

USES AND NUANCES

The many meanings of boxes

Although we use boxes and the word “box” almost daily, we have yet to elevate the concept of boxes to prominence among the great inventions of mankind.

When the word box is mentioned, our first mental image



Al Schalow

is that of a container made of cardboard, wood, plastic or other solid materials. We also use the term “box” to describe various aspects of daily living.

As a child, I liked boxes of all kinds. Cereal boxes were entertaining to read and provided food at breakfast. If our athlete-heroes performed miraculous feats because of eating certain cereals, so could we.

And the shoebox containing “sneakers,” shoes purported to enable faster running and higher jumping, was perfect for storing rocks, sticks, moss, small animals and other kid-essential treasures. Of course, when some of the kid-essential collections reached gigantic proportions, parents “suggested” paring them down to realistic essentials.

Small cardboard boxes long have been used for storing such things as family pictures, cards, letters and favorite recipes. A well-made wooden box, however, is in a class by itself.

In the “olden days,” you could go into a drug-store and ask for empty cigar boxes made of wood. The druggist usually was happy to get rid of them. Today, they are sold in antique stores.

Cigar and other small wooden boxes were useful for storing coins and personal items. And many hardware collectors still have spare nuts, bolts, washers and other adult-essential items stored in cigar boxes in their garages.

In my teen years, I decided to make a special wooden box for really special items. Although it became known as the box for my “little boy things,” it now is a repository for memorable items through the years.

It houses such items as pen knives, little

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DANGER TO DEMOCRACY



DWAYNE CARPENTER

THE BIG LIE

In his early 16th-century essay “The Prince,” Italian diplomat Niccolo Machiavelli argued that to successfully govern a nation, rulers needed to learn the art of subtle lying.

“Occasionally words must serve to veil the facts,” he observed.

Unfortunately, lying by our “rulers” has been anything but subtle or an art form. It seems that in some instances, the bigger the lie, the more some people buy into it, despite strong evidence to the contrary.

Referred to as “the big lie,” the Oxford standard dictionary defines it as “a gross dis-

tortion or misrepresentation of the facts, especially when used as a propaganda device by a politician or official body.”

Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels supposedly said: “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it,

people will eventually come to believe it ... It becomes vitally important for the State to use all its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and ... the truth is the great-

est enemy of the State.”

The 2020 presidential election and the Jan. 6 violent insurrection in Washington are good examples of how the big lie still lives. Claiming that the election was stolen from former President Donald Trump through massive voting fraud, many of his supporters threatened to overturn the election results and eventually install their man as the legitimate president. They did this despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Much like the disputed election, some Trump Republicans say the Jan. 6 insurrection actually was a

nonviolent event led by “peaceful patriots” who were taking a “normal tourist visit” of the U.S. Capitol. One only has to watch the news footage of the display of violence and destruction that went on at the Capitol to think there was anything peaceful about that day’s events.

Cases of the big lie are nothing new. For example, Goebbels used it to tap into long-standing German anti-Semitism. He perpetuated the myth that “international Jewry” ultimately were responsible for Germany’s defeat in World War I.

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Charles F. Bryan Jr.

TO REMAIN THE SAME, IT HAS TO CHANGE

VMI’s march into uncertainty



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Virginia Military Institute (VMI) is replacing bronze-and-stone symbols of yesterday with flesh-and-bone symbols of today. The politically besieged state-run college is betting they stand longer than their predecessors. VMI’s future — ahead of a controversial, soon-to-be concluded investigation of systemic racism — could

depend on it.

Just over a week ago, VMI — where slave-owning, lemon-sucking Stonewall Jackson taught and whose likeness on the parade grounds loomed until December for 108 years as a tribute to the institute’s Confederate pedigree — installed for the first time a woman as commander of its 1,700-member student body, the Corps of Cadets.

At 5-foot-2, Kasey Meredith — an international studies major with a minor in Spanish and a 3.6 GPA, who will wear the five stripes and feather-plumed shako of regimental commander — is an emblem of change at a school long resistant

to it. Amid intense racial, gender and cultural sensitivities, VMI is facing mounting pressure to change even more.

And faster.

“I do know this role is monumental,” said Meredith, crediting, in part, her achievement to the women who preceded her at VMI, which went co-ed in 1997 after the U.S. Supreme Court junked its males-only admissions policy. “It is symbolic. I was able to do something for the classes before that have done so much for me.”

Selected by VMI’s top administrators, Meredith, who doesn’t think of herself as a female com-



THE ROANOKE TIMES

Kasey Meredith is the first female cadet to become regimental commander of the Corps of Cadets at VMI.

mander but as a commander who is female, said that with the investigation, the school will demonstrate — as it has

before, sometimes grudgingly — that it can adapt. She attributes that to a military culture that relies on a firm discipline

to instill the flexibility demanded on the battlefield — and in the board room.

Meredith, an affiant, aspiring Marine intelligence officer in the Class of 2022 and who follows by 40 years the first Black regimental commander at VMI, the last Virginia college to desegregate, isn’t the only sign that things are different in Lexington.

They could be very different after investigators submit their findings to the Northham administration June 1, if not sooner.

Since December, VMI has been led by its first Black superintendent: Cedric Wins, a 1985 graduate and retired two-star Army

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