



MARGULIES
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And now for the good news

Some months ago, I asked readers to tell me what they liked and disliked about their newspapers.

There's not enough good news was the overwhelming response.

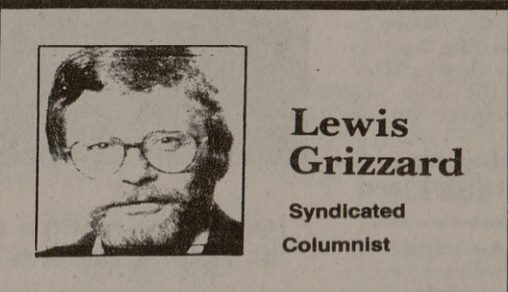
Wrote a woman from Plainview, Texas: "I get up in the morning and read my newspaper. After I'm finished, there are many times I'm so depressed I want to go back to bed."

I'm in complete agreement with such thoughts.

There may, however, be some good news. I finally saw a headline in a newspaper that, instead of dwelling completely on the negative, included an accent on the positive.

The headline appeared recently in the *Atlanta Constitution*. The article was about three inmates who escaped the Spaulding Co. jail in Griffin, Ga.

The three inmates tore a commode



Lewis Grizzard
Syndicated Columnist

out of a wall and crawled out of the hole that resulted.

That's the bad news. The good news was that there were 23 other inmates who could have followed the other three who escaped but chose not to.

Said the headline in the *Constitution*: "Three flee Spaulding jail, but 23 don't."

The headline writer came up with "... but 23 don't," thus pointing out the positive side of a negative story.

I'd like to see more headlines written in this manner. For example:

- "Students riot in Virginia Beach, but stricken airliner lands safely in Denver"
- "Jim Bakker sobs at trial, but it probably won't do him any good"
- "Pro footballer suspended for drug use, but Tommy Lasorda's doing something about his weight problem"
- "Loud rock music threatens teenage hearing, but orange hair on decline in U.S. high schools"
- "AIDS cases growing, but nobody worries about Herpes anymore"
- "Fergie pregnant again, but Rob Lowe didn't have anything to do with it"
- "Three shot in liquor store hold dup, but rain ends tomorrow"

Good news: It's there. All we have to do is look for it.

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Census getting a bit ridiculous

In a nation agog over statistics, the ultimate in bean counting — actually human being counting — is cranking up once again.

Every 10 years, Big Brother comes around poking his nose into your business. Having a head count, or census, is in the best interest of everybody. It is with this information that the powers that be carve up the nation into supposedly equal legislative districts — the better to brag about how fair the congressional process really is.

Also, with information gleaned from the census, government and private business alike will gain valuable information as to trends in living preference.

No doubt, California and Florida — meccas of sunshine and moderate temperatures — again will show tremendous gains. It will be interesting to see what happened to Texas in the roller coaster '80s.

But whatever the trends, the polls in Washington, D.C., will get an idea what areas should be pampered in order to maximize vote getting.

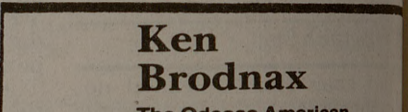
But has the counting process gotten out of hand?

Considering that it reached the point a few censuses back where the nation's citizens were asked to truthfully declare the number of toilets in their residences, the obvious answer is: Yes, the census is getting a bit ridiculous.

But it sure is helping the people who manufacture potty seats determine their version of supply and demand.

And it's even getting more personal this time around. Back in 1980, workers asked if you were living with a person. This time, the census bureau instead will be inquiring about "unmarried partners" in your home. That is a bit more specific and should clear up a lot of relationships, unless you happen to be rooming — platonically — with the person who is your tennis or golf companion.

For the record, this will be the 21st



Ken Brodnax
The Odessa American

time the government has counted. And — as Gomer Pyle used to say — surprise, surprise — it's going to cost more than any other census.

The effort, which actually got started five years ago, is expected to cost \$1.5 billion. Considering that best estimates place the U.S. population at 250 million that means it will cost \$10.40 per person to be counted.

Also for the record, that \$2.6 billion represents a doubling in cost from years ago. Wonder why? Why heck, the census bureau is hiring almost a half million folks to do the dirty deed.

But the feds tell Americans they're getting a bargain. Workers will be armed with language cards to get through any one of 32 different jargon problems.

What's more, a bunch of workers going to stay up all one night in March in hopes of getting an accurate count of the number of people who don't have potties, or even homes for that matter. In fact, the bureau actually is recruiting homeless people to help count the peers.

But for the average person who can't readily access telephone solicitations and a mailbox full of can't-miss sweepstakes, the census should be relatively painless. Just receive the form from the direct-mail campaign in March, fill out the questionnaire and then let the workers go about finding the non-conformists (about 85 percent of homes receiving such a form in 1980 responded) and other lost souls.

They're undoubtedly going to miss a few noses, maybe even some of the "unmarried partners." But what Big Brother doesn't know won't hurt him.

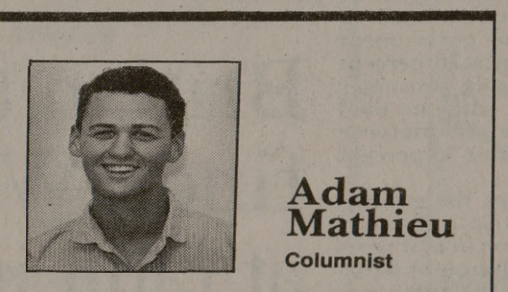
Ken Brodnax is a writer for The Odessa American.

Cheerleader Bush stuck on wrong issues

About 10 months ago, a certain event occurred that involved just over 50 percent of the people in the United States. It was the most popular news story, comic routine and subject of conversation. However, people have now largely forgotten that it ever occurred. Of course I am referring to the presidential election of 1988. I would like to take a not too critical look at the victor of that heated contest, George Bush.

I have a great deal of difficulty referring to George Bush as president, so I will simply refer to him as the "winner of the election" or "guy in Washington." Now, as we might have guessed, I did not vote for George Bush in the election. I am one of the proud few in College Station who voted for "the Duke." But I do not want to color this article with a lot of bitterness about the defeat of the man who should be president. I want to present a nice, non-partisan evaluation of that guy in Washington.

I was heartbroken when Michael Dukakis lost the election. But, being a person who loves his country, I decided that I would give the winner of the election a chance to prove himself. I hoped he would deviate from the policies of his predecessor (whom I will not even begin to berate) and emerge as a kinder, gentler leader. He is much more intelligent than his predecessor. He has more political know-how than his predecessor. In short, unlike his predecessor, he can think.



Adam Mathieu
Columnist

The first disenchantment came when he nominated a defense contractor, John Tower, as secretary of defense. I was still not ready to lose faith totally, so I disregarded this. I was glad I did. Later, he proposed long-overdue restrictions on the use of semi-automatic weapons. I was proud that I had kept faith in dear Mr. Bush. I do not remember him doing a lot about it, but I was happy that he at least said it. So, as of the beginning of this year, I was effectively tolerating the winner of the election.

Then came the flag-burning issue (a triviality magnified into a nation-threatening issue). This is an action that will forever frighten me. It haunts me, because it shows just how pathetic and pandering government officials from both of the major political parties have become. For months the entire government stopped to focus on this one issue that was neither a threat nor even a concern.

As we all recall, the issue really began when the Supreme Court reinforced flag burning as an acceptable form of protest. Anyone who read into the story a bit further could see that this was the Court's most bipartisan decision — several conservatives joined the two arch-liberals in rendering this decision.

Mr. Bush, who had not complained about earlier Court reversals of affirmative action laws, immediately demanded that Congress initiate the process of amending the Constitution. He was not alone to blame for the amendment. But he was to blame for playing sick cheerleader when there were pressing problems affecting the nation. I fault him less on the actual amendment, than

on his strident cheerleading and ridiculous inattention to real national concerns.

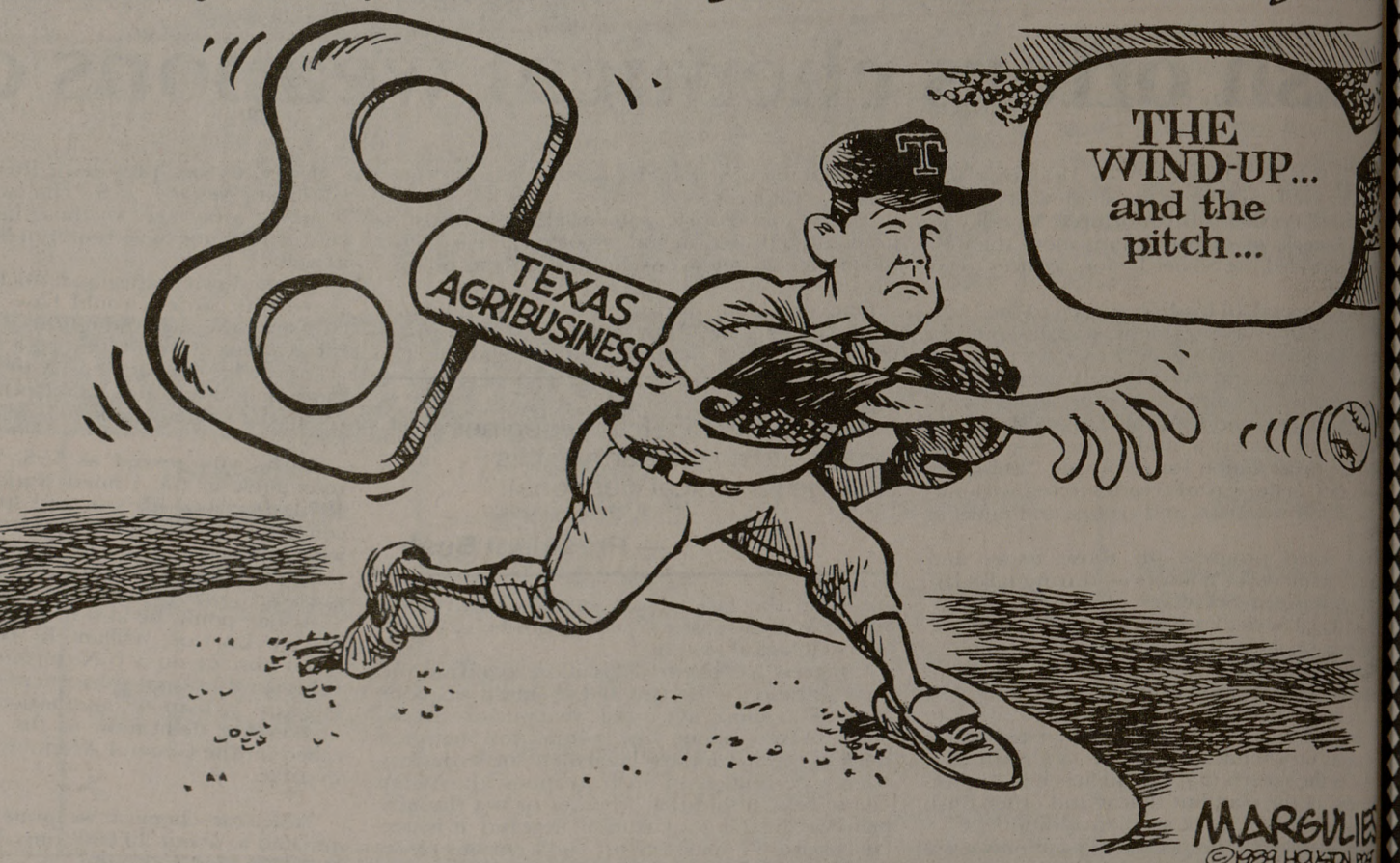
After this, my tolerance almost vanished. But I managed to probe my soul and find the goodness to give him one more chance. I remained in this state of tolerance for a month or two, but once again his actions crushed my soaring dreams for him. This time it was the "war on drugs," if this is still what he calls an inherently farcical notion. He demonstrated almost absolute ignorance in attempting to battle drugs in this way. I do not want to rehash all the many problems with the program, but it is certainly obvious that there are problems. Once again, he has simply played

cheerleader for a concern of the American people, without offering a well-considered plan for eliminating that concern.

I hope that I can once again search my soul for forgiveness, but I do not think that this is possible. I thought it was in the best interest of this country for me to keep quiet and give that guy in Washington a chance. I have given him that chance. Now it may be time to show him that he is failing, and that the American people will not let this white and blue puppet "lead" this country out of existence.

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Nolan Ryan may run against Agriculture Commissioner Hightower



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