

Advertising Sin and Sickness: The Politics of Alcohol and Tobacco Marketing 1950–1990. By *Pamela E. Pennock*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007. vii + 282 pp. Index, notes, bibliography, illustrations. Cloth, \$36.00. ISBN: 0-875-80368-5.

Reviewed by Inger L. Stole

Few legal substances are as controversial as tobacco and alcohol, but efforts to ban them have rarely been successful. The Prohibitionist plan to end production and sale of alcohol failed miserably, and no public effort to ban tobacco has ever been proposed.

In *Advertising Sin and Sickness*, Pamela Pennock explains how alcohol and tobacco advertising increased in the postwar era and how the new medium of television was seen as glorifying the two substances. Thus, instead of seeking to abolish the alcohol and tobacco industries, reformers focused on regulating their marketing practices. The fates of tobacco and alcohol took different regulatory shapes, a fact the author attributes to changing social and cultural mores. By the 1960s, alcohol was enjoying greater social acceptability, whereas cigarettes and tobacco had become more stigmatized. Thus, while regulators had limited luck in regulating alcohol promotions, they were more successful in harnessing tobacco advertising.

Pennock devotes the first section of her meticulously researched book to an in-depth exploration of the postwar effort to regulate alcohol advertising. It was during this period that the beer, wine, and liquor industries intensified their marketing efforts in attempts to reach new demographic groups. Efforts like the “Beer Belongs in the Home” (p. 87) campaign by the United States Brewers Foundation caught the attention of a still active temperance movement, which deemed such marketing to be harmful to children in particular.

Congressional reformers, supported by members from both parties, initiated several legislative battles to end, or severely restrict, the advertising of alcohol. The alcohol industries challenged these efforts and offered a range of objections. Their advertising, they claimed, was not designed to attract new users, nor did it aim to entice young people. Its function was that of gaining larger market shares from existing adult

consumers. Hoping to clean up its image and lessen the regulation threats, the alcohol industry initiated self-regulatory measures and intensified its public-relations efforts. Their most successful strategy, however, was the use of constitutional objections to shape the legislative debate. Posing a serious political challenge was the alcohol industry's claim that advertising was protected under the First Amendment. "Industry representatives argued that the proposed ban constituted censorship and denied them freedom of speech, a freedom they equated with the freedom to advertise" (p. 76). Not willing to use the federal government's power to curtail the advertising of a legal product, politicians backed away from their support both for banning and for restricting alcohol advertising. They were more willing to take action when measures were less drastic, as they demonstrated by passing a watered-down alcohol warning label in 1988.

The push for regulation of tobacco advertising, which Pennock explores in the second part of *Advertising Sin and Sickness*, followed a different trajectory. Unlike anti-alcohol crusaders, who were often seen as morally motivated, anti-tobacco advocates successfully framed their cause as health related. As in the case of alcohol, the goal was not to outlaw tobacco but to regulate how it was being marketed.

Although tobacco was declared a drug and placed under the jurisdiction of the Food and Drug Administration in 1957, advertisements for the product did not reflect its dangers. The early tobacco reformers were poorly organized and faced a politically well-connected and moneyed tobacco industry. Adding to tobacco's arsenal was the creation in 1958 of the Tobacco Institute, an influential outfit serving the industry's public-relations needs.

The release of the 1964 Surgeon General's Report, which linked tobacco to cancer, changed the situation and gave anti-tobacco interests the upper hand. Helping to catapult the issue into prominence was a burgeoning consumer movement concerned with industrial externalities and the government's failure to regulate in the public's best interest. Congress passed the Cigarette Labeling and Tobacco Advertising Act in 1965, requiring warnings on tobacco packages. Disappointed that the law did not extend to tobacco advertisements, activists continued their fight.

Support came when the Federal Trade Commission deemed cigarette advertising deceptive and misleading because it failed to admit the health hazards of smoking. Worse

for the tobacco industry, the Federal Communications Commission decided to allow “equal time” to antismoking groups so they could counter the commercial claims of cigarette advertisers on the air. Upset with the demand for free air time, the broadcasting industry decided to kick tobacco advertising off the air. The tobacco industry retaliated by pulling out voluntarily and reallocating their advertising dollars to print advertising. A federal law banning tobacco advertising from the airways was signed into law on April 1, 1970. But, as Pennock points out, the ironic outcome of these events was an increase, rather than a decrease, in smoking. With no antismoking messages to counter the pro-smoking claims, consumers appeared more susceptible to advertised portrayals of the habit. “Being on the air meant that effective antismoking messages were also on the air” (p. 162).

The last chapters of *Advertising Sin and Disease* explore the efforts to regulate advertising and alcohol marketing in the 1970s and 1980s, a period marked by business-friendly regulations and the legal community’s greater willingness to subscribe to the belief that the First Amendment protected commercial speech. Pennock clearly establishes the boundaries of her study, but I am not convinced about the wisdom of ending, at least the tobacco narrative, in 1990. The public exposure of the tobacco industry’s disingenuous behavior that resulted in tobacco’s having to make restoration payments to individual states in the mid-1990s, linked with past events, might have resulted in an even more dynamic story.

These concerns, however, are not enough to detract from a splendid book that is sure to find interested audiences in many academic fields, as well as in activist circles.

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