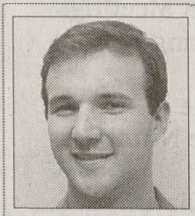


Aiming at ads misses target

Most Americans would not place Ronald McDonald in the same category as Joe Camel, but the two should be grouped together. Both characters are used by big business to lure young children into an addiction which will follow them for their entire lives and possibly drive them to an early grave as victims of chronic disease.



ROBBY RAY
columnist

This claim is not as unreasonable as it may at first seem. Ronald, the instantly recognizable clown representing the McDonald's corporation, and Joe, the mascot of Camel cigarettes, are both widely known and familiar characters and were, until recently, the imaginary representatives of very large, very real corporations.

It may seem that Happy Meals and cigarettes have little in common, but there are surprising similarities. Cigarettes have been shown to contribute to lung cancer, emphysema, and a host of other respiratory ailments.

Fast food is considered by many nutritionists a major part of the unhealthy diets of most Americans, and diet is now known to be a contributing factor in almost every disease and sickness known to man.

Both products, when used as they are intended and advertised, contribute to chronic health problems. In fact, heart disease is still a more dangerous killer, in terms of numbers of deaths, than lung cancer. Both products are still legal, and both are subject to increasing attacks and attempts at regulation by government agencies and health organizations.

There are differences, however. Burgers are not being attacked in lawsuits by the attorneys general of 39 states, as well as by politicians of all persuasions and any other group of public figure who needs a rallying cry.

The state of Florida recently approved a settlement with three of the tobacco giants worth \$11.3 billion, in which the companies agreed to severe restrictions on their advertising. The problem is that

these restrictions will do little, if anything, to reduce underage smoking, which is the aim of the restrictions. A recent comic tells the story brilliantly. Two kids are talking and one says to the other "Ever since they banned Joe Camel, I've lost all desire to smoke." The other responds, "I know, and I don't want to drink either ever since they stopped using the Spuds McKenzie ads."

The point is this: advertising is not the reason that kids start to smoke, so changing the ads will not prevent them from smoking. The settlement will also serve to increase profits of the companies by reducing their overhead and eliminating much of the expense of advertising in the state of Florida. That money can then be pumped into other states which haven't reached similar agreements, other countries, or other profit-generating enterprises.

Consider the response if fast food chains were being forced to advertise against their own products and pay the states astronomical sums of money supposedly for the medical treatment of those harmed by their products. Such a policy would be unthinkable — wouldn't it? It is no longer certain.

Advertising is not protected by the First Amendment as free expression, even though the courts have traditionally given advertisers wide latitude to advertise. They have recognized that advertising is an essential part of the American economic system.

An individual or company realizes that there is a need and acts to develop a product to fill that need. In some instances, a product is developed with the understanding that the advertising will supply the need; such is the power of some ads.

But advertising is the principle method used by business to inform the public of the existence of its products and of their superiority over those of the competition. It is still the responsibility of the consumer to determine which products are beneficial and safe to purchase.

The government, though, has decided to take that responsibility from us. Right now, it's just the state of Florida, but the national settlement comes up for approval this fall. Soon Uncle Sam, in all his regulatory wisdom, will be telling us what to smoke, eat, drink, and look at. Goodbye Ronald and Joe, hello Big Brother.

Robby Ray is a senior speech communications major.



Graphic: Brad Graeber

Increased smoking regulations hint at totalitarianism

God bless tobacco and the manufacturers who produce it. Texas and other states have filed suit against the tobacco industry, prompting a \$368.5 billion settlement to be approved by Congress. As the industry's right to business is threatened, so are the rights of Americans to live without oppression, endangering smokers and non-smokers alike here at Texas A&M.



DONNY FERGUSON
columnist

Spurred on by what they perceive as a public health crisis, tobaccophobes Michael Moore, Mississippi's Attorney General and Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles portray the tobacco industry as a horde of amoral, money-grubbing barbarians. They paint images of coldhearted blue-suited CEOs hatching sinister plots to secretly poison Americans with deceptive advertising and lies about tobacco's health risks.

If this were 1967, their conspiratorial theories might carry some weight, but over the past 30 years refutable evidence has linked tobacco use to numerous ailments. Children are warned of smoking's insidious effects beginning in preschool, and the health dangers are common knowledge. People make a conscious choice to smoke, and their rights must be defended.

Tobaccophobes assure worried civil libertarians

the right to smoke is in no danger. Recent events prove otherwise. In Chicago, one man is suing in federal court to ban his wife. Richard J. Thomas claims tobacco smoke is a toxic pollutant and should be banned from homes under the Clean Air Act. If Thomas is successful, the federal government can bully Americans in their own homes. As their absurd actions prove, Thomas and more extremist anti-smoking cheerleaders believe the only way to save lives is to trample

the rights of free persons.

Tobaccophobes do not intend to stop at banning smoking. One "public health advocate" has encouraged the creation of the Fat Tax, hiking prices on junk foods to discourage Americans from eating anything without the word wheat germ on the label. The Health Police have also teamed up with environmental extremists to launch a full-scale assault on the meat industry, exploiting recent outbreaks of E. Coli at a Hudson Foods factory and British "mad cow" disease to terrorize the public into adopting their vegetarian ways. PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (not to be confused with

PETA, People Eating Tasty Animals) compared the poultry industry to Adolf Hitler and the Holocaust, and beef producers to serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer. These and other assorted wackos intend to exploit the anti-smoking health wave in their quests to ban meat. Smoking may be nasty, filthy and about as healthy as licking a toilet in a Texaco restroom, but libertarian statecraft mandates its protection. To ban smoking would be un-American, setting a frightening precedent.

The most troubling aspect of the tobacco crackdown is the fact government cannot justifiably take away rights, it can only protect them. As recognized by the Declaration of Independence, our rights are bestowed by God, not the state. Even as recently as 1961, presidents have acknowledged the origins of our rights. "The rights of man come not from the generosity of the State, but from the hand of God," President John F. Kennedy said in his inaugural address. When rights are granted by God, government has no power to take them away. This is why Americans have enjoyed two centuries of freedom, while atheist nations like the Soviet Union and post-revolutionary France suffered brutal oppression. Anti-tobacco lawmakers failed to realize societies create governments to protect God-given rights from infringement, not to promote their infringement.

When Congress approves rollbacks on smoking rights, they abandon their duty as a libertarian watchdogs and take on the role of totalitarianism.

Cancer, emphysema, heart disease and premature deaths are tragic, but the death of freedom is more insidious. Once well-financed tobacco is vanquished, nothing can stop Big Brother from banning beef, salt, MSG, Howard Stern or anything else deemed unhealthy by our omniscient Nanny State.

Americans may not know it, but their fundamental liberties are rolled in a small paper wrapper packed with rich Carolina tobacco. Smokers and non-smokers alike must oppose anti-rights fanatics and urge lawmakers to take a more libertarian stance for tobacco. It may be filthy, disgusting and a quicker ticket to death than wearing a "Buchanan 2000" t-shirt in Tienamen Square, but smoking is a fundamental liberty which must be protected. With smoking soon to be banned by publicity-hungry politicians ignorant of the origins of freedom, meat, junk food and other pleasurable vices will soon follow. Once tobacco is relegated to the dustbin of history, the creep towards totalitarianism begins.

Donny Ferguson is a junior political science major.

Alcohol standards should adhere to tobacco principles

Imagine it is the year 2057.

You're exiled to planet Zorgo and doing geriatric aerobics in a spandex suit, since the government screwed up your social security account. Meanwhile, your grandchildren are back on planet



MICHELLE VOSS
columnist

Earth where kindergartners are forced to watch reruns of America's Funniest Home Videos, liposuction is a drive-thru procedure and the government has issued a prohibition on tobacco.

Underground smoke-houses are opened where hip pop-culture icons hang out to read bad poetry and smoke cartons of cigarettes. A new surge of intergalactic mafia lords, who smuggle tobacco throughout the Milky Way, reign over the nation's cities and law-makers. Bored homemakers grow crops of tobacco in their bathtubs. Unlikely, right?

Poor tobacco. One of America's numerous whipping boys just coughed up a wad of dough to Florida this past Monday — \$11.3 billion to be exact. Few questions beg attention when considering this and other legal reparations which our nation continues to heap upon the tobacco industry:

A) Who sees this money? (Could someone please ring up Florida and tell them to at least donate money to Miami so they can enforce a law banning elderly, pasty white males from wearing speedos with black knee-high socks

and sandals?)

B) What is all this hoopla about the ethics of advertising really saying?

C) In the end, who can we blame?

Along the lines of the year 1776, some little colonies rebelled against their tyrannic government. Yes, patriotic men rode throughout towns yelling such things as, "The Red-Coats are coming! The Red-Coats are coming!" while people stood around in their tobacco fields and said, "What the %#\$ is a red coat?" The No. 1 cash crop of the year 1776? Ahhh yes, tobacco.

Settlers were rather peeved that their government, an ocean away, was levying heavy and unfair taxes upon one of their hottest commodities. What's the point? America probably would not be able to kick Britain's butt today if it were not for Smith and his peer who discovered that nifty, little, smokable tobacco plant in North America. America has had a lengthy affair with the tobacco plant, and a large chunk of our economy contributes to the proof. In other words, the operative word here is money.

Americans spend more money on tobacco and alcohol than they do on education, and we wonder why a country in Russia that's only been a nation for three days has better math scores than we do. Financial World magazine ranks Marlboro brand cigarettes, a product of the Philip Morris company, as the No. 1 brand-name product in the world with an estimated value of some \$31 billion and an actual revenue of \$15 billion. Other friends on the list include Budweiser, Winston Cigarettes, Camel Cigarettes, Heineken beer, Johnnie Walker

Red scotch, Guinness Beer, Smirnoff Vodka, Schweppes mixers and Hennessy cognac. Ten out of the top 25, or 40 percent, of the best-selling brand-names in the world are alcohol and tobacco products. This means the combined images and impressions of tobacco and alcohol trigger more consumer recognition than say, Tampax tampons or Barbie. The conclusion being that this world is populated by slobbering drunks who chain smoke.

However, an individual cannot sit around making light of the situation. People are dying, and the tobacco industry is just mumbling something to the extent that, "Well, there is a remote, albeit slight and very slim chance, that smoking results in lung cancer." We have all lost family and friends to the ravages of cancer and disease, most likely brought about by years of smoking. Moreover, there is evidence that tobacco companies insert addictive additives into their cigarettes, complicating matters to senior-level ethics courses they all must have missed. Furthermore, opponents of the tobacco industry claim the advertising techniques which big wigs such as Marlboro and Camel use are luring children into inevitable death.

Okay, people are dying. It happens. Have a twinkle. Yet, is the tobacco industry the only one guilty of promoting certain death? As stated earlier, alcohol is pretty popular. So popular that the numbers go something like this:

- College students drink an estimated 4.4 billion cans of beer a year. Total alcohol consumption is some 430 gallons which is enough to fill an Olympic-

size pool at every college and university in America.

- Each year college students spend \$5.5 billion on alcohol; more than they spend on books, soda, coffee, juice and milk. On a typical campus, the average student spends \$466 on alcohol a year (don't underestimate those professional drinkers).

- Beer brewers spend an estimated \$15 to \$20 million annually to promote products to college students alone.

These numbers add up to a simple fact: Advertisements for alcohol are just as enticing, if not more, as tobacco. Beer commercials and ad lay-outs have plasticly enhanced chicks wearing tooth floss and straddling cars. One cannot deny the out-right attempt by alcohol manufacturers to promote the image of the suave, popular bachelor who can make it with a babe if only he drinks Brand X beer. What's worse is that the gullible American public is the perfect target for such commercialism, and the devastating results are as follows:

- 43.5 percent of the 40,155 total annual traffic deaths are alcohol-related crashes.

- 24 percent of the 15 to 20 year old drivers killed in traffic incidents had a blood alcohol content of .10 or higher.

- Alcohol is involved in 55 percent of all homicides and 65 percent of all serious assaults.

The double standard involved here is ludicrous.

Let's step back for a second. On one hand, we have the tobacco smokers who, regardless of second-hand smoke, are for the most part destroying themselves. By all means, these folks

have a utilitarian right to suck in enough smoke to turn their lungs into something which resembles overcooked spinach, whereas the socially inept individual who drinks three martinis, jumps into his or her Porsche and kills someone is violating another individual's rights. Yet, where are all the lawsuits against Bud, Smirnoff, Hennessy, Guinness or Heineken? These alcohol manufacturers are just as guilty of luring minors into inevitable death as anti-tobacco groups claim the tobacco companies to be.

In the end, Americans can only blame themselves. The individual makes the choice to light up or have one too many drinks. The greedy international conglomerates of death are just tapping into the true American drug: commercialism. All the hoopla about ethical advertising is phooey. If Americans are hoping to cure modern morality by cleaning up a couple of billboards, they need to do some serious self-introspection.

With rampant materialism, popular culture and the ensuing avarice dictating American consciousness, it is no wonder that the tobacco industry is bombarded with lawsuits. Americans are running away from their responsibilities and desperately seeking a scapegoat to take upon their conscience. The individuals who choose self-destruction must deal with the consequences, not the devil who sold it to them.

Oh yeah, and who sees the money? Lawyers.

Michelle Voss is a sophomore English major.