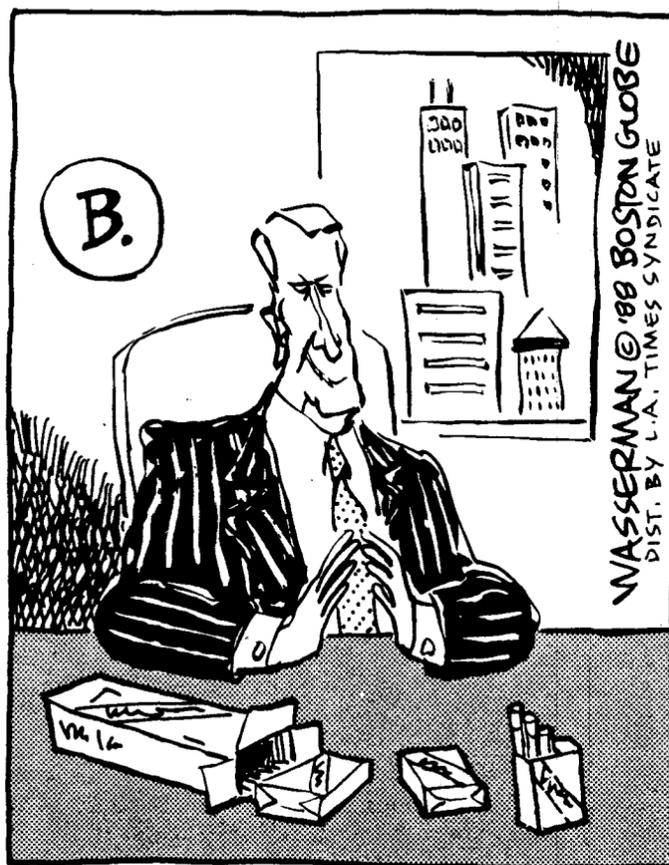
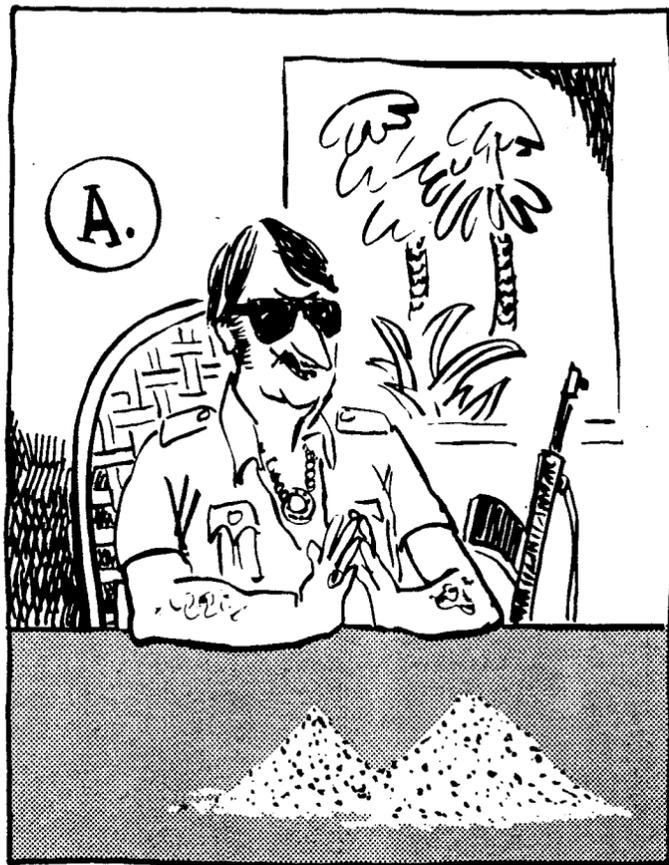


Q: WHICH DRUG DEALER KILLED OVER 300,000 AMERICANS LAST YEAR?



The drug war is a battle against symptoms

War, it has been said, is the health of the state. Certainly Cold War has been the health of the American state since the end of World War II. It has been the rationale for a military-based economy that provided short-term prosperity but contributed to the long-term decline of American industry. And it provided a Red scare that was the excuse for vastly increased federal powers of intervention and disruption of left political activity and social movements. But now the Cold War really seems to be over. Even the most dedicated warriors against the non-existent Communist menace find it difficult to convince most Americans that our security is threatened by the Soviet Union, Cuba or Nicaragua.

This, of course, should be cause for rejoicing, especially by those who believed their own Cold War rhetoric. But every silver lining has a dark cloud. And the cloud hanging over the U.S. ruling class is that without an external threat, the American people might turn their political attention to solving the multitude of social ills and problems bequeathed to our nation by the Cold Warriors.

Enter the war on drugs. It's not the Cold War: it isn't big enough and it doesn't have as clearly defined an enemy. And unlike the Cold War, which one could argue was won by the American corporate elite, it can't be won. In fact, this new war seems a lineal descendant of the Vietnam War, the contra war and the pseudo-war against Manuel Noriega—each of which was lost and each of which was fought against a successively smaller and less-formidable "enemy." But the war against drugs does serve a similar ideological purpose. It serves to divert popular attention from the underlying ills of our society, of which excessive drug consumption is a merely a symptom.

Concession to reality: The administration's new approach—to go after mid-level drug-industry figures like couriers, pilots and money handlers—reflects a more realistic assessment of the difficulties in stopping the production of cocaine, heroin and marijuana in Latin America and Asia. But this approach will also prove futile.

Any free marketeer knows why. In a freely competitive system, when the prospects for profit are great and the amount of capital necessary to enter the business is small, there will be an endless supply of entrepreneurs ready to enter the trade. So, as others are temporarily taken out of service—assuming that they are—replace-

ments will be legion. Indeed, it's surprising that our free-market politicians in Washington don't seem to understand their own philosophy. Since greed is the operative principle on which their economics is based, it should have been obvious to the free marketers that drug-running and pushing would be an unstoppable success, which from a business point of view it clearly has been.

To stop the spread and increased use of drugs—especially cocaine—drug use must be legalized and regulated, much as alcohol is. This argument has been made before, including on these pages, but has been largely dismissed by policymakers and the mainstream media. Every day, however, its logic becomes more compelling.

It would be better, of course, if it were possible to end the use of all destructive substances, including tobacco and alcohol. But our society—and maybe all societies—requires means of escape from the oppressions of everyday life. The total failure of Prohibition proved that simply making a narcotic illegal only gives birth to the kind of illegal and murderous gangs of traffickers that are once again growing in our midst. In the end, it was clear that the cure was worse than the original disease. Alcohol was again made legal, with restrictions placed on its sale and use.

Something like that is going to have to happen in order to remove the motivation for thousands of people in all walks of life, especially the poor, to take the terrible risks involved in entering the drug trade. Arresting them won't do it. The best that can be done short term is to take the profit out of street sales and to put the money going into interdiction into treatment centers and education.

The social context: Of course, in the long run the craving for drugs must be addressed as the social problem it is. Drug use, including alcoholism, is in large part a reflection of hopeless, meaningless lives. Desperate poverty, with little or no hope for leading a productive and comfortable life, is the major cause of our current drug crisis. But a society devoid of social purpose and obsessed with material gain and personal "success" creates a widespread demand for narcotics—from Valium and alcohol to cocaine—among all sectors of our society.

The drug crisis, in short, is not a thing in itself. Trying to stop the use of drugs through the attempted enforcement of narcotics laws is like trying to kill grass by mowing it. Ultimately the drug crisis is the product of the anti-social priorities that have governed our public policies since the end of World War II, and especially in the past decade. The crisis is of a piece with the Cold War, our military-oriented economy and our official deification of corporate profit. When we begin changing these priorities and begin to put the needs of all our people first, drug use will abate on its own.

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LETTERS

A time for truth

I AM A RETIRED AIR FORCE PUBLIC INFORMATION Officer. My job in the Air Force was to keep the Russian "enemy" bigger than life. I did this with a series of slide presentations in schools, churches and civic clubs. Any place the mindless met, I was there with my little dog-and-pony show, showing the public how to beat plowshares into swords. It really was an easy chore. I had lots of help from the Russians themselves, with their constant sword-rattling and puffery. They had inadvertently become the co-conspirators of our own Defense Department.

I don't want you to think that I was cynical enough to conceive of this diabolical plan myself. I was just one of the thousands of public information robots in the Air Force, Army, Navy and Marines that are sent across the nation to parrot the Defense Department's party line. Sardonically, we called ourselves the Bogeyman Patrol.

Three wars plus a cold war later, I finally came to the realization that the concept of butter and guns was a myth; a defense-spending frenzy can only be at the expense of social programs. For example, the price tag of an unneeded B-2 stealth bomber program is the same as the cost of taking our homeless off the streets, the cost of SDI could provide adequate health care for every one of our citizens and the proposed spending on the MX missile train could educate all our children for generations.

Can it happen? I wonder! We have tolerated the imposed fear and paranoia of our military spenders too long. Given enough time, the tiny self-serving cabal of our military-industrial-political leaders will find us a viable enemy again. As I speak, slide presentations are being revised and eager new public information officers are being trained.

However, the inertia of the military-industrial complex has been severely crippled by Gorbachov's admission that Russia is a limping bear. Now is the perfect time to organize a redirection of this nation's energy and resources. Now is the time to take care of the things we have neglected for so long.

Please don't think that I am pandering to a cause. I am 63 years old; my days are numbered. For me, it is too late to pander. I now have time only for truth and honesty.

Dennis L. O'Brien
Fisher, Ill.

No sweat

SOMETHING REALLY IRRITATES ME ABOUT YOUR Editorial on the Supreme Court's abortion decision (ITT, July 19). I think it's the tone that sounds like this: the current public debate over the right of women to control their reproductive lives is eclipsing more important issues, such as health care, education, housing and wages. I'm also annoyed by your condescending assumption that the choice of safe, legal abortion is a "painful and traumatic decision."

Let's consider the tone: of course you support the right of women to choose abortion; of course the choice may offend the moral sensibilities of others, but they don't have the right to impose their values on all of us. Good so far. Somewhere you're omitting an important point: the need for women to control their reproductive lives is, for

most, the very foundation for adequate health care, education, housing and wages.

This idea has been grasped effectively by the anti-choice groups. If you read their magazines and newspapers and really listen to them, the issue of abortion is but one on an agenda that includes banning artificial birth control, containing female sexuality and getting women out of the work force. If this agenda continues to dominate public discourse, the health, education, housing and wages of millions of women and millions of families will be affected in a way that will reverse 20 years of progress women have made in these areas.

Your own choice of words, that abortion is a "painful and traumatic decision," should make all of us realize that some of us still miss the point. I could merely dismiss your wording as the insensitivity of yet another group of males on the left who simply don't get it. But maybe your editorial was written by women. In any case, the option of safe, legal abortion is more often a relief to a woman. You have bought into the anti-choice dogma that every decision to terminate a pregnancy is an uncertain, dreaded one. It isn't. The majority of women seeking abortion know exactly what they need and want for their lives; you don't have to excuse their decision by assuming it's "painful and traumatic."

And why say that women choosing abortion "have decided not to give birth to an unwanted child"? Women choosing abortion have decided not to continue an unplanned pregnancy. How many years of public debate on this issue will it take before the liberal/left press understands that language is thought?

Sharon Lieberman
Evanston, Ill.

Deadly medicine

JUST AS PHOTOS OF ABORTED FETUSES IN BELL Jars distort the abortion debate, so too does network video footage of cops crashing down doors of crack houses and young men bleeding in the streets from gunshot wounds mystify the essential issues involved in the nation's drug war. Mike Tidwell's and Salim Muwakkil's articles (ITT, July 5) provide a much-needed corrective to the sensationalism and hysteria that permeate the debate on drug policy. My past nine months spent as a federal prison inmate (for an anti-nuclear-weapons protest) have greatly altered my impressions about who the real criminals are in the drug war.

Drug use per se is not the problem—drug abuse is. This suggests that the primary public-policy focus should be on treatment, not

interdiction. Violence, not drugs, is the most pervasive and lethal addiction threatening our society today. We tend, however, to see violence strictly in terms of Uzi-toting street thugs roaming the streets of our inner cities. High infant mortality, illiteracy, unemployment, homelessness and poverty rates—the result of massive cuts in social spending engineered during eight years of Reaganism—are dismissed by the dominant culture as either unfortunate accidents or minor misadjustments in an otherwise robust, growth-oriented economy.

The truth is that the government's systematic campaign of violence against the drug culture—more prisons, more police, more firepower, etc.—is essentially the domestic application of the low-intensity-conflict doctrine employed against Third World people who threaten North American political and economic hegemony. But one need look no further than the extensive drug trafficking inside the prison walls to know that interdiction can never work, even given the most totalitarian systems of control and surveillance.

Sooner or later we must wake up to the fact that the most insidious cost of the drug war is a wholesale erosion of democratic principles and legal rights. For most law-abiding, politically inactive citizens, these would seem to be distant concerns. Yet commando-style strike forces, utilization of "Pentagon assets" and quasi-military boot camps for drug offenders are but the most visible signs that a grass-roots military mobilization is well underway—and its primary targets are the poor and people of color.

Violence can never cure or eradicate violence. Instead, as in Vietnam, we find our society trapped in an escalating spiral of destruction, evidenced by the deterioration of legal protections for criminal defendants and the psychological brutality being inflicted upon an entire generation of young, black and Hispanic men who are being sentenced to 20- and 30-year prison terms. The damage done to the families of prisoners is inconceivable. At the same time, the criminal justice system seems unwilling or unable to confront the vast array of white-collar businesses such as banks that launder drug money or otherwise profit from illicit capital.

Our society is slowly assuming the trappings of a police state. This slide is neither inexorable nor necessary, but to stop it the progressive community must engage in the unpopular work of demythologizing the drug demon. Without the antidote of compassion and reason, the government's violent cure for the drug epidemic will surely prove to be deadly medicine for the body politic.

Duane Bean, #04973-045
Metropolitan Correctional Center
Chicago

Pope sin

I FIND IT APPALLING THAT READER MARK LENERS can even attempt to defend the Catholic Church's position on birth control and ecology by writing that the church supports "natural family planning" as a supposed route to population stability (Letters, June 21).

Is Leners joking? As it happens, my youngest sister was accidentally conceived through "natural family planning." So were millions of Catholic kids across this country. I happen to love my sister, and today I'm extremely glad that the birth control advice that the priests gave to my parents was wrong. But if conservative Catholics now say this same advice should be offered to the whole world as a population strategy, they're crazy. Or they're lying to themselves. Or both.

Distasteful as it may be, abortion is still one means for slowing continued population growth, which today threatens both developed countries and the Third World. That's one reason why environmentalists, as well as feminists, must support it.

"Natural" family planning, though, is generally an introduction to motherhood. When the pope attempts to restrict every real birth control method while encouraging this stupid, failed panacea, he's simply asking for humanity to breed itself into ecological Armageddon and starvation. And that's a sin.

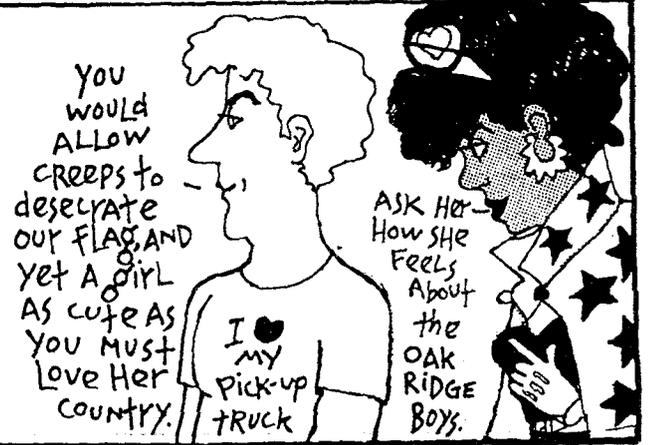
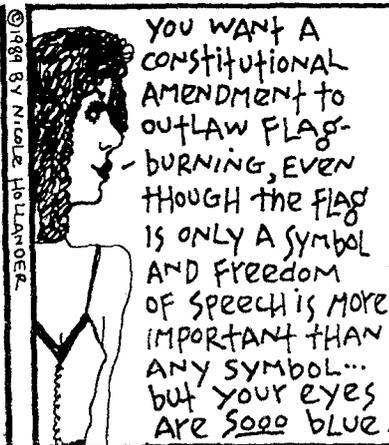
If the Roman Catholic Church can't come up with a better birth control position than this, it will continue to strike non-Catholics as a reactionary, bloodthirsty bureaucracy that is sacrificing the Earth (not to mention the health of millions of Catholic women!) on an altar of sexual hysteria and superstition. Also, millions of ethically sensitive Catholics will continue to face guilt over tolerating stupid papal teachings that they know are promoting ecological collapse.

As the world's population rises rapidly from the 5 billion mark toward 6 billion, the greenhouse warming problem is just a hint of what lies ahead. Wait until we lose a million plant and animal species to rain forest destruction over the next 40 years—in part because of Third World poverty and First World greed, but also because of the church's stubborn refusal to offer its Latin flock effective methods of birth control. Wait, too, for African starvation rates to rise again as countries like Kenya—where the pope has encouraged large families—struggle to raise living standards, only to wreck their fragile soils as their populations double every 18-24 years.

Just how many ecological disasters (and how many subsequent human deaths) do the church's abortion fighters want on their hands?

Andy Feeney
Washington, D.C.

SYLVIA



by Nicole Hollander