

Up in Smoke

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Back in the 1970s, Cheech Marin and Tommy Chong gained fame in their slacker movies. The films resulted in a huge backlash – critics claimed the underachieving duo glorified smoking marijuana. Well, 30 years later, Cheech and Chong are reunited and it's possible another movie may follow.

The trail-"blazing" pair paved the way for mainstream movies – this year alone, there were three flicks focusing on smoking pot: 'Pineapple Express,' 'Harold & Kumar Escape From Guantanamo Bay,' and 'The Wackness.' But glorifying smoking in Hollywood pictures is nothing new.

Researchers have recently discovered contracts from as far back as the 1930s between big tobacco companies, Hollywood movie studios and stars who endorsed certain brands of cigarettes. The research was partly funded by the National Cancer Institute and was led by the University of California-San Francisco's Stanton Glantz, PhD, who is the director of the school's Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education.

According to the study, cigarette ad campaigns linking Hollywood endorsements showed "major activity" during 1931-1932 and 1937-1938. Glantz asserts the findings prove that smoking in movies wasn't just a reflection of the culture at the time, but a concentrated effort to promote smoking. The contracts reflected that American tobacco companies and studio executives collaborated on a campaign to "cross-promote" movies and cigarettes.

Many movie stars, including Joan Crawford, Gary Cooper and Spencer Tracy, had contracts with tobacco companies to endorse their cigarettes. Those stars that promoted Lucky Strikes in 1937 were paid \$218,750, which according to the researchers is the equivalent of \$3 million in today's dollars.

Public health officials have recently called for no smoking to be shown in films that are geared to young audiences. According to Glantz, the study "strengthens the case for getting smoking out of youth-rated films by rating new smoking movies 'R.'"

But big tobacco and movie studios didn't just conspire during the Golden Age of Hollywood. In 1983, Sylvester Stallone contracted with Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp. to promote smoking in five of his movies, including 'Rhinestone Cowboy,' 'Rambo,' and 'Rocky IV,' in exchange for \$500,000.

The researchers claimed that discovering the movie and tobacco industry contracts was really a drag.