody's attention, let me say that if the mention of that particular product embarrasses or infuriates you, you are going to be embarrassed and infuriated a great deal in the future. Get ready for "The Return of the Condom."



Lewis Grizzard

Condoms, long obsolete as a means of preventing disease and pregnancy because of the development of penicillin and the pill, began their comeback alongside the rise and awareness of AIDS and teen pregnancy.

Several months ago, one company even began advertising condoms on billboards in certain American cities. I got phone calls and letters.

"How dare they put something like that on billboards," was the prevalent theme of the calls and letters.

That is nothing compared to what is about to happen. In its November issue, *Fortune* magazine featured a detailed study of the sudden surge of condom sales.

Consider this:

- Said New York's health commissioner, at a conference dealing with the threat of AIDS to heterosexuals, "The day of the condom has returned."
- The National Academy of Science is advising the use of condoms.
- The surgeon general has endorsed the use of condoms.
- Condom sales currently are up 10 percent, and they are expected to climb even higher. And you can expect more ad campaigns.
- Women account for 50 percent of condom sales. One company's expected to target women with billboards featuring a woman saying, "I like sex. But I don't want to die from it."

Also, according to *Fortune*, there will be seven days of on-campus festivities at a number of colleges and universities as a means of heightening the awareness of condoms in students. Call it National Condom Week.

According to *Fortune*, "In addition to tossing water-filled condoms around, the events will include the distribution of free condoms, condom model T-shirts and posters... and free condom-promoting literature."

A pin-the-condom-on-the-man contest mirrors pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey with obvious differences.

One of the schools where such is supposed to take place is strait-laced Methodist Emory University in Atlanta. Said George Lowrey, associate dean of campus life at Emory: "Our students can do something independently if they want to, but the school can't be involved in something like this. It just wouldn't do for our reputation. It's too sensational."

But isn't it important for Emory students to be aware of condoms as a means to protect themselves from deadly disease and pregnancy?

"Done right," Lowrey continued, "it's a good thing to get the message out, but the main intent of the campus activities seems to hold the idea up to public ridicule rather than the sensible approach."

The use of condoms might very well save a lot of lives in the future, so any methods of making people use them seem sensible enough to me.

National Condom Week. It begins on Valentine's Day.

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National troubles good news for press

The place where I work is excited. My colleagues scurry about, some of them working incredibly long hours, most of them willing to work even more if anyone asks. We smile, pat ourselves on the back and can hardly wait each day's developments. In the news business, we are having, as they say in New York's garment district, a very good season. This fall, the public is buying scandal.



Richard Cohen

And, boy, do we have scandals for you. There's everything from insider trading on Wall Street to investigations of influence peddling in Washington. First and foremost, though, comes the scandal involving Iran, the Nicaraguan Contras and, of course, the White House basement whence worked that national hero and Fifth Amendment anti-communist, Oliver North. Such a scandal is rare indeed; and we are making the most of it. That you can count on.

If you detect a certain glee in what I have said, you have read my mood accurately. That glee, however, has nothing to do with seeing a president in trouble, an administration adrift or our national credibility in shambles. It has to do, instead, with what my colleagues and I do

for a living. Stories are our business, and the better the stories, the better our business. Journalists are similar to cancer specialists who do not wish the disease on anyone. Most people, nevertheless, can appreciate the professional challenge that patients represent. And take satisfaction in knowing that the public benefits.

That distinction — the difference between not wishing the president ill for any political reason and yet enjoying the professional challenge that his misfortune presents — has been misstated, inadvertently or otherwise, by certain commentators and officials. Foremost among them is Patrick Buchanan who, with relish, has often quoted the executive editor of the *Washington Post*, Benjamin C. Bradlee, as saying, "This is the most fun we've had since Watergate."

The same quote was recently cited by President Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski. He accused Bradlee of "gloating" over the administration's troubles and characterized the press in general of being in an unseemly "frenzy."

Our extreme excitement (not frenzy) is self-evident, no Fifth-Amendment needed there. But gloating is a different matter. It suggests that the press is

doing something that it ought not to do, that it is being irresponsible. And, worse, it suggests the press is somehow anti-American, indifferent to the security or welfare of our country. Buchanan and Brzezinski imply that the press ought to be more delicate and, at the very least, not enjoy the feast before it.

Both Buchanan and Brzezinski suffer from a bad case of Potomac Rot. The symptoms are the inability to distinguish between the press and the government and their two quite different functions. They seem to want a press that is quasi-governmental, whose responsibility is not to inform the public but share in the governing of the nation. They would prefer us captured, domesticated, a somber adjunct of some worried think tank at which everything is taken into account but the people's right to know.

Just recently, President Reagan promoted Oliver North from light colonel to national hero. Whether North deserves such accolade, I seriously doubt, but I do think he would have made a swell journalist. Here, after all, is a man who made his rank in wartime — the Vietnam War. He showed bravery in combat and for that he was both cited and rewarded with promotions.

Does that mean he loves war, that he

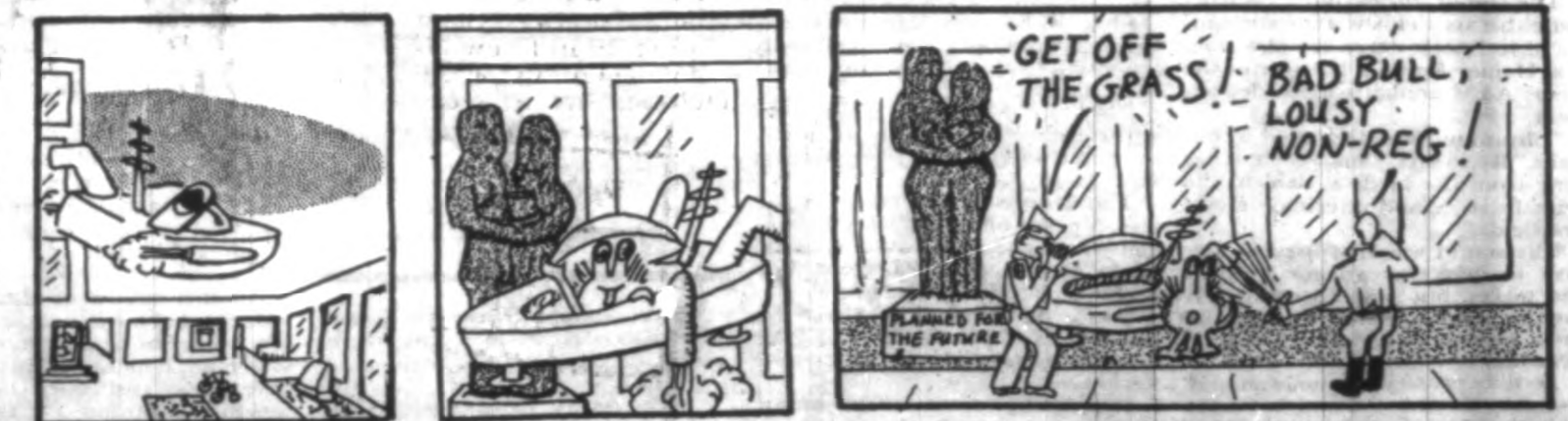
enjoys the killing of people, some of them, inescapably, innocents? No, War is the business of the military, the way officers gain promotions. In theory, the better they are at killing, the faster they will be promoted.

Aside from the fact that journalists are not in the business of killing people, we too try to perform our best. A murder is tragedy, but is also a story. A train wreck is a calamity, but it, too, is a story. A scandal can be both a tragedy and a calamity, but it is nevertheless one hell of a story. Like a war for soldiers, it is a chance for promotion, for citation and to make a name for yourself. A journalist who does not see that is in the wrong business.

So, are we having a good time? You bet we are. Are some of us looking to become famous? For sure. Is this a big story, one that has captivated the public? Yup. But do most of us exult in a distracted government and try to further some alleged political agenda? No, not for a minute. Reporting and even exploiting a scandal is just business. And business — knock on wood — is just great.

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Harsh Reality



The Battalion

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