

The Freedom to Smoke: Tobacco Consumption and Identity. *By Jarrett Rudy.* McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2006. xii + 232 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, notes, index. Paper, CAN\$27.95. ISBN: 0-773-52911-X.

Reviewed by Barbara Hahn

Histories of tobacco consumption tend to have a strong cultural flavor. Jarrett Rudy’s fluidly written, gracefully organized monograph on the history of smoking in Montreal represents no exception. Acknowledging the addictive qualities of nicotine has not stopped researchers from studying who smoked when, what practices and rituals were socially acceptable, and how and why these changed over time. From Henry James Meller’s *Nicotiana: The Smoker’s and Snuff-Taker’s Companion* (1832) to Cassandra Tate’s *Cigarette Wars: The Triumph of the “Little White Slaver”* (1999), such examinations always find that culture plays an important role in consumption. The nicotine habit is not defined solely by physiological dependence, however pressing or objective the physical urge. Rudy expands on many earlier studies, exploring tobacco’s changing constituencies and methods of ingestion, which shifted from pipes and cigars to cigarettes. His analysis extends even to the transformations in agricultural production as the rural *tabac canadien*, whose quality was derived from *le terroir*, or regional soil, was replaced by the standardized agricultural mass-production methods that the cigarette revolution presumably initiated. Yet, in mining as well material from older cultural studies, he often produces contradictory findings that impede the reader’s ability to reach firm conclusions about who smoked what, when, and why.

The first chapter, which takes the analytical form common to many social histories, chronicles proscriptions against tobacco use based on class, race, age, and gender: women did not smoke in nineteenth-century Montreal (except for members of the wealthy elite, poor and rural women, and prostitutes); children were not permitted to smoke; and doctors warned of the dangers of smoking (except in moderation), although they took up the habit themselves during their medical training, partly as a way to fumigate the dissection halls); and smoking in moderation became linked to self-control

in classic liberal fashion. Rudy then devotes a chapter to class, describing the bourgeois connoisseurship of cigars and Cuban-tobacco fetish and the rolling skills of guild factory workers. The domestic *tabac canadien* initially stood for patriotic values but then became a symbol of rural backwardness; in another chapter, Rudy recounts how it reappeared later in the twentieth century as a component of cigarettes that were mass-produced by the local firms of the American Tobacco Company trust. A pair of chapters on antismoking prescriptions and activism uncovers unusual material on the crusade against tobacco by the social reformers of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), whose proposed legislation united the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in opposition. The First World War legitimized cigarette smoking for men, while women who smoked in public found greater acceptance.

What makes Rudy's social history unusual is its setting, limited to Quebec and Montreal, which enables him to explore the historical debates that arose in these particular locales. Montreal forms the subject of a rich literature in the history of ideas about the development of liberalism and the rise of the modern individual as a subject of the state, usually portrayed as a battle between political and religious authorities over the benefits conferred by social legislation versus leaving to individuals the responsibility for instilling moral values and overseeing family issues. Rudy revises this history in sometimes surprising ways, especially in his revelation of the shared opposition of religious and political authorities to legal prohibition of the habit. Indeed, the focus on Montreal is at once the book's great strength and the key to its primary weakness. By writing an intimate local history, Rudy has gathered anecdotes about the ambience of cigar stores, dug up newspaper coverage and advertisements, and uncovered details of the social structure that are much livelier than a study of wider geographic range might have revealed. At the same time, however, the focus on this setting leads him into debates about liberalism that his research is inadequate to serve. Questions about how smoking and proscriptions on tobacco use "legitimize[d] beliefs about inclusion, exclusion, and hierarchy" (p. 4), while ambitious, represent only a narrow selection of the issues that can be illuminated by changing tastes.

Moreover, the author relies on standard accounts from the tobacco literature: old chestnuts that his own evidence undermines. For example, on the first page of the

introduction, he attributes the increased production of cigarettes to the Bonsack machine, adjusting the details slightly for the Canadian case, but he does not explain the quarter-century gap between Bonsack's mechanization of the industry in 1888 and the dramatic rise in cigarette consumption in 1914. Indeed, he is more concerned with the cultural significance for Canadian and Francophone identity of cheap clay pipes burning rank domestic tobacco. He devotes even more space to explaining the rise and fall of bourgeois connoisseurship of cigars. Why, then, begin with the topic of cigarettes when they figure so little in his narrative? Similarly, the account of how the cigar-makers' union encouraged consumers to believe in the importance of using skilled labor to roll cigars, and their emphasis on the racial constructions of their skill as they tried to establish market power, could have been strengthened with a parallel exploration of the importance of *le terroir* in tobacco production.

Nonetheless, *The Freedom to Smoke* has significant strengths. Rudy has left few of Quebec's stones unturned in his quest for useful source materials. These range from government reports on rural poverty to the influence of cartoons on popular conceptions of consumption methods. If his broad coverage sometimes leads him into contradictions, perhaps this is because consumer culture itself fosters such ambiguity. Another bonus of the book is Rudy's prose, which is a pleasure to read, as he deftly avoids the pitfall of repetition while managing to frame his entertaining anecdotes with serious analysis. *The Freedom to Smoke* offers a wealth of material for historians of liberalism. What lessons business historians may draw from it is somewhat less clear.

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