

OPINION PACKAGES

Our VIEW

Promises, promises

It's hard not to be skeptical of address

President Clinton's State of the Union Address sounded pleasantly reassuring Tuesday night amid his office's turmoil.

But we cannot accept his long string of promises, no matter how desperately we want to believe them. We cannot, because Clinton, his generation and his parents' generation raised us to believe otherwise.

Before we graduated from high school, they told us we would work harder than our parents but achieve a lower standard of living.

We learned each of us owed thousands of dollars to an unfathomable, growing national debt and our children would owe more.

We learned our taxes would rise, but we should expect fewer social services. We learned welfare mothers bilked the government while bearing illegitimate children.

We learned to pay social security taxes without expecting a dime upon our own retirements.

We learned violent crime was rising at the hands of children our own age.

We learned our generation used more drugs. We learned we would pay millions to care for children born addicted to crack.

We learned our generation had more babies out of wedlock and had more premarital sex.

We learned our families were weak. We learned domestic violence raged.

We learned most of our parents would seek divorces. We learned to be latch-key kids.

We learned some presidents lied.

We learned communists resembled Darth Vader, and crimes against humanity – if committed in Bosnia – could go unprosecuted.

We learned a spot in the presidential election is not bought with integrity but with Ross Perot's pocketbook.

We learned a president could smoke marijuana and sleep with Gennifer Flowers without losing an election.

We learned college costs were rising so fast, only the rich would easily attend college.

We learned no one paid attention to Keynesian economics, and trickle-down economics would not trickle to us.

We learned gangs could build drug empires, while the government couldn't rebuild crumbling inner-city schools.

But now ... now our president says everything is OK, and if it isn't, it will be.

He says we can save social security. Crime is falling. The debt has dissolved.

He says we will receive tax credits for interest paid on federal student loans. Parents will receive tax breaks to help pay children's tuition.

He says Saddam Hussein will not harm the innocent or further abuse his people.

We want to believe Clinton. We want our children to share a great future in a country of hope and light. However, though we order food served from drive-thru windows, we cannot accept such quick promises.

We are a generation of cynics and will deliberate before we believe.

Haney's VIEW



History lesson

'Russians' don't fit stereotypes



KATYA OVCHARENKO is a freshman English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

“Of course we don't have pens! We have neither pens nor paper! We write with sharp, pointed sticks on small clay boards, or we use feathers and write on parchment!”

And the history began. Later on, the state expanded and became Russia. I'll skip centuries and won't discuss how things were changing during that time period (such as how we were dividing the territory, broadening, uniting, becoming narrow, etc.). Finally, by 1917 (the year of the Great October Socialist Revolution: Lenin, Bolsheviks – remember this from the world history course?) we became one happy state. Fifteen Soviet republics were the parts of this country. It was the biggest country in the world (one third of the land on the earth) with probably the longest name in the world: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – the U.S.S.R.

After World War II the Cold War between the United States and the U.S.S.R. began. Mostly this very Cold War helped Americans formulate a very wrong opinion about people from the former Soviet Union.

Well, well ... what was next? Seventy-four years of the communist regime passed and 1991 was marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ukraine was the first republic to leave on Aug. 24, 1991 (ever since, my country is not known as THE Ukraine).

And that's pretty much it. Now each former republic develops separately and I'll say successfully. People still see themselves as a part of the non-existent Soviet Union. We had the same life all those years as a big family and now we have so much in common. Still, we all are so different, since we were from different republics, where each had its own unique culture.

All that was a tiny piece of history. Now let me talk about stereotypes.

When I was in school I had a pen-pal from America, and I recall

one offensive letter of hers where she asked whether we “guys write with pens there and do we have notebooks to write in.”

Heavens! Of course we don't have pens! We have neither pens nor paper! We write with sharp, pointed sticks on small clay boards, or we use feathers and write on parchment! Didn't you know that?

One more example is a recent one. One of my Russian friends, in a conversation with some American, was asked a question: “Do you have TVs in Russia?” I think I should make a list of the top 10 questions ever asked about Russia!

Isn't it funny? Russians are almost always represented by Americans as strange people who live in a huge country covered with snow all year long, with bearded men wearing red shirts and fir hats and women in shawls. They all drink gallons of vodka every day and live in forests, where bears run in the streets of their towns. And there are lots of military men in Russia, who guard nuclear weapons in the very middle of taiga.

By the way, nuclear weapons are an important issue in the stereotype of Russians. One student who was asked, “What would you like to know about Russians?” replied: “Why do they want to blow us up?”

That's the Cold War influence, though. Some of you may be pleased to hear that we also lived under the constant “threat” and in fear of being blown up by Americans.

The most ridiculous thing that Americans think of my people is that everyone has something to do with the Russian Mafia. Even I was suspected of being a member of Russian Mafia! And I really am. Didn't I tell you that before?

Oh, I guess I should have said something ...

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Those mischievous Russians ... “I'm doing this for Mother Russia,” muttered Gary Oldman, between his teeth, with an affected Russian (well, only supposed to be Russian) accent, as his hatred-filled glance and his hand, holding a gun, were fixed on the American president. Do you recognize “Air Force One”? I'm sure you do.

What really hurts me in such American movies – about some mythical vicious Russian enemies, who want to be the rulers of the world (why not universe then?) – is that these movies give the audience the wrong idea of Russians. I'm using the word “Russians” because foreigners usually identify everyone from the former Soviet Union as Russians. I have no idea why, but I hear this from any other American: “You are Russian, ha?” And when the person I'm talking to receives “no” in reply, he or she says in surprise: “Interesting; I thought you were speaking Russian. Am I mistaken?”

How can I explain that not everyone who has Russian as a native language is supposed to be from Russia?

I'll try to explain the differences between the Soviet Union and Russia. I'll try to show you what stereotypes Americans have toward “Soviets” and how true those stereotypes are. I believe some of you will change your attitude toward those scary Soviets.

Once upon a time ... no, I'd better start with certain dates. In the ninth century, one of the most powerful states in medieval Europe was founded on the territory of modern Ukraine. The name of the state was Kyivan Rus'.