

As for the United States, Endara has nothing but pleasant things to say about the government that installed him last December. But Panamanians have never had any clear way to define their nationalism except in opposition to U.S. domination. Endara's mentor had enduring popularity not least because he stood up to the *yanquis* and the army they trained. Torrijos made sovereignty over the canal the centerpiece of his political strategy. Noriega hoped to excuse all his corruption in the name of nationalism—and almost succeeded. Partly thanks to the dictator's bad example, for the moment Endara can cooperate happily with the United States, just as he works with the vice presidents he knows are his opponents-to-be. But Endara learned from his mentor that sooner or later the people he cares about want to see their leaders stand up to the Americans, and he is already staking out his future position toward Washington. "Should the United States meddle," Endara says, "they will find out that I am truly nationalistic."

Toward the end of the interview, Ana Mae comes into his office to pose for pictures. He sits behind his desk. She smooths his lapels, runs her hand over his slick hair, stands behind his elaborately carved chair. "The power behind the throne?" he says with a grin. "Ana Mae's heard that too." He looks at her and smiles. "Just as long as she doesn't believe it."

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Butts (et al.) vs. butts.

TILTING AT BILLBOARDS

By Ben Wildavsky

Nobody paid much attention, says "Mandrake," when he first covered a cigarette billboard featuring black models with white paint in broad daylight on Chicago's South Side last January. "People probably assumed I worked for the billboard company," says the fifty-five-year-old black professional, known by the pseudonym he adopted years ago for radio call-in shows. Since then Mandrake has become notorious for sparking a nationwide billboard-whitewashing crusade, mostly organized through churches, that encompasses black neighborhoods from Oakland to New York.

Mandrake obliterated his first billboard just days after Louis Sullivan, secretary of health and human services, attacked R. J. Reynolds's new brand of Uptown

cigarettes, which was targeted at blacks. Sullivan called for "an all-out effort to resist the attempts of tobacco merchants to earn profits at the expense of the health and well-being of our poor and minority citizens." Reynolds subsequently ditched Uptown, and Sullivan's well-publicized attack, followed by the whitewashing campaign, revived the long-standing fight to keep cigarette and alcohol advertising out of minority neighborhoods. There has already been some success. A number of cities have initiated efforts to ban cigarette and alcohol billboards. Schieffelin & Somerset has canceled all billboard contracts for scotch and cognac in minority areas around the country. And the billboard companies themselves have pledged to help keep cigarette and alcohol ads away from schools, churches, and playgrounds.

But these efforts have not been enough for Mandrake and his followers. Most whitewashers are wary of the motives of the billboard industry and have limited faith in city councils. Fearing First Amendment troubles, cities thus far have typically banned or regulated *all* signs, not specifically those advertising alcohol or tobacco, and they've often done so on aesthetic grounds. Whitewashers say they have nothing against billboards per se—they'd like to see more educational advertising as well as signs for wholesome products such as orange juice. Getting rid of cigarette and alcohol billboards from minority areas—not removing eyesores—is their goal. Drawing parallels to the civil rights actions of the '60s, they say they feel obligated to use civil disobedience to attract attention to their cause.

On a sunny Saturday morning in Harlem in April, the Rev. Calvin O. Butts III stood inside his Abyssinian Baptist Church and spoke in practiced cadences of his audience's "mission of righteousness" and the "corporate evil" they are fighting. Butts is probably the best known of the whitewashers, having orchestrated many well-publicized Saturday morning patrols through the streets of Central Harlem. A special guest this week was Dr. Harold Freeman, director of surgery at Harlem Hospital and co-author of a study finding that men in Harlem have a lower life expectancy than men in Bangladesh, thanks in part to alcohol and tobacco use. "Is it ethical, is it moral," Freeman asked, "to sell [cigarettes and alcohol] specifically to a community that is dying at a much higher rate than others?" Butts then donned a painter's cap and paint-flecked overcoat and, singing "Yield Not to Temptation" ("our battle song"), led his flock out of the church. Up and down the avenues they went, painting signs (with black paint this time, for an Afrocentric twist).

Harlem billboard companies have replaced some of the offending boards. Still dissatisfied, Butts has begun to take "direct action" against tobacco companies. He picketed Philip Morris's New York City headquarters twice in June and once in July.

Dallas County Commissioner John Wiley Price also got attention when he led a group that whitewashed about twenty-five billboards last March: he was arrested

and charged with a misdemeanor. (On July 10 Chicago priest Michael Pflieger was also arrested, for allegedly painting billboards and throwing paint at a billboard company employee.) "We'll do it again," Price told me, noting that he's had little success in negotiating with billboard companies. This may not be surprising; Price wants not only a 50 percent reduction in cigarette and alcohol signs in minority neighborhoods but also an advertising discount of "at least 20 percent" to black and Hispanic businesses.

Not everyone in the black community in Dallas agrees with Price's logic. Adolph Hauntz, co-owner of Ruth's Tamale House and president of the Dallas Merchants and Concessionaires Association, said in an interview, "When we broke the law during the civil rights movement, we were trying to get the door open so we could talk to people. . . . The [billboard] industry will respond to dialogue." He cited a recent public service campaign featuring 5,000 signs nationwide that read "Addiction is Slavery." The campaign has cost the industry \$5 million in donated space.

Hauntz agrees that there are too many cigarette and alcohol ads in black neighborhoods, but he thinks Price "has lost a broad base of African American support because he's taken a paternalistic approach." Whitewashing signs treats blacks "as if we are a stupid bunch of people that are overly influenced by billboards." NAACP Executive Director Benjamin Hooks has made the same point. In a television interview in March Hooks condemned billboard-whitewashing for "saying that white people have enough sense to read the signs and disregard them and black people don't." Sullivan, for his part, told *The Detroit Free Press* that the charge of paternalism regarding blacks and cigarettes is "bullshit." And the whitewashers and their supporters say that comments like Hooks's simply reflect the tobacco and alcohol industries' success at pre-empting criticism of their minority marketing strategies by making large donations to such groups as the NAACP, the United Negro College Fund, and the National Urban League.

When Butts says his actions conform to "a higher moral law—and that's the law of God," he is appealing to an enormously powerful civil rights tradition. But tempting people isn't the same as oppressing them. Unhealthy as cigarettes and alcohol are, no one has to buy them. And in the absence of coercion from the advertisers, the (coercive) use of civil disobedience seems disproportionate.

It's true, of course, that commercial speech doesn't enjoy the same protected status in America as political expression. There is ample precedent for regulating advertising, even for specific products. Warning labels on cigarette ads have been required by law since 1972. And numerous bills pending in Congress would further tighten regulation of tobacco advertising. But banning ads for specific products, whether through federal or local legislation, exposes another problem: Which products should be excluded? Mandrake is angry that one whitewashed billboard was replaced with an ad for

the kind of expensive sneakers that, for some kids, are literally to die for. And a billboard company official complains that overzealous protesters painted over a sign near the Chicago airport advertising electronic beepers to business travelers, presumably because drug dealers often carry beepers. In poor black neighborhoods, where high blood pressure is a serious health problem, should ads for high-cholesterol foods be forbidden?

Though the anti-billboard activists stress a familiar kind of victimology—Butts's campaign explicitly focuses on the notion of sinister (white) corporate forces exploiting the black community—it would be unfair to suggest that they ignore the issue of personal responsibility. There's the personal admonition to "Yield Not to Temptation." And Butts recounts this story: "One brother standing on Lenox Avenue the other day saw us coming by and threw his cigarette away—'You see, Reverend Butts, I'm with you!'" Similarly, Butts's message to children is: "Don't smoke and don't drink—don't even *think* about it! Clean up your *own* community. You have something that *you* can do."

One alternative to covering up these billboards follows from the American political model of countering "bad" speech with "good" speech. California has launched a \$28.6 million anti-smoking campaign using money from cigarette taxes. One television ad targeted at blacks features a short, sharp rap: "We used to pick it. Now they want us to smoke it." Colorado and Montana are considering following suit. Similarly, the federal Office of Substance Abuse Policy recently began a nationwide, 7,000-billboard campaign against drug and alcohol abuse.

Anti-billboard activists are on their firmest ground when talking about the vulnerability of children to intrusive billboards, which in minority areas typically feature young, light-skinned, well-dressed blacks who look sexy, sophisticated, and cool. The Outdoor Advertising Association of America, which represents 80 percent of billboard companies, announced a new policy in June encouraging its members to keep billboard ads for products that are illegal to sell to minors at least 500 feet from schools, places of worship, and hospitals. It also recommended that companies establish voluntary limits on the number of boards that advertise cigarettes and alcohol in a given market, i.e., in minority neighborhoods. Gannett Outdoor, the largest billboard company in North America, has started putting decals on all billboards near schools and churches indicating that no alcohol or tobacco ads are to be posted there.

Underlying the whole controversy, of course, is the ever present issue of race. Sullivan's salty dismissal notwithstanding, the notion that blacks as such need special protection from messages urging them to smoke or drink does smack of paternalism. In the end, targeted advertising is less victimization than plain old marketing.

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