SMOKE! SMOKE! SMOKE (THAT CIGARETTE):
HOW TV KEPT THE CIGARETTE INDUSTRY ALIVE IN THE 1950s

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“In summary, it looks as if tobacco belongs in the same class with love, liquor, money and the protective tariff. Some feel it’s good for what ails them and some don’t.”

—Hal Boyle, Associate Press

April 1954
Introduction

Smoke Gets in Your Eyes

When we consider who is at fault for the deaths caused by smoking, we could turn to the obvious offenders: the cigarette companies, who led a decades-long campaign to dupe the American people into believing that cigarettes are safe. The paper trail is there, the money exchanged hands, and the kinescopes and taped episodes that remain of that era clearly demonstrate the lasting effect cigarettes had on pop culture. Or, like many a classic Hollywood action movie, we could blame the Nazis. Yes, the Nazis conducted some of the first extensive research on the link between smoking and poor health, and some scholars argue that it was these ties to Nazi Germany that prevented the research from taking hold in the U.S. until much later in the 20th century.

However, there is a third culprit, one that crept quietly into living rooms and told the falsehood that would result in countless smoking-related deaths: television. It was the medium that enabled the cigarette companies, that gave them the airwaves to promote this lie and to claim lives in the name of profit. This insidious plot played out over news programs, commercials, sporting events, and classic sitcoms like I Love Lucy. The question is not who is responsible — the cigarette companies have been caught red-handed — but rather how they accomplished it, how they managed to bamboozle an entire nation. The short answer is television, specifically in the 1950s and early 1960s, just as the medium was taking hold in America. It was in this era that TV and pop culture became inextricably linked. As television struggled to figure out the smoking debate, so too did the American people. After all, as Oscar Wilde once wrote, “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.” In portraying a normative smoking culture, TV shows and the ad executives behind them ensured that smoking would be normative; smoking begat smoking.
begat even more smoking. Yet while television enabled cigarette companies’ rise, it also brought their inevitable (albeit gradual) fall.

It was no easy feat: tobacco is woven into the very fibers of the American psyche. Americans have had a lasting affair with the stuff from John Rolfe on, both as a commodity and as a consumable good. It was tobacco dollars that built much of America in the early days, and it was tobacco dollars that would later sustain American media. Opportunistic tobacco companies have taken advantage of crucial moments in American history, including free cigarettes in World War I soldiers’ rations in order to “lighten the inevitable hardships of war,” for example.\(^1\) (Perhaps, however, it is safe to say that the companies were more concerned with raising their profits than with raising soldiers’ morale.) Likewise, cigarette companies eagerly took up new media as they came along, with radio setting the notable precedent of broadcasting ads directly into homes. For the first time, listeners could hear singers and actors espouse the benefits of smoking — “It keeps my voice smooth,” a celebrity performer might say. This time in radio laid the groundwork for the companies’ later involvement in television, revolutionizing many of the hallmarks later seen in televised cigarette advertising, including the sponsored program and celebrity endorsement.

However, the subsequent shift to television as dominant media marked a key moment in American smoking culture, especially in the early days of single-sponsorship. The relationship between cigarette sponsors and television networks not only helped normalize smoking culture in the United States, it perpetuated a false — and dangerous — narrative of cigarette safety. Smoking had long been viewed as an effortlessly cool vice, with celebrities and public figures alike seldom seen without a cigarette; Hollywood was practically bankrolled on tobacco revenue.

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Television also enforced a normative smoking culture through programming geared at children, drumming up more business and hooking another generation of smokers before they were even out of primary school. This rather crafty form of marketing endorsed a lifetime of smoking by reinforcing addiction from early adolescence. As medical anthropologist Mark Nichter writes, “The ideology of dependence propagated by the tobacco industry is an important political economic dimension of ‘culture’ which we must not fail to appreciate.” That is, tobacco is a dependence industry — reliant on individuals becoming addicted to the product — and the industry’s self-serving attempts to propagate that dependence have massive cultural ramifications. Even when the sponsor’s name wasn’t explicitly in the show’s title, cigarette companies were still pulling the strings behind the curtain. For example, Lucky Strike sponsored The Jack Benny Show, while Philip Morris had Lucille Ball lighting up in primetime. These shows then served as de facto advertisement, blurring the lines between marketing and entertainment. While single-sponsorship’s potent effects were not limited solely to the tobacco industry, cigarettes undoubtedly had a more detrimental effect on viewers; there was never a lung cancer epidemic because viewers were encouraged to eat more Cheerios or drive a Ford. The true danger, however, came not necessarily from the entertainment programs, but from the news itself.

In a flagrant transgression of basic journalistic ethics, the newsmen became the hype men in the age of cigarette sponsorship. Here, trusted news presenters were used to reinforce smoking culture, often through their own smoking habits. Camel News Caravan’s John Cameron Swayze received orders from the sponsor that he could never be seen on air without a cigarette, while Edward R. Murrow of See It Now chain-smoked on air of his own volition. “When your nerves

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are shot, Camels set you right,” Swayze said during his program.⁴ Once again the advertising lines were blurred, this time with reality. Perhaps more insidiously, however, tobacco sponsors relied on trusted news presenters to reinforce smoking culture and perpetuate a deadly narrative of “safe” cigarettes. This played out in documentaries and specials that pitted scientists and industry advocates against one another as though they were equally objective. The effect was such that viewers might assume that the debate was still undetermined, despite a mountain of evidence showing a decisive link between smoking and disease. Moreover, even as cigarette sponsors moved away from news programs, this reporting style remained, an enduring reminder of tobacco’s stronghold on television.

Yet that is not to say that there were not critics. Reader’s Digest, notable for its lack of advertisements (and untainted by cigarette ad revenue), had published pieces on the harmful effects of smoking as early as the 1940s, with their seminal “Cancer by the Carton” gracing the magazine’s pages in 1952. The Digest moment was a landmark one in the smoking debate, but its effects were not immediate. A cultural shift of this proportion would take far more evidence and far more time. Moreover, the tobacco industry would meet the challenge head-on. Cigarette companies retaliated in 1954 with “A Frank Statement,” a widely-published ad that defended tobacco and cited earlier attempts to draw links between smoking and illness. Even popular columnist and broadcaster Walter Winchell defended cigarette companies in his November 29, 1953 show, claiming that tobacco companies were some of the largest donors to cancer research.⁵ At the height of its influence and power in the 1950s, Big Tobacco was a goliath that could not easily be taken down by an article or two. The cigarette industry’s resulting smear campaign redirected attention — at least momentarily.

⁴ Ibid.
On TV, cigarette companies promoted the illusion of internal regulation, with executives hawking “safer” filter tips and lower tar cigarettes and telling reporters that they would personally ensure the safety of their product. The ruse worked initially, but the public’s change of heart began soon thereafter. The companies put more emphasis on their cigarettes’ filters and lower tar, but this tactic only reminded consumers of the health reports, subliminally enforcing the message that smoking might still be at least somewhat dangerous and that there were safety changes that could be made. In fact, the cigarette companies cannibalized some of their own profits through this redirect campaign; “By stressing the health angle in cigarette advertising, the industry is only confirming the public’s fear that smoking is harmful. And one of these days, John Q. Public will go on the water wagon, or whatever kind of wagon it is that ex-smokers go on,” Sponsor wrote in one particularly scathing article in 1954. With its emphasis on tar, nicotine, throat irritation, and health, these ads only served to remind consumers of the recent reports, rather than assuage their fears. Health-related advertising reached a peak between 1952 to 1954, when the industry shot itself in the foot and caused cigarette sales to decline more rapidly than at any other time since the Great Depression, the Federal Trade Commission noted in one report. Filter tips and lower tar were mere bandages, slowing down but failing to stop the inevitable reckoning.

Meanwhile, Winchell reversed his stance on tobacco only a month after his November 29 broadcast. “The scientists may be unconvinced that the cigarette is guilty, but I am fully convinced that it is very far from innocent,” he told his audience. Though he admitted that he still smoked around 10 cigarettes per day, Winchell explained that the burden of proof had

8 The Walter Winchell Show, ABC, December 13, 1953.
shifted in the cancer debate. “It is no longer up to the scientists to prove that cigarettes cause lung cancer. It is the duty of all concerned to prove that they do not,” he concluded. The burden of proof may have shifted, but the effect on television would not be seen for several more years; Winchell simply was not an effective or decisive voice on TV. Edward R. Murrow, on the other hand, took to See It Now for a two-part report on the dangers of smoking. “He was literally smoking himself to death, even as he gave on-air reports on the dangers of cigarettes,” The New Yorker said of the report. Murrow’s report had a more tangible effect on the viewing audience, although he, too, fell prey to the journalistic pratfalls of the era. Though in retrospect these broadcasts did not necessarily result in much tangible effect at the time, they did mark the gradual decline of tobacco hegemony. For the first time, TV shows and news programs would tackle the smoking issue, often in a covert manner. It was a small step, but it was a start. Yet conspicuous absences still remained on television throughout the remainder of the decade, with otherwise groundbreaking programs — teleplays, for example — avoiding the issue as stars continued to smoke on screen.

Pronounced change came later, set in motion by two distinct changes in television and American culture. A shift in methods of sponsorship broke down tobacco companies’ autonomy over programming; an average 500 percent increase in live programming costs in the 1952 to 1953 season drove networks to the “magazine” system of advertising. NBC’s Pat Weaver championed this system, which allowed several companies to purchase ad time in a given program. Not only did this method give each individual company less power, it also separated advertising and editorial content. Meanwhile offscreen, the obvious effects of smoking-related disease also drove the point home. From the end of the decade, the public saw and felt the loss of

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family members and beloved public figures due to smoking, including Humphrey Bogart, William Talman, and Walt Disney. Surgeon General Luther Terry’s 1964 report on the effects of smoking only reinforced this, decisively concluding that smoking does indeed cause lung cancer, heart disease, and a plethora of other cardiopulmonary illnesses. Consequently, changes in sponsorship and the heightened visibility of smoking-related disease jointly contributed to the fall of tobacco’s hold on the media, culminating in a 1970 ban on television and radio tobacco ads.

The takeaway from this period is not that smoking is dangerous, or that sponsors and news are a toxic mix — it is, and they are. Rather, this episode in American history demonstrates cigarette companies’ use of media as a tool, and an effective one at that. It is not necessarily the message itself, but the medium, for the medium is the message, as media scholar Marshall McLuhan argues. The two are inextricably linked, and the form of medium is deeply ingrained in the message it conveys. In other words, when we consider who’s at fault for the decades-long perpetuation of smoking culture, we must look not only to the message that cigarette companies were sending, but also to television, their means for sending it.
Chapter One

Through the Ether:
Cigarettes Establish Dominance in Radio

The story of television begins not with Philo T. Farnsworth’s 1927 invention of the set, but with radio, the first broadcast medium and a pioneer for all those to come. Many of the same conventions that mark early television (single sponsorship, for example) were taken straight from radio, with the latter essentially setting the stage for the cultural-historic moments seen on the small screen in the 1950s. With radio, news could reach audiences instantly, bringing listeners together to experience the news simultaneously. The medium thereby lends itself to mass-cultural moments like Charles Lindbergh’s arrival in Paris, or the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Truly, radio’s power lies in its immediacy and intimacy. These key components make the medium successful at disseminating news to the masses, and they are precisely what make radio attractive to its benefactors: advertisers.

“It is the most intimate of all mediums,” Cecil B. de Mille said of radio in 1938. “It is the closest contact that I have ever felt in my professional experience. And it is a great responsibility that rests upon us, for we enter the listeners’ home and join them at the fireside to weave the pattern of our story.”

For newsmen and entertainers, the new medium presented an opportunity to improve storytelling; for advertisers, however, radio was a way to hawk their products directly into homes, en masse. The best way to sell a product, then, was to use radio to adopt the tone of a friend recommending something new — intimate, informal, trustworthy. “The key discovery made by advertisers was … that radio’s persuasiveness was related to its intimacy, and that listeners at home were most effectively addressed in a personal or even intimate voice,” author

and journalist David Goodman writes. Tobacco companies, which began their cigarette campaigns in earnest by targeting soldiers’ rations in World War I, also knew that the auditory medium would better promote their products than would print; with radio, one could hear the precise inflection of a spokesman’s voice as he told listeners how smooth the product was.

That is not to say that radio advertising started out smoothly. In its early years, radio ads were closer in sound to a boardwalk peddler than a smooth, intimate acquaintance. “For a time advertisers were baffled as to how to use this new access to public attention,” preeminent media scholar Erik Barnouw explains. “The resemblance to a carnival pitch was close enough to be uncomfortable…” In fact, in its early years radio was perhaps more advertisement than regular programming. On December 29, 1932, reporters around the country joined together in gathering data about the day’s broadcasts by 208 stations. This data showed that 2,365 hours of broadcasting had 12,546 advertising interruptions. “By now the ‘spot announcement’ unrelated to programs was in full swing and accounted for about 40 percent of the 12,546 interruptions,” according to Barnouw. “The total time devoted to news, education, lectures, and religion was ‘less than the amount of time absorbed by commercial sales talks.’” This commercial saturation in the 1920s and 1930s came as the American government was attempting to establish some ground rules for radio; “It is inconceivable that we should allow so great a possibility for service, for news, for entertainment, for education, and for vital commercial purposes, to be drowned in advertising chatter, or for commercial purposes that can be quite well served by our other means of communication,” then-Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover warned in a February 27, 1922 address. Yet despite Hoover’s reservations about giving too much power and airtime to radio

12 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 239.
advertisers, this is precisely what happened. As advertisers worked out the tonal kinks with their early pitches, they also inadvertently established what would become a convention of both radio and television: sponsor hegemony. Single-sponsor programs began to crop up in this era, many of them helmed by tobacco companies. “Cigarette sellers were among the most enthusiastic pioneers in the use of network broadcasting for coast to coast advertising,” behavioral scientist Richard Pollay writes. “The audience attention and heavily commercial nature of these radio shows is hard to imagine by today’s standard. A single hour of the ‘Raleigh Review,’ for example, contained seventy promotional references to Raleigh cigarettes.” Unlike print, radio presented greater opportunities for commercial saturation. While print readers could avert their eyes from advertisement, radio listeners had no choice but to swallow the ads, lest they be forced to turn off the set mid-program. Thus, radio elevated sponsors to a new level, giving them unforeseen power over the airwaves. Sponsors now held the purse strings in broadcast, and cigarette companies led the pack.

Radio spelled opportunity for cigarette companies in more ways than one. With the advent of the intrepid flapper in the 1920s, tobacco companies also discovered an untapped market for cigarettes: women. “Advertising had approached the possibility in gingerly fashion,” Barnouw writes. “In one [Lucky Strike] advertisement a man smoked while a girl — trembling on the brink of emancipation? — said, ‘Blow some my way!’ … If women could be induced to smoke, the market would double.” The auditory medium lent itself well to early female-centric advertisement, which used softer-toned pitches with music and rhetoric more suited to women’s perceived delicate sensibilities. R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, for example, was eager to double sales by pulling women into its consumer base: “Each day, with violin background,

[broadcaster Tony] Wons spoke of the contentment to be derived from cellophane-wrapped Camels, ‘as fresh as the dew that dawn spills on a field of clover.’”  

Opera singers, as Barnouw points out, were also a popular choice in cigarette advertising geared at women. Again, the “smooth and mild” marketing trope was most effective when the spokesperson’s voice could be heard over radio. Ad men might also reach out to the female listener by appealing to her desire to maintain her figure — ‘Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet!’ comes to mind. Consequently, radio gave cigarette companies the opportunity to explore the women’s market and essentially double the smoking population. Though advertisers would eventually tone down women’s ads somewhat, these early radio bits served as the precursor to future female-geared taglines like Virginia Slims’ “You’ve come a long way, baby.”

Radio also allowed cigarette companies to use another advertising staple: the celebrity endorsement. While these had been present in print, the testimonial-style ads were used in radio like never before, though they were often fanciful and written up by PR men, rather than the celebrities themselves. Celebrity cigarette endorsements were a win-win situation for the actors and Big Tobacco alike. American Tobacco, for example, spent millions on print and radio time to promote stars and their films. In 1937 and 1938, the company also paid the stars at least $218,750 — roughly $3,765,340 in 2018 — each to endorse Luckies in print and on radio programs owned by American Tobacco. These were not the only perks: “In a standard agreement, American Tobacco supplied the actor with Lucky Strikes for a year, a modest gift for stars at this income level. Free cigarettes might have aided publicity or served as evidence that

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the star valued and smoked the brand, should these arrangements again be investigated.” In the context of commercial oversaturation in radio, the Hollywood endorsement also had a powerful effect for cigarette companies. In 1943, for example, an American Tobacco radio producer tallied 268 “Lucky Strike impressions” in 135 minutes of airtime. Listeners essentially heard the Lucky Strike brand name or jingle every 30 seconds. Today, this type of commercial saturation is almost unheard of — and nearly unfathomable, at that. Yet while perhaps an extreme case, this method of advertisement in radio would set the tone for later marketing in television, with commercials integrated into the listening experience, thereby blurring the line between the ad and the medium itself. Warner Bros. stars would deliver their testimonials on the brand’s *Your Hollywood Parade*, as well as in Lucky Strike commercials delivered by emcee Warner Bros. contract actor Dick Powell. As scholar KL Lum notes, the effect was astounding; the average listener might assume that all of Hollywood smoked Luckies, given the sheer saturation of Hollywood Lucky testimonials. That is, radio was a vessel for cigarette companies to saturate the airwaves, an ambition made all the more effective with backing from Hollywood. Stars’ close relationships with Big Tobacco would persist into the television era, with commercials showing actors lighting up their favorite brands.

Oftentimes, these celebrity endorsements would come in the form of name-drop advertisements, incorporated into various news and entertainment programs. Blurring the line once more between the program and the advertisement, these would come as something of a precursor to TV’s later integrated commercials, which made the ad part of the show. On one occasion, Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart dropped by *The Lucky Strike Program Starring Jack Benny* to humorously reenact a scene from their film, “To Have and Have Not.”

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
and-forth between Benny and Bacall, the show’s sponsor got not only a name-drop, but a de
facto celebrity endorsement, all woven seamlessly into the skit’s dialogue:

Bacall: “Have you got a cigarette?”
Benny: “A cigarette … Yes yes … here you are.”
Bacall: “Thanks … Match?”
Benny: “Match … You know Lauren, that cigarette I gave you is a Lucky Strike.”
Bacall: “I know and it’s my favorite brand, too.”
Benny: “Really?”
Bacall: “Yes … They’re so round … So firm … so fully packed … so free and easy on the draw.”

Not only did this act as a celebrity endorsement from Bacall, it also painted the picture that every cigarette Bacall smoked in her films was a Lucky. One need only recall Bacall’s sultry voice calling the cigarettes “round” and “firm,” and the cigarettes essentially would sell themselves. The skit did all this and more without even cutting to commercial break.

However, this sweet setup would not last. First, the candy industry came after Lucky Strike’s 1928 slogan, “Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet.” Next, the Federal Trade Commission came to the conclusion that “American Tobacco’s advertising was misleading in several respects. Some Lucky Strike testimonials were from non-smokers, while others were not written or reviewed by the celebrities represented as making them.” One celebrity endorsement credited to Al Jolson, once dubbed “The World’s Greatest Entertainer,” praised Luckies for keeping his voice smooth — a sentiment that surely had the most impact on radio. “Talking

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
pictures demand a very clear voice,” Jolson said in the endorsement, which aired on a 1928 Lucky Strike Radio Hour broadcast. “Toasting kills off all the irritants, so my voice is as clear as a bell in every scene. Folks, let me tell you, the good old flavor of Luckies is as sweet and soothing as the best ‘Mammy’ song ever written.” Yet the FTC found that while American Tobacco had gotten permission to use the statement and had paid for it, Jolson had not written it. In 1929, the FTC issued a cease and desist order against American Tobacco, prohibiting testimonials that were not written by the endorser, whose opinions were to be “genuine, authorised and unbiased.” Further, American Tobacco was required to conspicuously disclose payments for testimonials in its advertising, though the company was able to get this stipulation removed by 1934. Yet despite the setbacks, the Hollywood cigarette endorsement trope persisted into the television age, with ads frequently featuring celebrities smoking their favorite cigarettes and extolling their benefits. Cumulatively, the sponsored programs, commercial oversaturation, and Hollywood endorsements cemented tobacco’s dominance over radio, which effectively kept cigarette-related coverage positive and controversy-free for several decades.

However, though there was success to be had in radio, it was clear as early as the 1930s that the future was always in television. RCA’s David Sarnoff, for example, knew that a visual broadcast medium was endgame: “In April 1935 Sarnoff made the dramatic announcement that RCA was ready to put a million dollars into television program demonstrations. … In his usual meticulous fashion, Sarnoff was getting ready for his hour.” The only problem? America was on the cusp of world war as RCA prepared to roll out the television, thereby delaying TV’s rise and extending radio’s dominance for essentially another decade. However, it may have been

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24 Ibid.
25 Ferguson GS, Jr, Hill GW, Johnson OB. United States Of America before Federal Trade Commission, in the matter of American Tobacco company, a corporation, file no. 1–4989, stipulation as to the facts, November 18, 1929.
worth the wait; despite a brief recession, the American economy was on the uptick after the war — meaning more disposable income — and returning soldiers and their wives would need luxury appliances to fill their new homes. Moreover, coming out of WWII, there was a market boom for tobacco companies as the soldiers looked to continue smoking the brands they had grown accustomed to from their rations during the war. Indeed, it was a good time to be a cigarette company. In the 1949 to 1950 television season alone, tobacco sponsors planned to pour $28,800,000 into television and radio. The cigarette sponsorships came as “smoke-ring manna from heaven” in post-war America, as tobacco was the only “‘foolproof’ industry in times of recession.” As it had held the purse strings in radio, then, tobacco would again reign supreme in early TV.

In the end, though radio would establish cigarette companies’ dominance, television would spell their demise. Despite some early setbacks, cigarette companies used radio to double their consumer base and control the airwaves through sponsored content. Yet while cigarette companies thrived in radio, television would gradually break down cigarette sponsor hegemony as the link between smoking and cardiopulmonary disease came to light. The difference here between radio and television lies not so much in the fundamentals of the media, but rather in their cultural context. TV produced a different outcome because it arrived in a later cultural moment, as smokers begin dying off from illness and as attitudes become more cautious. As Barnouw explains, “New media have meant new values. Since the dawn of history, each new medium has tended to undermine an old monopoly, shift the definitions of goodness and greatness, and alter the climate of men’s lives.”

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28 Ibid.
early as the mid-1950s, they began the decade with many of the same values and, as a result, the same relationship with cigarettes. Moreover, in singlehandedly sponsoring a slew of news and entertainment programs, cigarette companies had bought themselves a bit more time — quite literally.
Chapter Two

I Love Philip Morris:
Tobacco Sponsors, Television Shows, and the Evolution of Smoking in 1950s TV

Television viewers have all heard the warning: “TV will rot your brain.” In fact, this statement may be more than just a line parents feed their kids to get them out of the house; studies have shown a link between reduced verbal abilities and prolonged television exposure in children, according to a 2016 *Scientific American* article. But in addition to rotting young brains, television — specifically 1950s TV entertainment — also rotted lungs. That is, popular television shows in the 1950s reinforced a prevalent smoking culture through both on-screen consumption and advertisement. In their marketing techniques, tobacco companies intentionally and directly targeted children, yet when it came time to mark an anti-smoking shift in TV, family-friendly shows were some of the first to make the change. As television sought to figure out its identity as a new medium, it also grappled with issues of single-sponsorship and public opinion on tobacco use, resulting in a turbulent decade of entertainment.

Lucy, you got some smokin’ to do!

*I Love Lucy*, one of the most popular sitcoms of the era, did not avoid this struggle; if anything, *Lucy* came at tobacco head-on through the innovative advertisement methods used to promote sponsor Philip Morris. When it comes to *I Love Lucy*, it is no coincidence that one of the most popular television programs of the decade was also one of the most dangerous in terms of perpetuating smoking culture. As radio programs turned to the budding medium of television en masse, Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball struggled to gain traction, partly due to Arnaz’s thick

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accent and Cuban heritage. Enter: Philip Morris. The tobacco company, which sponsored *Lucy* from 1951 to 1955, helped bring the series to the small screen, and Arnaz and Ball graciously repaid them with years of innovative advertising. Before *Lucy*, television shows would cut to black and show commercials in a completely different audiovisual style, a method that Arnaz found too abrupt and jarring. Arnaz made it part of the deal that the Philip Morris commercials would be integrated into the show, leading into the commercials with his *I Love Lucy* orchestra and continuing the score in the bridge and commercial. Demand for this new method of commercial integration created a steady stream of business for Desilu, the production company founded by Arnaz and Ball. Meanwhile, “the practice of using music to integrate the commercials became the standard convention for commercial television.” Already, the sponsor’s effect on the program was evident.

Integration essentially made each episode a 25-minute Philip Morris commercial, blurring diegetic lines and nearly breaking the fourth wall to advertise directly to viewers. “Every time Lucy and Ricky light up a Philip Morris cigarette, they are advertising the sponsor and depicting cigarette smoking as a natural part of the good life. It is cultural hegemony in action,” media scholar Lori Landay writes. “Thinking about *I Love Lucy* as an advertisement for Philip Morris instead of entertainment shifts the way we interpret the series, and popular culture in general. The entire narrative strategy of early television blurred the boundaries between the sponsor’s product, the fictional diegetic world of the show, the actors, and the audience.” This blurred line is apparent even from the very first episode in 1951, which began with a two-minute introduction from the sponsor, featuring the iconic Philip Morris bellhop. These early attempts at

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 16.
blending advertising and entertainment fell a little flat — one *Variety* reviewer called the intro “overlong” and “monotonous,” adding that it “has the same irritation quality that PM attributes to its rival smokes.”\(^{35}\) However, the *Variety* review of that first episode also noted that Philip Morris’ return on investment would be great: “It’s costing PM $30,000 a week … for the half-hour film series, … but on the basis of this week’s preem installment, it should sell lots of cigarettes.”\(^{36}\) Truly, *Lucy’s* partnership with Philip Morris marked a crucial shift in American advertising, blurring lines between advertisement and entertainment.

While many television programs of the era portrayed smoking as a fact of life, *Lucy* consciously peddled tobacco to its viewers. This extended into the show’s original animated introductions, which predated the iconic satin heart title card and which featured cartoon versions of Lucy and Ricky interacting with their sponsor’s product.\(^{37}\) This animation often acted as a tie-in at the start of each episode, further breaking down the barriers between the diegesis and reality.\(^{38}\) For example, the introduction to the 1952 episode “*Lucy Does a TV Commercial*” shows animated Lucy and Ricky approaching a giant cigarette carton. The cigarette wrapper changes into a curtain, lifting to show real-life Lucy in the Ricardo living room. These introductions operate as framing devices that both highlight and blur the lines between reality and television. They also, as media scholar Lynn Spigel notes, “work as a graphic reminder that the story had been brought to our homes through the courtesy of the sponsor.”\(^{39}\) That is, with

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36 Ibid.
37 Most retrospective viewers are familiar with Lucy’s satin heart title card, but this introduction only came into use once the show entered syndication in 1957.
each innocent-appearing cartoon introduction, Philip Morris further asserted its dominance over the program.

As far as framing devices go, these animations are ingenious and highly effective in subtly peddling tobacco to viewers, especially impressionable young adults. Perhaps most effectively, characters don’t even have to say the sponsor’s name in order to produce a Pavlovian response in viewers. When Lucy takes out her pack, viewers are meant to want — to crave — Philip Morris. She need not even mention the brand name; the integration, animated openings, and the stars’ own print and TV advertisements had already made that connection for the viewers. All of these details make *Lucy* a masterpiece not only of situational comedies, but also of advertising innovation. Moreover, sponsorship’s overwhelming effect on the program serves to perpetuate popular tobacco culture, drawing in a new generation of smokers.

Even decades later, *Lucy*’s cultural effect cannot be underestimated. The wildly popular show set the tone for most of a decade, popularizing everything from cigarettes to mixed marriages. The program drew viewers unlike any other, a phenomenon perhaps best seen in 1953, when Lucy gave birth to her second child. The pregnancy was written into the show, albeit

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with some requested changes from Philip Morris. Primarily, the words “pregnancy” or “pregnant” could not be uttered onscreen. Instead, Lucy and Ricky were to use phrases like “expecting” or “having a baby,” with the pregnancy-announcement episode titled “Lucy Is Enceinte” — the French word for “pregnant.” While Philip Morris and CBS received a number of angry letters about the choice to show pregnancy onscreen, “there seems no grounds for valid objection. … Miss Ball and Mr. Arnaz not only have handled the topic of their approaching baby with a great deal of taste and skill but also have been thoroughly amusing in the process,” Jack Gould wrote in the Times. The story arc’s timing could not have been any better: after a massive buildup and sky-high ratings, Lucy Ricardo gave birth on January 19, 1953, the same day that Lucille Ball had a scheduled caesarean section. Yet “this timing was apparently no more than coincidental, having been determined by the timetable of Ball’s physician, who performed all such operations on a Monday.” The birth did, however, eclipse another important moment in American culture: President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s inauguration. “The arrival of Little Ricky Ricardo attracted an estimated forty-four million viewers to CBS for I Love Lucy, a peak for the already massively popular show and an all-time high Trendex rating of 71.1, far outstripping the 29 million viewers who watched Eisenhower's inauguration as President the next day.” Therefore, Lucy’s sheer cultural relevance is enormous, its effect on viewers too large to ignore. If Lucy smoked, surely everyone would.

41 Phil Dyess-Nugent, “More than 60 Years Ago, a Pregnant Lucille Ball Couldn't Call Herself ‘pregnant’,” TV Club, July 24, 2013.
43 Jude Davies and Carol R. Smith, “Race, Gender, and the American Mother: Political Speech and the Maternity Episodes of I Love Lucy and Murphy Brown,” American Studies 39, no. 2 (Summer 1998).
44 Ibid.
In other programs from the era, the sponsor’s effect was visible in everything from series titles to plotlines. One memo from sponsor Camel to *Men Against Crime* screenwriters instructed, “Do not have the heavy [villain] or any disreputable person smoking a cigarette,” and “It has been found that we [Camel] retain interest best when our story is concerned with murder. Therefore, although other crimes may be introduced, somebody must be murdered, preferably early, with the threat of more violence to come.”\(^{45}\) Richard A. Pinkham, an ad man with Ted Bates, offered some insight into this sponsor censorship: “It’s amusing, but not ridiculous. The association of the product that might be recognized as the client’s product with the villain, a murderer, or whatever, is certainly something to be avoided.”\(^{46}\) Camel also mandated that no one be allowed to be shown coughing on screen, fires were forbidden (they might remind viewers of blazes caused by cigarettes), and doctors could only be shown in favorable light — with reports on cigarette safety on the horizon, R.J. Reynolds could not afford to upset the health profession, as Barnouw notes. The changes were small; the effects were massive.

Even teleplays — which produced some of the more edgier content of the generation, tackling issues like racism and anti-Semitism — still deferred to the sponsor. In this light, the lack of teleplays on the smoking issue proves something of a conspicuous absence, although it was not unprecedented. Playwright and screenwriter Rod Serling once altered his plot about the lynching of a black child at the behest of a sponsor, so as not to offend consumers in the South. Meanwhile, a *Playhouse 90* script on the Nuremberg trials was stripped of references to the use of gas in death chambers to appease the sponsor, a natural gas company.\(^{47}\) In controlling which characters could be seen with the product and in which situations, the cigarette sponsors were


effectively using the shows as extended commercials, the ultimate PR weapon. However, unlike print ads or clearly marked commercial breaks, this integrated advertising is able to more subtly manipulate the viewer, enticing him to pick up a Camel or “reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet!” Through their manipulation of *Lucy, Men Against Crime*, and various other programs, tobacco companies could continue to control the narrative.

Yet for tobacco companies, television shows like *Lucy* were only one piece of the marketing puzzle. In essence, the goal was to start targeting youths from an early age in the hopes of building brand loyalty before the child even picked up their first cigarette. Tapping into kids’ fascination with cowboys and the Wild West, Philip Morris used its Marlboro Man to “capture the youth market’s fancy” and target “post adolescent kids who were just beginning to smoke as a way of declaring their independence from their parents.”

On *The Flintstones*, meanwhile, Fred and Barney lit Winstons and extolled the brand’s benefits. Though the show was initially meant for adults (Fred and Wilma were one of the first couples to appear in bed together on screen), *The Flintstones* played during prime time and would come to attract a much younger viewing audience. This type of advertising is insidious for how it preys on young children, but it is not a dated marketing tactic left behind in the 50s. After tobacco ads were banned from radio and television in 1970, cigarette

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companies turned to print media to target women, children, and African-Americans — market segments with less authority and voice than the industry’s former bread and butter: white men.

Years later in the 1980s, R.J. Reynolds introduced animated mascot Joe Camel, who was used primarily to target children and teenagers — a marketing group dubbed First Usual Brand Younger Adult Smokers (FUBYAS). Joe Camel was put into scenarios designed to appeal to young adults, and advertisements tapped into FUBYAS social subgroups like the jock, the goth, the cheerleader, and the nerd. An internal document from R.J. Reynolds explained that teenagers “know the script. … They know the costumes. … They know the props. We want to supply one of the props — their brand of cigarettes.” Ultimately, these marketing tactics were wildly effective in getting children hooked on tobacco; one study found that 95 percent of adolescents surveyed had seen an advertisement featuring the Marlboro Man or Joe Camel at least once, with nearly half believing that Joe Camel made smoking more appealing, and 40 percent believing that the Marlboro Man made smoking more appealing. Though this insidious form of advertising persisted into the latter half of the 20th century, there were some in the tobacco industry who developed a conscience, albeit far behind the curve: “I don’t think cigarettes ought to be advertised,” one retired Marlboro ad executive said in 1974. “I don’t know any way of doing this that doesn’t tempt young people to smoke, and, in view of my present knowledge, this is something I prefer not to do.”

Tobacco-sponsored television programming from the 1950s on ushered in a new generation of cigarette smokers, and there would be a

51 Ibid.
reckoning in later decades as children turned into adults with cardiopulmonary disease. “Maybe they’ll get your little brother or sister,” former tobacco lobbyist Victor Crawford said. “Or maybe they’ll get to the kid down the block. But one thing is perfectly clear to me, the tobacco companies are after children. Why? Because tobacco companies know that ninety percent of smokers start as children, before they know better. Of course marketing to kids is unethical, so they just deny it. … I was a tobacco lobbyist for five years so I know how tobacco companies work. I lied. And I’m sorry.”

But while tobacco companies hawked directly to adolescents, family-friendly television sang a slightly different tune. In fact, many television shows and movies geared to children told viewers that smoking was bad… for kids, that is. Up through the first half of the 1950s, family entertainment typically showed smoking as bad for children solely because they were too young to do it properly. In 1940, for example, Pinocchio featured little boys turning into donkeys as punishment for smoking and drinking, and Pinocchio himself becomes ill after trying a cigar. Similarly, a 1955 episode of Father Knows Best, “Kathy Makes Magic,” shows more of the physical consequences of underage smoking. Egged on by a friend, teenage son Bud smokes pilfered cigars, becoming so ill that a doctor is brought in and his kid sister believes that he is on his deathbed. The Father Knows Best episode is particularly noteworthy, given that Kent Cigarettes had dropped out from sponsoring the program only months earlier. Fans scrambled to save the series: “Even hardboiled TV editors joined in the campaign to find a sponsor for the pleasant, homey series,” the Olean Times Herald reported. “[Star Robert] Young believes that this wave of enthusiasm was a major factor in finding a new bankroller.”

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54 Richard Pollay, “Tricks of the Tobacco Trade” (lecture, March 15, 1997).
which ran six months later, came after The Scott Paper Company picked up the series.\textsuperscript{56} Perhaps \textit{Father} sought to snub Kent in its negative portrayal, though it may have just been coincidence. Regardless, while this type of programming stands thematically in contrast to the Marlboro Man or Joe Camel, it still reinforces tobacco culture by chalking up smoking-related illness to youth and inexperience.

Other programs took a similar stance, warning children against smoking but also using popular themes and buzzwords ripped straight from tobacco advertisements. Disney’s \textit{No Smoking}, a 1951 short film that was rebroadcast on television in 1961, drew upon the classic “moderation” defense against tobacco health advisories, which argue that smoking is safe in moderate amounts. This theme is also present in Philip Morris advertisements, which promised consumers, “You need never feel over-smoked — that’s the miracle of Marlboro!” Disney’s short follows chainsmoker Goofy as he attempts to kick the habit, drawing ties between a lack of self-restraint and unfavorable symptoms: “Sometimes, because of the irritated eyes, tickling throat, dry hack, coughing, wheezing, and the shortness of wind, the inveterate smoker gets the strange desire to rid himself of the habit,” the narrator explains.\textsuperscript{57} Goofy goes manic in his withdrawal, bumming a cigar that promptly explodes in his face, closing out the short. The 1961 rebroadcast version, however, shows Goofy vowing to quit for good. This change might be seen as a nod to Pinto Colvig, the original voice of Goofy, who was diagnosed with lung cancer and died of the disease in 1967 after advocating for cigarette companies to put warning labels on cartons.\textsuperscript{58} However, this small change also shows a thematic evolution — though the short

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\textsuperscript{56} “Young And For-Real Wife In Las Vegas Before TV Work,” \textit{Olean Times Herald}, April 30, 1955.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{No Smoking} (The Walt Disney Company, 1951).
\textsuperscript{58} Dawna Curler, “Vance DeBar (Pinto) Colvig (1892-1967),” The Oregon Encyclopedia.
\end{flushleft}
initially draws upon one of the classic defenses against tobacco health warnings, its revised ending reflects shifting attitudes toward smoking.

Of all the family-friendly programs to tackle the smoking issue in the 1950s, *Leave it to Beaver* perhaps does it the best, marrying the classic tropes of parental lecture and a child’s trial-by-error. This is most evident in “The Pipe,” a 1958 episode of *Beaver* which tells viewers that not only is smoking unsuitable for those under age 21, it is utterly unhealthy for all. As in *Father Knows Best*, Beaver and his friend try smoking, comically burning coffee grounds and cigarette ashes before making themselves ill. In his classic lecture at the episode’s end, Ward Cleaver tells Beaver, “You boys did something that could have had very serious results.” Of course, this concern focuses more on the fact that Beaver handled matches without adult supervision, but the episode still hints at the inherent dangers of smoking. Perhaps this sentiment is most obvious, most effective in *Beaver* because the presence of children in the show changes attitudes on smoking. That is, a show like *I Love Lucy* can guiltlessly show adults smoking, because there is no impressionable audience immediately present. However, once children are added into the mix, as they are in *Beaver*, the parents must become the role models and teach their children healthy behaviors. Even in *Lucy*, Philip Morris demanded that Lucy not be shown smoking onscreen while pregnant, presumably lest the conspicuous combination of children and tobacco direct viewers’ attention to the issue. Moreover, tapping into the child psyche, Beaver also attempts to reconcile smoking’s allure with adults’ warnings, telling his mother, “Well gee, Mom, everybody’s always saying how bad it is and telling kids not to do it, and I figured, if grownups said it was so bad, there must be something real good about it. But there wasn’t. I

60 Ibid.
could hardly hold my stomach down.”\textsuperscript{62} The most noteworthy moment, however, comes when older brother Wally tells Beaver that smoking is unhealthy, especially for an aspiring athlete: “You’re always telling me you want to go out for football and stuff when you get into high school. Don’t you know that smoking could wreck you? … You better watch it,” Wally says.\textsuperscript{63} Through Wally’s message, \textit{Beaver} stands in stark contrast to the era’s professional sports culture, which saw famous athletes endorsing cigarette brands and upholding smoking as an important part of staying in shape. Thus, through these small cues, \textit{Beaver} marks a shift in smoking’s portrayal on television, reflecting the evolution in popular tobacco culture that had begun only years prior.

Ultimately, TV entertainment has a long and complicated history with tobacco, alternately advertising directly to consumers, targeting young smokers, and dissuading children from picking up the habit. However, the latter half of the decade marks a noticeable shift in the way smoking is shown on TV, with television reflecting a transformation in public sentiment. Though earlier children’s programming gave mixed messages about the safety of tobacco use, cautionary tales like \textit{Pinocchio} and \textit{Father’s “Kathy Makes Magic”} may actually have put a family-friendly show like \textit{Beaver} in the prime position to make this change. It is also no coincidence that this shift corresponds with a steady drop in how often smoking is shown on TV, with tobacco screentime trending downward from the late 1950s on.\textsuperscript{64} As a testament to television’s formidable influence, this trend in turn correlates with a decrease in American tobacco consumption; one study found that annual changes in smoking screentime were correlated with adult cigarette consumption in the U.S. from 1955 to 2010, “suggesting that TV

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
portrayals of smoking may have influenced national cigarette consumption." For better or for worse, the medium and the product are inextricably linked.

65 Ibid.
Chapter Three

Through a Rose-Colored, Ventilated Filter:

Tobacco Companies Try to Control the Conversation

The airwaves may have belonged to the people, and television to the networks, but programming belonged to the sponsors, who held the purse strings. “I care not what puppet is placed upon the throne of England to rule the Empire on which the sun never sets. The man who controls Britain’s money supply controls the British Empire, and I control the British money supply,” 19th century banker Nathan Rothschild is often credited as saying. In many ways, sponsors controlled the TV empire in the medium’s early years, exercising editorial control over programs ranging from entertainment to news. As the tobacco debate picked up momentum, dialogue on the airwaves lagged as a result of this influence, given that tobacco sponsors provided a significant chunk of change. As long as newsmen feared the all-mighty sponsors, the tobacco debate would continue as a niche issue, heard only by those who sought to hear it.

It was precisely a lack of this type of sponsorship that allowed Reader’s Digest to truly begin the debate in the first place. The Digest, a general interest magazine that culled its material from various other publications, did not begin to accept advertising until 1955. Untethered by advertisement of any sort, Reader’s Digest could exercise full editorial control in covering the tobacco story. In May of 1952, a group of prominent cancer researchers led by Dr. Alton Ochsner, the former president of the American Cancer Society, found that lung cancer rates increased by 144 percent between 1938 and 1948, coinciding with an increase in cigarette consumption. The report had an urgent tone to it, and the findings drew attention from national

publications, *The New York Times* included. “It is frightening to speculate on the possible number of bronchogenic cancers that might develop as a result of the tremendous number of cigarettes consumed in the two decades from 1930 to 1950,” Ochsner said of the study.\(^68\)

*Reader’s Digest*, one of the most widely read publications worldwide, put out its own coverage — excerpted from the *Christian Herald* and aptly titled “Cancer by the Carton” — in December of 1952. While the *Times*’ report cast doubt on the research — referring to similar studies as “suggestive” and including the kicker, “two doctors report research shows ‘real’ link between malignancy and smoking”\(^69\) — the *Digest* coverage echoed Ochsner’s urgent tone. “Cancer workers want something done, and done now on the basis of present clinical knowledge, to alert the smoking public,” the article concluded.\(^70\) Operating outside the traditional print medium advertising standards, without tobacco sponsorship’s editorial restraints, *Reader’s Digest* was able to offer a stronger report on the issue.

The *Reader’s Digest* coverage and the slew of cancer research that followed marked a landmark moment for the American tobacco debate, bringing it to the forefront of popular discourse. However, as historians Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway note, the findings should not have been news to those who were paying attention. Scientists had established the link between cigarette smoking and lung cancer as early as the 1930s, and the link between smoking and illness was already known to many health-conscious individuals. There was just one problem with the research: it had come from the Nazis. “The Nazi government had run major antismoking campaigns; Adolf Hitler forbade smoking in his presence,” Oreskes and Conway explain, speculating that the anti-tobacco movement’s early ties to Nazi Germany may have hindered its

\(^{68}\) Ibid.


\(^{70}\) Ibid.
effectiveness in immediately post-war America.\textsuperscript{71} “The German scientific work was tainted by its Nazi associations, and to some extent ignored, if not actually suppressed, after the war, it had taken some time to be rediscovered and independently confirmed. Now, however, American researchers — not Nazis — were calling the matter ‘urgent: and the news media were reporting it.”\textsuperscript{72} Reader’s Digest can be forgiven for its tardiness, then. After all, this was a problem that spanned American mainstream print media. However, the magazine did show some signs of buckling after advertising company BBD&O dropped its Digest account in 1957 to appease its tobacco clients (the firm also handled American Tobacco). The next month, Reader’s Digest acquiesced and published “a yarn on filter tips and how they could help.”\textsuperscript{73} Though “Cancer by the Carton” may not seem overwhelmingly incendiary in retrospect, and though the magazine may have buckled to financial pressure later in life, Reader’s Digest took a sizeable step with its coverage, especially considering the context of the decade. Free from sponsorship at the time, it was able to offer a stronger editorial stance on the issue, albeit a mild one by today’s standards.

Reader’s Digest continued to cover the smoking issue with particular fervor, following up “Cancer by the Carton” with 1954’s “How to Stop Smoking.” Another article, “I Quit Smoking, or Cooper’s Last Stand” was published three times from 1940 to 1964, with the final printing including an editor’s note that highlighted the magazine’s coverage of the issue.\textsuperscript{74} In the 40-year period between 1924 and 1964, the magazine had published 36 articles on smoking and health, creating a lasting impact on public awareness. Though major policy changes would not come for

\textsuperscript{71} Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, Merchants of doubt: how a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 15.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Army Archerd, “Just for Variety,” Variety, August 1, 1957.
more than another decade, “Cancer by the Carton” is truly one of the landmark moments in the tobacco debate, beginning an era of awareness that would surely make cigarette companies sweat.

But as legendary Yankees catcher Yogi Berra once said, “it ain’t over till it’s over.”75 Certainly, tobacco companies would not roll over on a million-dollar industry without a fight. The weapon of choice? Print and broadcast media; a war of words would be waged in the former, but smoking culture would be aggressively reinforced in the latter. In TV commercials, cigarette companies used words such as “clean” and “mild” as stand-ins for “healthy” and “non-irritating.” For example, Lucky Strike TV and print ads in the mid-1950s unrolled the slogan, “Luckies taste better — cleaner! Fresher! Smoother!” Meanwhile, cigarette-sponsored TV entertainment continued to promote the blissful image of actors smoking their favorite brands, unburdened by the recent health scare. Thus began a public relations campaign that would promote a false illusion of tobacco safety, utilizing a two-pronged approach: equal parts personal responsibility and self-regulation. This campaign began at the start of 1954, when the nation’s biggest tobacco companies teamed up via the Tobacco Industry Research Committee to promise the American people that tobacco was safe, a fact upon which the companies would bet their business. Published in more than 400 newspapers nationwide on January 4, 1954, “A Frank Statement to Cigarette Smokers” sought to put a positive spin on the tobacco safety debate. Its 14 co-sponsors ensured that the product was safe and, if it turned out not to be, then rigorous internal testing and safeguards would ensure a speedy remedy.

“For more than 300 years tobacco has given solace, relaxation, and enjoyment to mankind. At one time or another during those years critics have held it responsible for practically every disease of the human body. One by one these charges have been abandoned for lack of

75 “How people started saying ‘It ain’t over till it’s over,’” BBC News, September 23, 2015.
evidence,” the statement read, attacking the scientific claims made over the previous two years.76 However, the statement was all a ruse, the beginning of a decades-long campaign intended to mislead Americans about the devastating effects of smoking and to avoid government intervention and regulation, public health scholars K.D. Brownell and Kenneth Warner explain.77 “Everything was at stake,” the pair writes. “The industry wanted desperately to prevent, or at least delay, shifts in public opinion that would permit a barrage of legislative, regulatory, and legal actions that would erode sales and profit.”78 Shortly after “A Frank Statement” was published, Philip Morris Vice President George Weissman reassured consumers that the company was taking its personal responsibility seriously: “If any one of us believed that the product we were making and selling was in any way harmful to our customer’s health — and our own as well — we would voluntarily go out of business,” he explained.79 This illusion of accountability was intended to salvage the industry’s reputation, in effect creating an insidious cover-up that allowed more Americans to fall ill and even die from continued cigarette consumption.

As former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner David Kessler explains, the tobacco industry’s playbook was just as much a legal tactic as it was a public relations strategy. The unofficial “script” of Big Tobacco’s master plan was devised by lawyers seeking to minimize liability and legal ramifications for the companies, and “every tobacco company executive in the public eye was told to learn the script backwards and forwards, no deviation was allowed. The basic premise was simple — smoking had not been proved to cause cancer. Not

78 Ibid.
proven, not proven, not proven — this would be stated insistently and repeatedly. Inject a thin wedge of doubt, create controversy, never deviate."80 Documents entered into evidence by the Liggett Group — formerly Liggett & Myers Tobacco Company — in a 1992 Supreme Court case regarding smoking and lung disease showed that tobacco companies were walking a fine line in combatting the 1950s health scare. The strategy in those documents is described as “creating doubt about the health charge without actually denying it … advocating the public’s right to smoke without actually urging them to take up the practice.”81 The operative strategy, then, was plausible deniability and minimized liability. The tactic was to paint the controversy as a two-sided debate and to keep that debate going for as long as possible, with no clear winner. As behavioral scientist Richard Pollay explains, “They don’t have to win a debate; they just have to keep the debate going.”82 These seeds of doubt may have been a shrewd business move, but they were also insidious in their result; cigarette companies’ manipulation of the debate lulled smokers into a false calm, encouraging them to keep smoking, even as evidence clearly demonstrated the negative health effects. The strategy worked, for a time: dialogue and reports on the tobacco issue always followed the research claims with a shadow of a doubt, falsely implying that the data was still inconclusive, the game too early to call.

Another part of the industry’s strategy was self-regulation, which manifested most obviously in the filter wars, the fight to find a “safer” cigarette. By filtering out toxins and creating a cigarette with less tar, cigarette companies claimed that they could negate health concerns and offer consumers a healthier product. These efforts, of course, were not out of sheer goodwill: as internal safeguards, they were intended to prevent further government intervention

81 Richard Pollay, “Tricks of the Tobacco Trade” (lecture, March 15, 1997).
82 Ibid.
and regulation. The bad publicity had caused cigarette consumption to fall in 1953 and 1954, from 435 billion units to 401 billion.\textsuperscript{83} There was serious coin at stake in cigarette sales, with the “smoking materials” industry the fourth largest advertiser in national media, topped only by food, toilet goods, and the automotive industry. With cigarette companies spending nearly $100 million in advertising in 1954, the radio and TV stake in the business would have been around $70 million.\textsuperscript{84}

However, the filter-tip solution met the threat head-on, rescuing tobacco companies from rapidly declining sales. In the 1950s and 60s, cigarette companies would spend millions of dollars “to solve what the industry identified as the ‘filter problem.’” These extensive filter research and development efforts suggest a phase of genuine optimism among cigarette designers that cigarette filters could be engineered to mitigate the health hazards of smoking,” scholar Bradford Harris explains.\textsuperscript{85} While it cannot be said for certain whether tobacco companies truly believed that they could make smoking safer, the fact of the matter is that the companies soon came to the same conclusion as everyone else. A 1961 report from Philip Morris Vice President of Research and Development Dr. H. Wakeham revealed that available technology could not selectively filtrate out carcinogens, which were dispersed through “practically every class of compounds in smoke.”\textsuperscript{86} Harris writes, “Through their efforts to make mainstream smoke less toxic, cigarette researchers had opened a Pandora’s box to reveal how many potentially dangerous substances mainstream smoke contained.”\textsuperscript{87} Yet despite the bunk science behind the filter claims, consumers bought into cigarette companies’ public relations strategy. Consumption

\textsuperscript{83} Paul Rutherford, \textit{The New Icons?: The Art of Television Advertising} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 38.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
of filter-tip cigarettes rose rapidly from 1953 on, a trend that would continue through the next two decades, a 1979 Surgeon General’s report noted. By 1964, 65 percent of smokers were buying filter-tip brands. However, these ads could damage sales, too. The cigarette companies were playing a risky game — the advertisements’ emphasis on health just reminded smokers of the health reports, rather than assuaging their fears. “With all this evidence painting a clear picture to the agencies of a cigarette-wary America, the tobacco companies find themselves impaled at present on the horns of a dilemma,” Sponsor magazine wrote in 1954. “How far can they go in boosting their own brands as giving greater health protection? It would seem they can’t overdo such advertising lest health consciousness of consumers leads to the final step: giving up smoking altogether.”

Sure, the tobacco companies’ PR playbook proved an initial success with consumers, but could the industry weather more bad press?

Fortunately for Big Tobacco, cigarette companies exercised a great deal of editorial control over the budding medium of television — especially early network news programs. Nowadays most journalists stringently enforce objectivity and independence, with the Society for Professional Journalists advising journalists to “deny favored treatment to advertisers, donors or any other special interests, and resist internal and external pressure to influence coverage.” This was not the case with 1949’s Camel News Caravan, NBC’s flagship news program in the early 1950s. Each episode was bookended with Camel commercials, blurring the lines between news and advertisement. In fact, the commercials reminded viewers that the news was coming right from the camel’s mouth: “The makers of Camel cigarettes bring the world’s latest news events right into your own living room,” the program would begin. “Sit back, light up a Camel, and be

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an eyewitness to the happenings that made history in the last 24 hours. *The Camel News Caravan* presents: Today’s news today!"91 The news broadcast itself reinforced smoking culture as well. Camel imposed several rules on the newsroom, designed to promote the brand and create an image; anchor John Cameron Swayze always had to have a lit cigarette in an ashtray while on air, there could be no visible “No Smoking” signs, and no one — with the exception of Winston Churchill — could be shown with a cigar.92 Caravan correspondent David Brinkley would fill in occasionally for Swayze on the show, “where he had to hold up a cigarette carton and thank the sponsor for sending supplies to our troops overseas.”93 Of course, “They were considered minor aspects of good manners rather than of news corruption,” Barnouw writes.94 Though NBC would later replace *Camel News Caravan* with the *Huntley-Brinkley Report*, tobacco’s legacy on network news remained. While some would attempt to bring the tobacco issue to the small screen, all-powerful sponsors effectively ensured that network news programs would not be able to sufficiently cover the debate. Rather, it would take a newsman who operated outside the normal network news system, whose influence and relationship with sponsors could weather the storm.

Unfortunately, Walter Winchell was not that man. Winchell had previously defended cigarettes in a November 29, 1953 broadcast, arguing that tobacco

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91 *Camel News Caravan*, NBC, September 19, 1952.
companies were some of the biggest donors to cancer research, with American Tobacco donating $250,000 to the Damon Runyon Cancer Fund in one year alone.\textsuperscript{95} However, Winchell, who was sponsored by the Gruen Watch Company, soon reversed course. Introducing a segment on cigarettes and lung cancer in his December 13, 1953 broadcast, Winchell changed his entire delivery style to emphasize his point. Instead of his usual method of quickly barking the news into his microphone, hardly looking up, Winchell took off his glasses, sat back, took a deep breath, and looked directly into the camera. “Never was any newspaperman’s responsibility to others and his own integrity to himself a heavier burden than mine tonight when I tell you the facts, as I know them, for and against the cigarette, now on trial for its life,” he told viewers.\textsuperscript{96} Notably, Winchell valued scientific evidence over anecdotal evidence in the broadcast, emphasizing that the relationship between cigarettes and lung cancer was supported by clinical records. Yet even Winchell fell back on the moderation defense, claiming that the cancer link is only evident for heavy smokers — “I mean excessive smoking, not ordinary smoking,” he reassured.\textsuperscript{97} However, in perhaps one of his finest moments on television, Winchell closed the segment with conviction. “Now, my editorial opinion is this: the scientists may be unconvinced that the cigarette is guilty, but I am fully convinced that it is very far from innocent,” he said. “To say that a majority of heavy smokers do not get lung cancer leaves the vital question unanswered of whether a minority — a minority — of excessive smokers do get it. One cancer, in my opinion, one cancer victim is one too many.”\textsuperscript{98} Though he acknowledged that he still smoked about ten cigarettes a day, Winchell asserted that the “burden of proof has shifted,” and

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{The Walter Winchell Show}, ABC, December 13, 1953.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
it could no longer be up to science to prove that cigarettes cause cancer, but to detractors to prove that they do not.

Yet despite Winchell’s outstanding performance, his condemnation of tobacco failed to stick. This was partially due to the fact that Winchell, a writer and radio man, was unsuited for the cool medium of television. A rather unattractive and loud man, he announced the news as if speed-reading a newspaper, requiring little interaction from viewers and treating his television show as more of a hot medium. In a cool medium like television, engagement with viewers or listeners is required to complete the picture, whereas a hot medium is more one-sided. As media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who coined the terms “hot” and “cool” media, explains in *Understanding Media*, “a hot medium is one that extends one single sense in ‘high definition.’ High definition is the state of being well filled with data.”\(^9\) Moreover, the hot radio medium can have a “violent effect” when applied to cool cultures or situations.\(^1\) Television is just as much about visuals as it is about content, something that Winchell never quite understood. Ultimately, he gave viewers too much information too quickly, and his visual presentation was lacking. Thus, despite his excellent sentiment in the December 13 cigarette segment, his message was not communicated effectively to viewers, and thus was not necessarily the landmark moment in the tobacco debate that it could have been.

Moreover, Winchell suffered the consequences of challenging tobacco sponsors, albeit indirectly. Even on programs that weren’t sponsored by tobacco companies, there was still a risk, as another show on the network would likely have a cigarette sponsor. As it so happens, the program after Winchell’s, *The Orchid Award*, was sponsored by Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company. “ABC-TV this week became the first network to lose business because of the recent

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\(^1\) Ibid., 39.
cigarette-cancer news stories,” Billboard reported a couple weeks after Winchell’s broadcast. “Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company reportedly cancelled its sponsorship of ‘Orchid Award’ because Walter Winchell read newspaper and magazine commentary on the question on his [telecast].”  

Asked years later why The Orchid Award did not last, director Bob Finkel diplomatically responded that its 15-minute format — then being phased out of television — was to blame. “That was certainly the only objection I remember,” he said. Evidently, however, tobacco sponsors were king, holding the power to cancel TV shows at whim. The single-sponsor setup might therefore have served as a deterrent for network news programs considering covering the tobacco debate, lest they bite the hand that fed them.

Additionally, tobacco companies used the medium’s early conventions to their advantage, weaponizing the Federal Communications Commission’s 1949 Fairness Doctrine. In exchange for broadcast licenses, radio and TV stations were required to devote some airtime to issues of public interest, and they were required to represent both sides of the argument in doing so, under threat of legal penalty. While on paper the Fairness Doctrine appeared to support journalistic objectivity and the marketplace of ideas, in practice it stifled broadcasters who may have otherwise offered their opinion on tobacco. As media scholar Adam Thierer writes, “With the threat of potential FCC retaliation for perceived lack of compliance, most broadcasters would be more reluctant to air their own opinions because it might require them to air alternative perspectives that their audience does not want to hear.” Moreover, tobacco companies could manipulate the doctrine to their advantage by refusing to appear on television; without both sides of the debate, many networks would scrap programs on controversial issues, lest they feel the

102 Wesley Hyatt, Short-lived Television Series, 1948-1978: Thirty Years of More Than 1,000 Flops (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2003), 47.  
FCC’s wrath. Such was the case in 1957, when NBC’s WRCA-TV disinvited Dr. David M. Spain, whose research team had found a relationship between cigarettes and cancer — the anchor, Tex McCrary, had been unable to engage a speaker opposing the doctor’s views. In a column on the debacle, The New York Times’ Jack Gould described the Fairness Doctrine’s obvious loophole: “The side that would rather not see an issue discussed in public then exercises a gracious veto by declining to appear. The opposing side then awakens to the realities of broadcasting’s lower gamesmanship; he has been a late scratch.”\textsuperscript{104} Gould also condemned the FCC’s “Big Brother” policies, which he claimed promoted de facto censorship. The same week that Spain was disinvited, the FCC intervened in a scheduled Studio One production of John Secondari’s “The Commentator.” As Gould explained, “Mr. Secondari’s impudence apparently was to suggest that there might be more than the authorized view on whether a commentator should express an opinion or merely model a necktie” — a surprisingly fitting sentiment.\textsuperscript{105} The issue was such that the American Civil Liberties Union also challenged the Fairness Doctrine for its impact on free speech and free press. Referring specifically to the Spain incident, the American Civil Liberties Union took the issue to Capitol Hill. “A Congressional inquiry into the handling of controversial topics on radio and television has been urged by the American Civil Liberties Union, in a letter to the Senate Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. ACLU declared that several recent incidents ‘raise the question of how well diverse and different subjects and controversy are being handled in station programming,’” Variety reported.\textsuperscript{106} Alas, the doctrine would persist throughout the decade, and for nearly the remainder of the century. With ‘fairness’ still on the books, TV networks were at a significant

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{106} “Congress Asked To Probe B’casting’s Controversy Nix,” Variety, April 30, 1957, 10.
disadvantage in covering the tobacco issue, and broadcasters faced an uphill battle in offering their editorial opinions.

Faced with bad press, tobacco companies executed a deliberate and painstaking public relations strategy, which relied upon the illusion of personal responsibility and internal regulation. However, cigarette companies also exercised a great deal of influence over the media via sponsorship and manipulation of the era’s standards, thereby controlling dialogue and minimizing coverage of the tobacco debate. Thus, it would take a newsman who could navigate the Fairness Doctrine while still giving an editorial opinion. Moreover, it would take someone who operated outside of traditional network news, the likes of which were rooted similarly to the Camel News Caravan legacy. A cherry on top would be someone who had a good relationship with sponsors, whose cachet had been meticulously built up over an illustrious career. In short, it would take a god, or at least CBS’ version: Edward R. Murrow. See It Now’s Murrow, who cut his chops in radio as a European correspondent in World War II, was “a commentator whose prestige puts him in a special position unattainable by others in the industry.”107 Coming off a lost antitrust suit, See It Now sponsor Alcoa, an aluminum company, needed to brighten its image with a reputable program. As Murrow biographer Ann Sperber notes, “The agreement was, hands off program content; you do the programs, we’ll make the aluminum. Alcoa needed Murrow more than Murrow needed Alcoa. He was a national figure, almost a national emblem. He was also presumably safe.”108 These conditions gave Murrow the freedom to crack the tobacco debate, bringing national attention while dodging the brunt of cigarette companies’

influence over the media. “In short,” Variety explained, “Murrow has freedom to do as he pleases in the public interest; who else on tv can do the same?”\textsuperscript{109}

Chapter Four

Testing Tobacco:

Murrow Makes Good

Edward R. Murrow was a familiar face — or, rather, voice — by the time TV took off in the 1950s. He had gotten his start in earnest in March 1938 with his radio coverage of the Anschluss, the Nazis’ annexation of Austria. In an attempt to get a leg up on NBC, which had an exclusive deal with the Germans, Murrow began what would become his trademark roundup of uncensored, eyewitness accounts of life inside immediately pre-war Europe. While he was abroad, Europe changed dramatically, inching ever closer to World War II. “In the meantime, he had become a reporter,” Ann Sperber writes in her 1986 biography of Murrow. “After two-and-a-half years away, Murrow was back in the trenches. In mid-crisis he had found his profession, or more specifically perhaps, it had found him.” Murrow went on to cover the war, and his career continued when he returned home to the United States, culminating in 1950 in the radio show Hear It Now, which would position Murrow for a key role in the new medium on the block: television.

TV was kind to Ed Murrow. In fact, with his slicked back hair and cool demeanor, it was almost as if he were built for the budding medium. With his associate Fred Friendly, Murrow produced and starred in the CBS program See It Now, specializing in long-form reports and interviews with celebrities and common folk alike. A 1953 investigative report on Milo Radulovich, who had been discharged from the Air Force under the suspicion that his father and sister were communist sympathizers, got Radulovich reinstated and brought more acclaim to the budding program. “Public reaction was swift and outraged, the Radulovich affair transmuted

from local issue to national test case inside half an hour, via television,”\textsuperscript{111} Sperber writes, adding, “The momentum started, one step led invariably to another.”\textsuperscript{112} See It Now’s Radulovich coverage was lauded in the public sphere and in the papers. New York Times TV reviewer Jack Gould wrote of the “inspired” episode, “Mr. Murrow was at his journalistic best and with reason. He was dealing with a story that was alive and he reflected that intangible sense of excitement and urgency which comes with being on top of the news. ‘See It Now’ demonstrated that there is no substitute for truly original reporting that is unafraid, perceptive and mature. Everyone connected with the program can be proud.”\textsuperscript{113} But while the Radulovich episode elevated Murrow’s TV journalism career, it also put him in the path of someone who would become his greatest challenger: Senator Joseph McCarthy.

McCarthy was at his peak in 1954, having taken control of the nation’s second Red Scare and loaned his name to the finger-pointing, fear-mongering movement that branded anyone and everyone “card-carrying communists.” In other words, McCarthy’s apple was ripe for the picking. Murrow’s McCarthy reports, which began airing on March 9, 1954, were a brilliant show of broadcast journalism’s power. Using clips of McCarthy’s own antics, Murrow painted a picture of a delusional madman, essentially letting the senator destroy himself from within. Murrow’s conclusion at the end of the March 9 episode was particularly damning, sealing McCarthy’s fate in the public eye. “No one familiar with the history of this country can deny that congressional committees are useful,” Murrow told viewers. “It is necessary to investigate before legislating, but the line between investigating and persecuting is a very fine one and the junior Senator from Wisconsin has stepped over it repeatedly. … We must not confuse dissent with

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 419.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 417.
disloyalty. We must remember always that accusation is not proof and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law. We will not walk in fear, one of another.”

The words were cutting, and the episodes proved the beginning of a rapid decline for McCarthy.

It would stand to reason, then, that Murrow’s 1955 “Report on Cigarettes and Lung Cancer” was par for the course in a television show that made a name for itself covering controversial topics. The market was prime: one study of television found that there was not a single documentary on smoking from 1938 to 1955, the period during which the first reputable scientific studies on the dangers of smoking had been conducted. CBS, with backing from sponsor Alcoa Aluminum, strongly hyped the two-part series, which examined the controversy over smoking and its supposed health risks. “Edward R. Murrow, back in the U.S., begins frank ‘Report on Cigarettes and Lung Cancer’ — tonight at 10:30,” read one two-column advert in the May 31, 1955 Buffalo Evening News. Truly, the two episodes — airing May 31 and June 7, 1955 — were feats of traditional “objective” journalism, which sought to give equal time to both sides of an issue. For almost every expert who denounced smoking, there was another expert who claimed there was not enough evidence to prove a link between cigarettes and lung cancer. “The thirty minutes was almost mathematically divided between scientists who believe cigarette smoking is responsible for lung cancer and those who believe no cause and effect relationship has been established,” Jack Gould wrote of the first episode in his June 1, 1955 column.

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The sheer number of expert scientists in the two episodes lent itself to the program’s visual style. While the program certainly relied heavily — perhaps too heavily — on the “talking head” interviewee setup, Murrow’s team did make use of the medium to present some engaging visuals. For example, epidemiologist Ernst Wynder showed viewers a smoking machine, which condensed the tar from cigarettes into a beaker of thick sludge. Wynder and his assistant painted the tar on mice, some of which later developed skin cancer as a result. “It is not … significant because it shows that mice should not smoke. It is significant because of the human evidence available,” Wynder emphasized. In the interest of fairness, of course, *See It Now* then granted screen time to W.C. Hueper of the National Cancer Institute, who argued that many of the accessories of a 20th century city — such as increased gas consumption, more asphalt roads, and greater coal use — can also contribute to the observed increase in cancer rates. “We have to consider that mice are not men, and a direct application of any experimental animal to the human problem is not permissible,” Hueper claimed. Likewise, American Medical Association President Elmer Hess argued that increased cancer rates can be explained away by better diagnostic equipment and longer life expectancies — a robust 67 years for men and 72 for women. Even still, Hess said, smoking in moderation is part of a fulfilling, “comfortable” lifestyle. “Cigarette smoking may be a smelly, dirty, and very expensive habit,” he admitted. “I’ve been a smoker all of my life. There have been periods when I have quit smoking. But all of my life I’ve smoked, and I have enjoyed smoking. I would rather, myself, live 15 very, very active, productive years, than live 25 years as a potato, unable to do anything but just exist.”

Hess may have had a point in arguing that the statistics do not yet prove beyond a doubt that smoking leads to cancer in humans. However, there is evident delusion in Hess and the others who defended smoking; it almost appears that they are willing to justify their habit by any
means, even when their approach lacks common sense. Take, for example, Dr. Harry Greene of Yale Medical School, who sat smoking a pipe throughout his time on screen. Reporter Arthur Morris asked Greene whether he believed cigarettes play a role in the production of lung cancer, to which Greene responded with conviction, “No, I don’t. Certainly no more important a role than the eating of tomatoes.” In Greene, viewers can see just how many of these experts are deluded by their addiction; in a sense, it’s almost as if the smoke from their cigarettes has shaded their vision. Wynder takes a stance against this denial: “In medicine, … we cannot overcome a problem by denying its existence,” he concluded, urging the tobacco industry to work with cancer researchers to reduce the health fallout from smoking. Charles Cameron, medical director of the American Cancer Society, took a stronger approach, drawing upon cases like the London cholera outbreak and the smallpox vaccination, wherein common sense prevailed in matters of public health. If it will take human experimentation and the clinical death of a man from smoking-related illness, Cameron said, “If that is the degree of proof which is required, I hope the experiment is never done.” He also debunked the experts who sought to prove tobacco safety by pointing to other causes, like smog or asphalt roads. Smoking “may well not be the only cause [of lung cancer],” Cameron admitted. “But if it is a cause of any moment at all, then we must find that fact out.”

It would stand to reason that this two-part program, with its balanced reporting and slew of experts, would follow in the path of the McCarthy report and Murrow’s other cutting-edge programs. However, that is simply not the case. Murrow ends the report by taking the coward’s way out, failing to commit to one side or another. “We have no credentials for reaching conclusions on this subject, but in the course of our research, we were impressed by the disposition of scientists of differing views to collaborate, to pool their knowledge, to whet their
minds, one against another,” he concluded. “There is controversy, and a vast area of ignorance. And there is, as we hope you’ll have seen, a determination to acquire knowledge, which is the only ground upon which opinion and action can be based.” In light of the hardline stance he took against McCarthy, the “Report on Cigarettes and Lung Cancer” is a little lacking. The evidence is plain, even disregarding what we know today as fact, that smoking greatly increases one’s chances of developing lung cancer. Walter Winchell initially took a similar route, defending tobacco in his November 29, 1953 broadcast by arguing that cigarette companies were some of the biggest donors to cancer research.\textsuperscript{118} Winchell’s strong reversal just weeks later, however, emphasized an ardently critical change of heart. In light of Winchell’s adamant response, it is obvious, then — and somewhat disappointingly so — that Murrow had also fallen prey to his own delusion on this matter. A four-pack-a-day smoker, Murrow’s bad habit could certainly be the reason why he failed to take a stronger stance.

This not only makes for a weaker program, it makes for a distorted portrait of the issue at hand. “The Murrow study, though exhaustive enough, demonstrated that the controversy isn’t the hot potato that tv thought it was. For every claim that cigarettes are cancer-producing, an equally persuasive counterclaim from a reputable source said it ain’t so,” a June 15, 1955 \textit{Variety} review asserted. “The newspapers carried both sides as they broke day-by-day, but tv ducked. The ducking wasn’t worth the effort, if the Murrow show is any standard. For all the noise, cigarettes’ cancer-causing capacities are far from proven.”\textsuperscript{119} Murrow’s balanced approach — admittedly the journalistic standard of the era — gave viewers the illusion that the scientists are on equal footing when it comes to the evidence for their respective sides. In truth, however, while both

sides may have had the same amount of evidence, the anti-tobacco experts had far more scientific evidence to draw upon, while the pro-tobacco experts supplemented their approach with untestable anecdotal evidence. Even the Variety reviewer notes that some of the experts “were more like hot-tempered politicians than the cool and cautious scientist of textbook and storied fame.” The experts seemed to have their own agendas, and their approaches were tainted with emotional subjectivity, the reviewer writes, asking, “What ever happened to the scientist who kept his mouth shut until all the evidence was in and carefully weighed? Where’s the ‘scientific detachment’ that examined each argument and each development and slowly built an unbreakable chain of proof before making claims?”

Perhaps mirroring Murrow’s methods, later programs that covered the smoking debate took a similar “balanced” approach to the issue. Journalist and anchorman Howard K. Smith bemoaned the fact that a 1965 CBS documentary on smoking created the impression of balance between the opinions of medical professionals, “who had every reason to be objective,” and tobacco industry representatives, “who have no reason to be objective.” “The public was left with a blurred impression that the truth [about the role of smoking in cancer] lay between [the two sides] whereas … we have everything but a signed confession from a cigarette that smoking has a causal relation to cancer,” Smith said.

As a journalist, Murrow had an obligation to provide context and question his sources’ motivations for providing less-than-credible evidence. As the Society of Professional Journalists’ Code of Ethics asserts, journalists must “provide context, … [taking] special care not to

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120 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarizing a story.” This context is necessary when reporting a news story of such magnitude; without it, the public does not see the full picture. Instead of engaging as a reporter, Murrow sat as a bystander, listening to the sources without prodding further. While this method served him well for the McCarthy episodes — the clips of McCarthy’s outbursts spoke for themselves — it provides an incomplete picture in the tobacco debate. Ultimately, See It Now had the unique opportunity to condemn smoking as it had McCarthy, thereby setting trends in public discourse. In this sense, the program made a valiant effort, but smoke got in their eyes, and delusion hindered the episodes’ potential.

However, the report’s shortcomings are admittedly best visible through the lens of hindsight. Considering, for a moment, the context of 1955, the episodes were far more cutting edge than could be said today. “For an industry that once would have been frightened to death by the thought of touching on a dispute that might disturb an advertiser, last night’s ‘See It Now’ was a forward step in TV’s growing journalistic maturity,” Gould wrote in his June 1, 1955 column. He added, “Certainly, the highlights of the dispute were well rounded up last night in a program that once again saw ‘See It Now’ set the pace in TV reporting of controversy.” Truly, in the era when cigarette companies were king, upsetting the sponsors was a risky move, one that only a media darling like Edward Murrow could make. “Television finally caught up to the lung cancer story,” the June 15 Variety review began. “It took Ed Murrow’s ‘See It Now’ to cover the story ‘in depth’ in a two-parter, and it’s still rather a poor reflection on the tv industry that video coverage both took so long and had to come as an isolated study by a commentator

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125 Ibid.
whose prestige puts him in a special position unattainable by others in the industry.”

As the reviewer notes, regular network news programs had failed to pick up the story, largely out of fear of controversy (and likely due to fears of angering tobacco sponsors). Murrow was also up against some sponsorship woes: although Alcoa Aluminum sponsored See It Now, tobacco bigwigs Philip Morris and Lucky Strike proudly sponsored CBS’ big draws, I Love Lucy and The Jack Benny Program, respectively.

Alcoa initially had something of an unspoken agreement with Murrow: “You do the programs, we’ll make the aluminum. Don’t tell us how to make the aluminum, and we won’t tell you how to make the programs,” as Alcoa President Irving Wilson put it. Yet that agreement began to change as Murrow pushed the boundaries of television news, regularly covering controversial material that polarized public opinion — it was only a matter of time before See It Now angered the wrong people. After Murrow’s first report on McCarthy, Wilson told him, “I wouldn’t ask you not to do such programs, but I would hope you wouldn’t do them every week.” A year later, Alcoa dropped Murrow just prior to the reports on lung cancer, after the show had covered a scandal in Texas that involved state officials attempting to defraud Black and Hispanic veterans out of state-awarded land grants. Though the termination would not take effect until the end of the season, July 5, this uncertainty no doubt weighed on Murrow’s mind going into the lung cancer reports. With this in mind, his decision to continue covering controversial topics is noteworthy.

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128 Ibid.
The report was also a risky challenge to Murrow’s audience; according to a National Clearinghouse for Smoking and Health poll, approximately 52.6 percent of all American men smoked in 1955, in addition to 24.5 percent of all women. Moreover, there is something to be said about Murrow’s objectivity and cool demeanor in the face of the often hot-tempered experts: “The Murrow show performed the valuable service of demonstrating perhaps there’s more emotion than detachment on both sides, and that there’s gotta be a fire first before there’s any smoke,” the June 15 Variety review asserted. As the first major TV program to take on the tobacco debate, See It Now’s true power lies in the exposure it gives to the issue, not in the statements it makes. In this light, “The heavy smoker probably had a disquieting moment or two in watching the program. … The statistics showing that lung cancer was 75 per cent higher in smokers than non-smokers were certain to give a viewer pause,” Gould noted in his review.

Additionally, it might be argued that while Murrow’s “even” reporting may be a cop-out by today’s standards, in contemporary times the objective reporting made the show not only more palatable for a smoking audience, but also more engaging for viewers cautiously looking to join the debate. Moreover, the reporting was in line with the Federal Communications Commission’s Fairness Doctrine, which required networks to present both sides of an issue equally and fairly. “An extremely interesting and responsibly handled report exploring the relationship between cigarette smoking and lung cancer,” cheered a May 31 listing in the Long Island Star-Journal. “From the opening salvo when we’re told that Los Angeles smog is every bit as lethal as cigarette smoking, to a statement from a biggie in the American Medical Association which may give heavy smokers case to ponder, proves this report to be of special

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interest to all viewers including non-smokers. This and the second installment next week are another contribution of this distinguished show to adult TV.”

In other words, the program effectively took on a non-condescending tone, offering up available arguments from both sides and leaving the ultimate decision up to the viewer, rather than forcing an opinion down their throats. In effect, the setup helped attract a wider audience, including those who may have been on the fence in the debate.

This method panned out: Barron’s National Business and Financial Weekly reported in its “The World at Work” section on June 6 that Murrow’s report sent a shockwave through the stock market. “Edward R. Murrow willy-nilly has now become a factor as important in the stock market as Walter Winchell. The day after his TV program, ‘See It Now,’ featured the controversy regarding the relationship between cigarette smoking and lung cancer, tobacco stocks slumped,” the article read. In return, this caused a slump in cigarette sponsorship on television, albeit a temporary one. After American Tobacco pulled out of Robert Montgomery Presents in 1955, “the reason underscore[d] why all ciggie outfits have gradually been retreating from the high-cost-of-tv — the drop in sales due to cancer scare talk,” Variety reported. Murrow’s demeanor in the episodes may have also contributed to the See It Now report’s lasting impact. Barron’s erroneously reported that Murrow curbed his smoking for the duration of the episodes: “What may have startled some investors more than anything said on the program was the noticeable fact that Mr. Murrow, the first time in the memory of viewers, did not smoke during the presentation.”

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135 Ibid.
have been shocked to see that Murrow, “television’s most inveterate smoke, did not light one up.” In reality, Murrow did have a cigarette in hand for a brief stint on camera in the first episode, though he quickly shifted his body to move the cigarette out of frame, a seemingly conscious decision to eliminate any illusion of personal bias. That said, his efforts to keep his own smoking out of the program may have served as a wakeup call for some viewers, who had grown accustomed to seeing Murrow with a cigarette permanently fixed in hand. Perhaps they thought, “Well, if Ed Murrow is cutting back on his smoking, maybe I should too.”

However, while the See It Now report certainly played a role in furthering dialogue on smoking and lung cancer, it did not — and could not — completely reverse the era’s standards. Despite the initial stock slump that saw cigarette companies restructuring their ad-buy policies, the companies bounced back after a relatively brief convalescence. “The ciggie companies are already beginning to reverse a policy of cancelling or sharing costs on shows — a trend which began after the first sales slip on the weeds resulting from the lung cancer publicity,” Variety reported the day after the second half of Murrow’s special aired. “Moreover, despite some much-publicized cancellations … the tobaccoists are buying more time now than they are getting rid of.” In fact, Variety reported that cigarette advertisement still accounted for $28 million of advertising spent across 18 different TV shows. “The cancer scare, its attendant slip in cigarette sales, and the highly publicized budgetary cutbacks of the cigaret companies all to the contrary, the tobacco industry continues to provide a healthy slice of televisions’ network billings,” Variety reported. The magazine went on to list the “Full Ciggie-Line-Up” for fall TV programming, which saw all tobacco companies except Philip Morris upping their ad buys.

137 “Ciggies Still Up There; $28,000,000 Tab for 18 TV Shows On Webs.” Variety. June 8, 1955.
138 Ibid.
Moreover, the relationship between television and tobacco was strong, and the power of the new medium could not be denied; according to a June 1, 1955 Variety report, 54 percent of cash spent in purchases could be attributed to TV ads.\(^\text{139}\) According to Variety, the Television Advertising Bureau survey found that “video was the ad medium which influenced the haus-frau most often in making a purchase.”\(^\text{140}\) Thus, Murrow’s reporting no doubt had cigarette companies sweating, and his influence on the stock market was clear. However, the prevalent smoking culture of the time — and tobacco companies’ sheer power in the era of three network hegemony — meant that it would take a lot more than two episodes of See It Now to produce lasting change.

Regardless, Murrow’s efforts also had a clear impact on how the media covered the smoking dilemma. Of course, there had been some reports on the controversy prior to the See It Now coverage. Associated Press Science Reporter Alton L. Blakeslee published a series of reports on the subject in the fall of 1954, with installments ranging from “The Evidence,” to “The Stakes,” and “Should You Stop?” However, while that series was published in a number of syndicated newspapers, Murrow’s reports saw an even greater spike in national attention. After the first episode, The New York Times published several reports on the issue in the first week alone, many of which drew upon evidence Murrow had presented or experts See It Now had called upon. Thus, even though he ultimately failed to explicitly take a clear stance, Murrow’s efforts — somewhat risky in context — did not go unnoticed. His two-part report served to bring greater attention to a growing public health crisis, thereby setting the stage for future journalists and political actors to come. Yet the other side of the coin is that Murrow’s controversial and polarizing reports may have also inadvertently temporarily hindered similar reporting in the 1950s and 1960s. “In the end the much-discussed Alcoa ordeal — its ‘years of sitting on the hot-

\(^\text{139}\) “54% Share of Coin Spent in Purchases Attributed to TV,” Variety, June 1, 1955.
\(^\text{140}\) Ibid.
seat,’ as Sponsor magazine called it — made most sponsors wary of documentaries particularly when produced by a free-thinking entity like the Murrow unit,” media scholar Erik Barnouw writes.¹⁴¹ While there were quiet rumblings about cigarettes and lung cancer following Murrow’s report, television remained more or less mum on the smoking issue after the initial noise died down. By decade’s end, however, San Francisco’s KPIX would be broadcasting a 90-minute live telecast of lung cancer surgery, while the city’s KTVU had a half hour titled “Cigarettes & Lung Cancer” on its Doctors’ News Conference.¹⁴² Murrow’s report had opened the floodgates for riskier coverage; the reckoning had begun.

¹⁴² “TV-Radio Production Centres,” Variety, April 29, 1959, 42.
Chapter Five

Going Cold Turkey:

The Jig is Up

Though Murrow’s report was not the be-all, end-all of the smoking debate, it did force tobacco men and the media alike to — as David Bowie might put it — turn and face the strange changes. No longer could cigarette companies belittle claims that smoking causes a plethora of lethal ailments. Certainly, Murrow did not prove beyond a reasonable doubt that smoking is harmful, nor did he even come close. Rather, he brought the debate to a new level of infamy, forcing greater scrutiny from the media on the safety of smoking. However, the final nail in the coffin — quite literally — did not come until these health effects began to manifest in a slew of the Greatest Generation’s finest. Moreover, as individuals across the country began suffering from smoking-related illness, Hollywood was not spared. This wave of death and disease brought actors to the forefront to caution against smoking. This activism, coupled with changes to television’s advertising structure and governmental action in the 1960s, effectively resulted in a new wave of anti-smoking sentiment, culminating in significant restrictions on Big Tobacco’s influence in television.

Tobacco’s advertising touchdown

Cigarette companies had long shrouded their product in a veil of health, from doctors’ testimonials to improved filters and emphasis on lessened throat irritation. Doctors often graced cigarette advertisements, vouching for certain brands and even recommending smoking as a cure for various ailments. More importantly, however, was the industry’s sponsorship in sports, which created a key link between smoking and fitness. From the earliest days of professional sports,
cigarettes companies were tethering their product to professional athletes. Shortly after teams in the National Baseball League began playing in 1876, trading cards with pictures of the players cropped up in cigarette packages.143 The rest was history; athletes, long seen as the epitome of good health, came to be cigarette companies’ biggest cheerleaders. While there would be some changes to this tradition, it would largely remain intact throughout the remainder of the 20th century. Though the commissioner of baseball issued a rule toward the end of the 1950s prohibiting players from appearing in cigarette ads in uniform, nothing stopped the players from doing these ads in plain clothes.144 These rules were for show, the sort of nominal internal regulation meant to assuage fears and create an illusion of responsibility. The National Football League did not even make an attempt at pretense, signing Philip Morris’ Marlboro as its television sponsor and permitting players to appear in tobacco ads.

Moreover, sponsorship of televised sporting events was an easy way to get the brand name mentioned on television.145 Often targeted at a male audience, this sponsorship could also have a negative effect on impressionable children who watched professional sporting events. Citing the ads’ effects on youth, the Minnesota State High School League adopted a resolution in 1963 calling for professional sports organizations to prohibit professional athletes from appearing in alcohol or tobacco advertisements. “Use of tobacco or alcoholic beverages is not accepted as contributing to wholesome living for youths and high school students are at an impressionable stage and given to hero worship,” the resolution declared.146 This youth-geared sponsorship spanned college sports as well, with Bayuk Cigars joining forces with NBC in 1958

to air not only professional basketball games, but NCAA contests, the Sugar Bowl, and the Senior Bowl. Once again, the coin was major; in gross figures, *Variety* reported, it was roughly $2 million from this one company alone. Combined, this sponsorship and advertising in televised sports helped perpetuate the illusion of fitness and harmlessness in the cigarette industry. And so, despite the health reports that had begun to stack up in the 1950s, cigarette companies still managed to retain some illusion of health — that is, until members of the Greatest Generation began dropping like flies.

The Greatest Generation, as it was dubbed by journalist Tom Brokaw, had seen it all, from the Great Depression to World War II, and everything in between. However, after living nearly two decades day-to-day, wondering whether poverty or war would be the end of it all, the Greatest Generation couldn’t help but think that the future was all gravy. During war and depression, future ailments were the last thing on this generation’s mind. Biographer Ann Sperber writes of Edward Murrow’s heavy smoking during the Blitz, “He was borrowing heavily against the future, in a world where few thought further than making it from day to day. Any thoughts about the future were moreover focused elsewhere, as the winter’s hardships heightened calls for social justice.” Simply put, there were more pressing matters at hand, and the research on smoking safety was nowhere near as widespread as it would later become. Moreover, smoking-related illness had not yet become prevalent, because people typically did not live long enough to experience symptoms. However, longer lifespans in the postwar era made death by smoking an issue; while the life expectancy at birth for men and women of all races in 1900 was

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47.3 years, that number jumped to 68.2 by 1950. The reckoning for women smokers would be delayed, as many women did not begin smoking until around World War II, decades after men had begun. After all, women were not seen as a viable cigarette market segment until the 1920s and 1930s. Still, longer lifespans would hasten this cold realization.

Unfortunately, the “day-to-day” mindset had already taken root in the Greatest Generation. “I really detested them,” Murrow’s son, Casey, said of his father’s cigarettes. “Mom used to worry, obviously, that he smoked too much; he would talk about it sometimes, too. But then he had that ridiculous line that he would use periodically, that they would have a cure before he got cancer.” Murrow, of course, died in 1965 at age 57 of lung cancer, the result of smoking 60 to 65 Camel cigarettes each day. Brokaw, who coined the “Greatest Generation” moniker, also experienced such loss firsthand. “After 50 years of smoking unfiltered cigarettes, my father died, too young, of a massive heart attack. He was 69,” Brokaw wrote in a 2010 op-ed criticizing President Barack Obama for smoking. “It’s almost certain that all those years of nicotine inhalation were a major contributor to his clogged arteries.” Even cigarette company executives were not spared. Many succumbed to smoking-related illness, even as their companies proclaimed the product’s safety. Patrick Reynolds, the grandson of R.J. Reynolds, spoke about the effect tobacco had on his own family. Many of his family members who had smoked or used tobacco suffered from related illness: his grandfather, the eponymous R.J. Reynolds, died of cancer. His father died of emphysema, his mother had emphysema and heart disease — as did three of his brothers — and two of his aunts died of cancer and emphysema.

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respectively. He himself developed small airways disease after smoking for 10 years. “We’ve all heard the tobacco industry say that there are no ill effects caused by smoking. Well we have plenty of cigarette-caused disease and death right in the R.J. Reynolds family itself,” Patrick Reynolds said, adding, “Now tell me, do you think the cigarette companies are truthful when they tell you that smoking isn’t harmful? What do you think?”

Needless to say, the rise of smoking-related illness and death in the 1950s and 1960s gave many families a personal connection to the factual reports they were seeing on TV and reading in the newspapers. No longer could the link be denied; the epidemic had hit too close to home.

Hollywood, whose stars had long supported and been supported by the tobacco industry since the days of radio, was not spared. The 1950s and early 1960s saw Hollywood lose some of its finest to death by smoking — Humphrey Bogart, for example, died of esophageal cancer in 1957, while longtime Chesterfield champion Gary Cooper died of cancer in 1961. As humorist Frank Scully put it in a 1963 *Variety* piece, “Though the average life-span in the United States is said to be 65, … Hollywood hardly helps our statistics on longevity. Whatever actors may argue to the contrary, their work is not as hard on the old corpus as, say, cutting sugar cane. And yet Hollywood people go down from cancer or heart disease in increasing numbers at comparatively young ages. What is killing far too many stars far too early is a combination of smog and snipes.”

In fact, incidents

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152 Richard Pollay, “Tricks of the Tobacco Trade” (lecture, March 15, 1997).
of smoking-related illness in Hollywood may have contributed to awareness on the issue, building a public face for preventable cardiopulmonary disaster. William Talman of Perry Mason fame became the first actor to film an anti-smoking campaign, partnering with the American Cancer Society and opening his landmark 1968 commercial with the words, “Before I die, I want to do what I can to leave a world free of cancer for my six children.”154 Talman, who smoked three packs a day for most of his adult life, called on viewers to either quit smoking or never pick it up in the first place. In another short film made with the ACS, he related one story about how his father offered him $1,000 and a gold watch if he didn’t smoke before he was 21.

“I lost that case before I was 12. Of all the cases in my whole life that I’ve lost, of all the bets I’ve lost, of all the chances I’ve blown, that one I regret the most today,” he said.155 Talman’s plea was not without controversy; CBS affiliate KNXT initially refused to air the public service announcements “on the grounds of taste,” eventually reversing course and airing them in response to “some phone calls and inquiries.”156

In other media, the conspicuous absence was clear. On one TV Guide cover that ran the week of Talman’s death, a caricature of Johnny Carson was displayed prominently, cigarette in hand and ashtray overflowing. While smoking would slowly fade from TV Guide covers, this phasing-out would take years — cigarettes and pipes could still be seen gracing the covers in the early 1970s. The

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156 “KNXT Reverses Gears; To Air Talman Plea,” Variety, October 22, 1968, 9.
next Carson cover, however, an August 15, 1970 Norman Rockwell rendering, would be notably sans cigarette. Similar to Talman, William Gargan of the TV and radio program *Martin Kane, Private Investigator*, (sponsored by the U.S. Tobacco Company), was diagnosed with throat cancer in 1958, and in 1960 had surgery to remove his larynx. He eventually learned to speak using an artificial voice box, using his platform to become an activist against the dangers of smoking.\(^{157}\) As Hollywood’s longtime tobacco fixation began to catch up, many celebrities used their considerable platform to send an anti-smoking message, no doubt a risky move at a time when most studios and leading stars were sponsored by cigarette companies. Their advocacy, however, undoubtedly hastened a public shift in American opinion.

As smoking-related illness hit Hollywood, the television industry was also undergoing a massive change in advertising structure; single-sponsorship’s time was running out. As the medium of television began to pick up momentum, single-sponsorship lost its allure. The sponsors had become too powerful, and the advertising system proved both difficult to sustain and diminishingly lucrative. After all, for single-sponsorship to work, there needed to be a plethora of companies with the funds needed to sustain a show. Enter: NBC President Pat Weaver. Weaver’s own career history mirrored the industry’s power shift. As a Young & Rubicam ad man and as advertising manager for American Tobacco, Weaver started out at a time when the agencies and the sponsors exercised unprecedented control over programming. However, as Weaver made the shift to television, he was resolved to take back control of the airwaves. “Now Weaver was determined that control should shift to the networks,” media scholar Erik Barnouw writes. “He pushed hard for the ‘magazine concept,’ under which advertisers bought insertions in programs produced and controlled by the network.”\(^{158}\) Under the

magazine concept, which persists today, a single sponsor’s individual power is limited, and the company’s influence on programming is diluted. This shift became apparent over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, with 75 single-sponsored primetime shows on the three networks in the 1955 to 56 season, but only 12 in the 1964 to 65 season.\textsuperscript{159} For cigarette companies, this meant that they could no longer control how their product was portrayed on television, that they could no longer co-opt the medium to cast doubt on the link between smoking and poor health. A key pillar of cigarette companies’ public relations strategy had officially crumbled.

As pressure mounted in scientific circles and in Hollywood, politicians began to feel the heat. In 1961, the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, the National Tuberculosis Association, and the American Public Health Association addressed a letter to President John F. Kennedy calling for a national commission on smoking. It was long overdue, they said, and the question — whether or not there was a decisive causal link between smoking and illness — demanded immediate action. The following year, Surgeon General Luther Terry announced that he would convene a committee of experts to conduct a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on the smoking question.\textsuperscript{160} Candidates qualified for the commission only if they had not previously taken a stand on tobacco use, and the commission’s report was issued on January 11, 1964, a Saturday. (Terry had chosen the weekend so as to minimize any effect on the stock market and to maximize coverage in the Sunday papers.)\textsuperscript{161} Looking back on the event two decades later, Terry recalled, “[the report] hit the country like a bombshell. It was front page news and a lead story on every radio and television station in the United States and many

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
abroad.”\textsuperscript{162} The report estimated that the average smoker had a nine- to ten-fold risk of lung cancer compared to non-smokers, and that heavy smokers had a twenty-fold risk. Smoking was also linked to chronic bronchitis, emphysema, coronary heart disease, and low birth weight in newborns. On one issue, however, “the committee hedged: nicotine addiction. It insisted that the ‘tobacco habit should be characterized as an habituation rather than an addiction,’ in part because the addictive properties of nicotine were not yet fully understood, in part because of differences over the meaning of addiction.”\textsuperscript{163} The report caused a crisis of faith in the TV industry, as many network chiefs felt “that tv, as the nation’s leading ‘persuader’ of cigaret use, must decide between its moral obligation and its highly profitable cigaret advertising franchise,” \textit{Variety} reported. “Reduced to the heat of cold statistics, they equate $130,000,000 in revenues with 41,000 lung cancer deaths a year — or a tv ‘sacrifice’ of a little more than $3,000 for a life.”\textsuperscript{164}

There would probably be changes to how TV networks approached cigarette advertising, but a voluntary full stop to tobacco ads would be unlikely, given the cash cow nature of the industry, \textit{Variety} asserted. While the Terry report had little initial effect on cigarette companies’ TV ad buys — the quantity went up and the time slots went earlier, \textit{Variety} reported\textsuperscript{165} — the report’s effect on American popular opinion was substantial in the years to come. A 1958 Gallup poll found that only 44 percent of respondents believed that cigarette smoking is a cause of lung cancer; that number had risen to 70 percent by 1969.\textsuperscript{166} Thus, the official report’s conclusiveness had a positive impact on the consensus gentium, collectively bringing the American public to the realization that, yes, this was real. At long last, there was a scientific report out there that did not

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.  
beat around the bush, that had not been tainted by cigarette companies. Media reaction would be swift.

Change came first to print, with some publications taking immediate action. Following the 1964 report, *The New Yorker* stopped taking cigarette advertisements, a prompt editorial condemnation. Other publications soon followed: *The Boston Globe* stopped in 1969, and *The New York Times* announced that, as of January 1, 1970, it would accept cigarette ads only if they contained, “in plainly legible form,” a warning concerning the health hazards of smoking.\footnote{167} Largely owing to Hollywood’s close ties with the tobacco industry, TV was something of a holdout. However, the Federal Communications Commission soon stepped in and forced change. Starting in 1967, the FCC mandated that television stations air anti-smoking ads at no cost in order to offset the effect of paid cigarette advertisements.\footnote{168} Citing the Fairness Doctrine, the FCC claimed that years of tobacco-sponsored programming had controlled the narrative inappropriately, requiring correction. Cigarette ads were subsequently banned entirely from TV and radio in 1970, ending, once and for all, tobacco companies’ rule over the airwaves. The pressure from public health advocates had come to a head, and President Richard Nixon, an eight-bowl-a-day pipe smoker, reluctantly acquiesced.\footnote{169} The ban took effect at midnight on January 2, 1971. “That gave cigarette companies a final chance to advertise on TV during the New Year’s Day college bowl games. The last televised cigarette ad ran at 11:50 p.m. during ‘The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson.’”\footnote{170} It was supposed to be a decisive conclusion to the longtime tobacco debate, ending what had been a messy fight waged over the airwaves.

\footnote{167}{Thomas Whiteside, “The Fight to Ban Smoking Ads,” *The New Yorker*, June 18, 2017.}
\footnote{169}{Andrew Glass, “Congress bans cigarette ads on the air, April 1, 1970,” Politico, April 1, 2009.}
\footnote{170}{Ibid.}
But victory would not come so easily. Cutting their losses, tobacco companies took to print, targeting market segments outside of their longstanding bread-and-butter consumer base of white, middle class men. Now cigarette companies targeted with fervor women and African-Americans, also amping up their advertising in the youth market with the creation of cartoon characters like R.J. Reynolds’ Joe Camel. The proof was in the numbers: from 1970 to 1990, the tobacco industry’s investment in magazine ads increased from $50,018,000 to $328,143,000.\(^{171}\)

Appearing almost exclusively in print, this advertising campaign drew a clear and evident line between those print publications that accepted cigarette advertising and those that did not. Cigarette advertising, notably absent for the most part in TV Guide’s earlier years, began to crop up at unprecedented rates in the mid- to late-1960s, even appearing on the back of the front cover published the week of Talman’s death.

Three full-page TV Guide cigarette ads from 1968, the last from the issue published the week of Talman’s death.

In the late 1970s, Dr. Elizabeth Whelan was tasked with writing a report, “Protect Your Man from Cancer,” for Harper’s Bazaar, geared at the magazine’s female readership. However,

the piece was never published in full due to its frequent references to tobacco. “I was paid in full for the piece, but the editor frankly explained to me that they could use only a small part of it because of my frequent mention of tobacco and the fact that they ran three full-page cigarette ads each month,” Whelan said later of the event. “On other occasions, I have been told up front by the editor of a publication, ‘no columns or stories on tobacco.’”\(^{172}\)

This type of policy was nearly consistent across the board. A study of ten prominent women’s magazines that carried cigarette advertisements found that there were only eight feature articles on the dangers of smoking published between 1967 and 1979; four of those magazines carried no anti-smoking articles in the entire 12-year period.\(^{173}\) In contrast, two magazines that did not accept cigarette advertising, *Good Housekeeping* and *Seventeen*, ran 11 and five anti-smoking articles in that period, respectively.\(^{174}\) “Our data suggest that the tobacco industry may have responded to decreases in the number of smokers and the per capita consumption of cigarettes with an enterprising attempt to recruit new smokers — particularly young people and women,” reported one study published in *Health Education Quarterly*. “In addition, there is evidence that the tobacco industry has allocated substantial revenue to the promotion of cigarettes in women’s and youth magazines.”\(^{175}\)

Women, once seen as a less-desirable market, were now cigarette companies’ new bread and butter.

Similarly, the tobacco industry targeted African-Americans with fervor following the TV and radio ban. Starting in 1971, the annual aggregated number of printed cigarette ads in

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\(^{174}\) Ibid.

traditionally-black magazines *Ebony, Essence,* and *Jet* increased five-fold. While there were approximately 50 cigarette advertisements annually in these three magazines from 1960 to 1970, that number jumped to over 250 by 1971. By 1976, it was 320. These numbers continued to rise and fall with cigarette consumption; whenever tobacco companies were in need of more smokers and more revenue, they would undoubtedly turn to traditionally-black magazines. As mainstream, general-audience publications forsook cigarette advertisers, that revenue stream was turned toward more niche, specific-audience publications. In the wake of the 1970 TV and radio ban, cigarette companies’ marketing strategy also (somewhat insidiously) targeted society’s less powerful: women and African-Americans. The result, however, was that these companies maintained their revenue and their place in American society, thereby making cigarette companies not yet gone, and nowhere near forgotten.

To make matters worse, tobacco companies never truly left the airwaves to begin with. The Fairness Doctrine ceased to apply to anti-smoking advertisements following the 1970 ban, a benefit to cigarette companies. Moreover, many companies skirted the radio and TV ban by advertising through sports, which were still broadcast but were exempt from the ban. Tobacco companies had a long history of using athletes — the epitome of good health and performance — to sell the product. And so it was a natural choice for cigarette companies to shift to sponsorship of nationally televised sporting events when other wells ran dry. The net result of this shift to sports was “a more cost effective and less hard sell way to retain cigarette brand imagery,” writes Dr. Alan Blum, the director of the University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco &

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This sponsorship was everywhere in sports; for example, there was the Philip Morris’ Virginia Slims Women’s Tennis Circuit and the R.J. Reynolds’ Winston Cup NASCAR Series, to name just a couple. By 1994, R.J. Reynolds acknowledged sponsoring 2,736 separate sporting events each year. Televisions’s cigarette battle had been won on paper, but the war was far from over in reality.

Undoubtedly, the 1960s and 1970s were a time for great leaps forward in policy and public stance on the safety of smoking. The groundwork laid on TV in the 1950s, in addition to sponsorship changes and the heightened visibility of smoking-related disease, resulted in the fall of tobacco’s hold on the media, culminating in the 1970 ban. However, this story cannot be considered a clear victory; through their normalization of smoking culture and perpetuation of the cigarette safety falsehood, tobacco companies prolonged the fight against smoking for more than two decades, directly contributing to countless additional deaths by cancer, heart disease, and emphysema. The hazardous effects of smoking are substantially lessened when a person quits sooner rather than later — how many deaths could have been avoided had cigarette companies not exercised so much control over the media? How many times were cancer victims reduced to a dollar amount, a bottom line, for the sake of exponential profit in TV? Through the power of television, cigarettes companies seemed determined to ensure that their product lived up to their colloquial nickname: coffin nails.


\[178\] Ibid.
Conclusion

Thank You for Smoking

Long after it was thought to have been put to rest, the cigarette issue continued to haunt America, the remnants of a popular smoking culture visible in smoking/non-smoking restaurant sections, hotel rooms, and airplane seats. The issue was no longer at the forefront of the American psyche, but it was far from over. As a testament to this, smoking was not banned on international flights until 2000, while the Federal Drug Administration only gained the authorization to regulate tobacco products in 2009. In examining the roots of this national obsession, it is necessary to not only look to the tobacco companies that perpetuated this campaign and this narrative, but also to the forums through which this war was waged. Crucially, television and its massive audience lent cigarette manufacturers the power and the platform to promote the falsehood of cigarette safety and to attract generation after generation of smokers.

Change came gradually over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, with benchmark moments — “Cancer by the Carton,” Leave It to Beaver, Winchell and Murrow’s reports — each chipping away at tobacco’s dominance. At the same time, however, cigarette companies launched a cultural war that spanned network news and popular sitcoms, using the medium to sell this narrative of cigarette dominance and safety. Television was not merely a passive vessel for this normative smoking culture, it was an actor, a weapon in the tobacco war. Examination of this medium is the best indicator of how society struggled with the smoking dilemma because, as author Hanna Rosin once said, “pop culture is like our subconscious.”179 In examining smoking’s effect on television, then, it becomes evident that TV and pop culture grappled immensely with the issue, torn between the cold, hard facts and the cold, hard cash.

This theory is not without flaws, however. Television is perhaps not the best mirror to pop culture after all, as its content goes through a screen of sponsor preferences and network regulation. Using television as a gauge for all of popular opinion and normative culture might therefore be somewhat inadequate, as there may certainly well have been those offscreen who took a more controversial stance on smoking, who stood up to cigarette companies much earlier than their onscreen peers. Perhaps, then, the picture that television paints is much tamer than reality. However, television is still one of the best indicators of mainstream culture, though television-as-pop-culture may be more of a self-actualizing prophecy than a true reflecting mirror. That is, the television shows that remain from the 1950s represent the mainstream line of thought that dominated pop culture at the time, and the cigarette companies’ effect is plainly evident. Television thus begat pop culture, which begat television, all the while promoting this normative smoking culture.

Despite successes along the way — the 1964 Luther Terry report and the 1970 TV and radio ban — smoking is far from done, and perhaps it may never be; according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 37.8 million adults in the United States currently smoke cigarettes, and more than 16 million live with a smoking-related disease.\textsuperscript{180} How much of this number can be chalked up to advertising and cigarette companies’ 20th century media campaign is unclear, but the powerful hold on the American people sets a dangerous precedent for other industries. Already many have studied the similarities between the tobacco industry’s marketing tactics and those seen in industries like fast food or pharmaceuticals.

Now, the tobacco industry is once again returning to its playbook, this time for smoke-free devices like vapes and electronic cigarettes, which do not burn tobacco, instead aerosolizing a nicotine-laced liquid. Once more the industry seeks to undermine public health officials who

\textsuperscript{180} “Smoking & Tobacco Use,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 15, 2018.
express doubt as to the devices’ inherent safety. The tobacco industry has also turned its eye toward youths once more, mass-marketing e-cigarettes in flavors that appeal to children, who need only click a link affirming that they are 18 or older in order to purchase a smokeless device. The future is smokeless after all, but not in the way many intended. Philip Morris, for example, announced in 2018 that it would seek to abandon smoking products for good, instead turning its eye on smokeless devices. “We will be far more than a leading cigarette company,” Philip Morris’ website reads. “We’re building PMI’s future on smoke-free products that are a much better choice than cigarette smoking. Indeed, our vision — for all of us at PMI — is that these products will one day replace cigarettes.” The website goes on to talk about the company’s social responsibility, how it must find the safest product for its consumers and only deliver harmless and quality goods. Sound familiar? It should. These are nearly the same words cigarette companies — Philip Morris included — gave in the 1950s at the height of the smoking debate. Perhaps we are doomed to repeat history, having never quite learned our lesson.

It is still unclear what the long-term health ramifications of smokeless devices may be, though some health experts suggest that the nicotine in these devices still leaves users vulnerable to heart disease and other ailments. As the tobacco industry moves away from cigarettes and toward these smokeless devices, this may become a rich area of study. How will the smokeless device play out in the media, especially in television? Will it continue to follow cigarettes’ trajectory, or will it diverge in a meaningful way? However, it should be no surprise that smokeless devices have begun to replace the cigarette, just as cigarettes eclipsed cigars, pipes,

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chewing tobacco and all the iterations that came before it. After all, smokers will always smoke ’em if they got ’em.
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