

Fillers and faux pas

To the Editor – We are writing concerning the cartoon that appeared at the end of our article on tobacco policies among Indian tribes in the Northwest United States, which was recently published in *Tobacco Control*.¹ We would like to clarify that our research group had no part in the decision to print this cartoon. We had no knowledge of the cartoon until it was brought to our attention by colleagues, who assumed that we were responsible for its inclusion.

The content of the cartoon is offensive to both Native Americans and many whites, as is addressed in the accompanying letter from our colleagues at the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board.

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1 Glasgow RE, Lichtenstein E, Hall R, Meyers GB, Wilder D, McRae SG. Indoor smoking policies of Indian tribes in the northwestern United States. *Tobacco Control* 1993; 2: 35–7.

To the Editor – The Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board was pleased to learn that the article on smoking policy in Northwest Tribes was accepted for publication in your journal. We looked forward to its release and the presentation of our project to an international readership.

However, when we received the journal we were disappointed to see the cartoon accompanying the article. We are sorry that neither the Oregon Research Institute nor this

organization was contacted regarding the decision to include the cartoon. If we had, you would have been advised that the cartoon is an unflattering caricature of American Indians which gives a message regarding the role of American Indians in the spread of tobacco use that is inaccurate.

This caricature of American Indian males as big-nosed, pipe smoking, in full feather headdress is a common media image that is silly and offensive. But more offensive is the message in the cartoon which suggests that American Indians are responsible for the widespread use of tobacco in a habitual, addictive and abusive manner. Tobacco was a scarce commodity used by Indian tribes for ceremonial and social purposes. It was Europeans who began large-scale cultivation and sales of tobacco to smoke for pleasure – not American Indians.

Finally, the cartoon mentions that millions of American Indian people were killed by the Europeans who invaded North America. The sorrow and grief resulting from this genocide remains a painful part of the cultural memory of American Indian people and is not humorous. It is doubtful that your journal would have such poor taste as to run a cartoon in which the genocide of the Jewish people in World War II was a subject. Why should the genocide of American Indian people be treated differently?

We hope that our response to the unfortunate inclusion of this tacky cartoon with our research article will result in a greater cultural sensitivity on your part towards, not only American Indians, but other cultural minorities as well.

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In reply – I apologise for the offence created by publication of this cartoon. The cartoon was used as a “filler” to take up empty space at the end of the article by Glasgow *et al.* A horizontal line separating the article from the cartoon was meant to indicate that the cartoon was not a part of the article. Because of the tight production schedule of the journal and because available fillers cannot be matched to the empty space in an issue until late in the production process, authors of articles are not routinely contacted regarding fillers that might appear at the end of their papers.

Even though a filler is meant to be separate from the preceding article, I do choose fillers, whenever possible, that relate in some way to the preceding article. That explains, in part, why I selected the cartoon in question, which featured American Indians, the subject of the preceding article.

My decision to publish the cartoon was driven by what I perceived to be the main message of the cartoon – the stupidity of the “white man” in taking up smoking. Thus, I saw the cartoon as a self-deprecating joke *on Caucasians*.

But Ms Wilder is absolutely correct in pointing out the cartoon’s distasteful caricature of American Indian males. For that reason alone, we should not have published it. I understand her revulsion at the cartoon’s reference to the genocide of American Indians – I myself lost many ancestors in the Jewish holocaust she mentions. She is also correct that American Indians were *not* responsible for the epidemic of tobacco use among the descendants of the Europeans who migrated to North America; the blame for that rests with the tobacco industry and its allies. – ED