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..Beer Goes to War

THE POLITICS OF BEER PROMOTION AND
PRODUCTION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR



ABSTRACT

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In the Second World War, American brewers launched a massive public relations and advertising campaign to combat a resurgence of prohibitionism. This paper examines how brewers gained the stature of an essential wartime industry—a classification that gave them access to rationed goods denied other industries—despite dry protestations that beer wasted vital foodstuffs. It argues that brewers achieved such success by repoliticizing beer as an emblem of American national identity and linking their fortunes to other wartime food crusades. Brewers convinced military and government officials that brewers' yeast, a byproduct of brewing, provided a rich source of vitamin B complex that could enrich soldiers' rations and boost the productivity of factory workers. By the war's end, the once illicit associations of brewers' yeast with Prohibition-era homebrew had acquired entirely new patriotic associations with victory over fascism and freedom from want. A previously suspect commodity had gained new legitimacy.

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Society

Keywords: advertising, alcohol, beer industry, brewers' yeast, food crusades, prohibitionism, United States Brewers' Foundation, Second World War

Introduction

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Throughout the Second World War, American business saturated mass magazines with advertisements that joined calls for sacrifice with promises of a postwar future of consumer abundance, domestic comfort and marital bliss. Ads for electric appliances, dream kitchens and automobiles beckoned war-weary Americans to imagine a better tomorrow—one that would have to await peacetime, when manufacturers had retooled for civilian production.¹ Industries that still serviced civilian markets, though, had little incentive to stress the virtues and rewards of deferred gratification. These industries, while not completely abandoning appeals to sacrifice, took a different approach. In their "Morale is a Lot of Little Things" collective advertising campaign, American beer producers tied the simple pleasures of drinking a "refreshing glass of beer" with "good friends" and a "home-cooked meal" to the broader war effort. In one such ad, a soldier, writing to his sweetheart from the battlefield and dreaming of a better tomorrow, imagined himself lounging in his backyard hammock, enjoying a glass of beer, his wife's company, and "the kids playing in the orchard" (See Figure 1).² Such wartime images of beer, presented here as a commodified symbol of the "good life" Americans were fighting to defend, advanced the brewers' longtime post-Repeal ambition: to distance beer from its earlier associations

memories of their previous victory in the First World War, when wartime exigencies had swept national prohibition into law, dries saw the return of total war and food conservation as a tantalizing opportunity to revive Prohibition. Indeed, public opinion polls at the beginning of the war indicated that 40 percent of Americans favored some sort of emergency wartime prohibition.³ Yet, despite dry protestations that beer production wasted vital foodstuffs and diverted manpower from urgent wartime needs, government policies allowed beer production to continue largely unabated. Dry efforts to ban beer from army training camps and create dry zones around them also failed in the face of strenuous opposition from military officials and the Secretary of War Henry Stimson. In fact, the government deemed beer sufficiently important to military morale that it required the industry to set aside 15 percent of its wartime production, at modest cost, for the troops. Even more dismaying to dries, brewers' access to rationed goods such as rubber, gasoline and tin cans gave brewing the stature of an essential wartime industry.⁴

This paper examines how brewing, a reviled and decidedly nonessential industry in the First World War, gained such privileged status in the Second World War and why the war proved such a pliable moment for reimagining the place of beer in American life. It seeks to illuminate how war creates opportunities for previously suspect industries and consumer practices to gain new legitimacy, as happened with cigarette smoking in the First World War.⁵ Historians have attributed brewers' happier fortunes in part to a more hospitable political climate—brewers no longer had to contend with the anti-German hysteria that had inflamed public opinion against them in the First World War. Official propaganda generally avoided conflating opposition to Nazis with animus toward the German people and rage over Pearl Harbor focused hostility on the Japanese.⁶ In addition, the federal government was too pragmatic to jeopardize a reliable source of tax revenues as it mobilized for total war.⁷ In times of national emergency, historian David Courtwright has argued, western governments have been especially reluctant to sacrifice revenue from “psychoactive commerce.”⁸ Others have argued that brewers' more favorable treatment merely ratified a revolution in morals and manners that had been underway since the 1920s. The Second World War, in historian Jay Rubin's words, “only confirmed what repeal had already signaled—an end to decades of serious national conflict over the temperance issue.”⁹

Such interpretations might lead one to conclude that brewers' wartime victories were a foregone conclusion—the inevitable outcome of expedient regulatory policies and cultural shifts that rendered dries a nuisance but certainly not a serious threat. Brewers at the time did not see it that way—if they had learned anything from their failure to defeat national prohibition it was to never underestimate the enemy. “The mental attitude that ...

pervaded the country concerning Prohibition was not stamped out with Repeal,” *The American Brewer* warned in 1942. Now, “more than ever,” the trade journal continued, “great effort is necessary to keep the Drys from dividing and confusing the public once again.”¹⁰ Dry victories in 9,000 of 15,000 local option elections held between 1933 and 1945 attest to the legitimacy of brewers’ concerns.¹¹ Treating the triumph of beer as inevitable underestimates the significance of the Second World War as a transformative moment for alcoholic beverage industries and slights the important cultural and political work that helped brewers legitimize their product.

The significance of the beer industry’s enhanced wartime stature can be better understood by examining how brewers *repoliticized* alcohol and linked their fortunes to other wartime food crusades. As food historians have shown, wartime systems of food controls and food rationing have alternately worked to reinforce and overturn existing social hierarchies and moral orders. On the one hand, wartime food controls have often become intertwined with moral crusades to control other forms of “untrustworthy consumption,” especially the consumption of alcoholic beverages. On the other hand, war has also created opportunities to reinvent and redefine the meanings of food precisely because it disrupts established social conventions surrounding eating patterns and access to food.¹² The differing American approaches to food controls in the two world wars have special significance for how we understand changing conceptions of virtuous consumption and the shifting fortunes of beer. American food conservation programs in the First World War, Helen Zoe Veit has argued, envisioned the true patriot as an ascetic, self-denying citizen and associated food conservation (and alcohol deprivation) with the moral purification of the individual and the nation.¹³ Drys continued to embrace such notions in the Second World War, but brewers (along with many social scientists) stressed tolerance over moral purity and psychological wellbeing over self-denial as the keys to morale and victory. In their view, the virtuous wartime consumer was a nutrition-conscious cultural pluralist, tolerant of diverse tastes.

Brewers also answered their dry critics by launching a food crusade of their own. Tapping the new science of nutrition, brewers convinced military and government officials that brewers’ yeast, a byproduct of brewing, provided a rich source of vitamin B complex that could enrich soldiers’ rations and boost the productivity of factory workers. Brewers’ promise to fortify the nation (mentally and physically) not only fortified the industry’s links to government bureaucracies and disarmed drys of a key claim against beer—that it wasted vital foodstuffs—but it also helped to transform beer into an emblem of the American way of life. The brewers achieved such success not because repeal had already depoliticized beer but because the industry repoliticized beer in ways that exploited and sometimes harmonized

key tensions in American national identity and American cultural values. Their campaign subtly distanced beer from its roots in ethnic, working-class drinking traditions, even while aligning beer with American virtues of tolerance and cultural pluralism. It embraced the softer appeals of masculine domesticity by shifting the class and milieu of drinking to the middle-class suburban home, yet also preserved beer's associations with the virility of soldiers and industrial workers. Finally, it made the pursuit of private pleasures compatible with wartime sacrifice and victory over fascism and want. In all these ways, brewers positioned beer to survive the vicissitudes of war and flourish in the imagined postwar order of consumer plenty and suburban domesticity.

The Resurgence of Prohibitionism

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When the United States entered the Second World War, eight years had passed since the repeal of Prohibition—a turn of events many dries treated more as a temporary setback than a permanent defeat. During these years, dries had won 7,700 out of 12,400 local option elections and the looming war encouraged them to step up the pressure.¹⁴ In 1941, even before the United States declared war, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Anti-Saloon League, ministers and their Protestant congregations—many from dry counties and states with long traditions of prohibitionism—began flooding Congress with petitions supporting Senate Bill 860.¹⁵ Introduced by Senator Morris Sheppard, chairman of the Military Affairs Committee and a major champion of the Eighteenth Amendment, S860 proposed to ban all alcohol from military training camps and create “moral zones” that would outlaw prostitution and alcohol from the vicinity of the camps. Though seeming to target only military personnel, the Sheppard Bill was not a modest proposition: the wide, ten-mile dry zones could potentially encompass entire cities such as San Francisco, New Orleans, Los Angeles, New York and Chicago where the army or navy was stationed.

In urging passage of the bill, dry petitioners revived arguments they had successfully employed in the previous world war. Some petitions supporting the Sheppard Bill issued broader calls for full wartime prohibition, arguing that the alcohol trade sabotaged the war effort by wasting manpower, grain, fuel, sugar and shipping space.¹⁶ Many other petitions invoked maternalist rhetoric to plea for the “Defense of our Defenders” against the twin evils of prostitution and intoxicating liquors, beer and wine.¹⁷ “Do not return [our boys] to us labeled—CONTAMINATED, DAMAGED GOODS,” one mother wrote to Congress. “A government that stops at martial training, and utterly ignores the moral and physical phase of the flower of our American manhoods placed in its care, is abetting the enemy.”¹⁸ The fall of the French

Republic to Nazi control struck other petitioners as compelling evidence of alcohol's power to strip enlisted men—as well as nations—of their virtue, virility and determination to resist fascism. One widely circulated petition, headlined “ALCOHOL—Hitler's Best Friend, America's Worst Enemy,” blamed alcohol for the “downfall” of wine-loving France.¹⁹ How could the United States in turn expect to defeat the Nazis if its own servicemen could not practice self-denial? “Germany bans beer from her army in order to win the war,” one petition scolded, while “France admits she lost because her soldiers drank freely.”²⁰ (Never mind that the Nazis requisitioned thousands of cases of French champagne to ship to the front.²¹)

Modern Brewery Age saw the Sheppard Bill as an ominous sign that “the ghost of national prohibition has returned and will attempt to come to life under the guise of wartime need.”²² Opponents mounted a counter petition drive with the aid of beer wholesalers, the Liquor Dealers' Association, the International Brewery Workers' Union and various hotel associations.²³ Petitioners cast the Sheppard Bill as a conspiracy by professional drys to reinstate national prohibition and an unnecessary usurpation of military authority to regulate alcohol consumption in the armed forces. The National Council of State Liquor Dealers' Associations protested that the bill would furnish “a fertile field for bootleg operations” and “deprive those men who have made great sacrifice to protect us, of the personal liberties and privileges enjoyed by all Americans and which the Nation has vowed to defend.”²⁴

Although dry petitions to Congress outnumbered wet petitions, wets had one important advantage: most military officials—including several high-ranking officials—shared their views. The American Legion and the American Federation of Labor joined Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox and Secretary of War Henry Stimson in strenuously opposing the Sheppard Bill and related amendments to the draft bill. Not only would such measures deliver a serious blow to morale, Stimson wrote in a letter to the Senate, but flat prohibition would likely also invite greater excesses as soldiers inevitably turned to speakeasys and bootleggers outside the camps. Temperance could be better attained, Stimson argued, through the current practice of selling light 3.2 percent beer on military premises, where beer consumption could be supervised and controlled.²⁵ About half the potency of regular beer, 3.2 percent beer was, indeed, a mild mood enhancer—enough of a morale booster, military officials calculated, to compensate for the deprivations of military life while keeping servicemen from less wholesome activities off the reservation. The logic of providing access to 3.2 percent beer followed much the same logic the military used when they introduced cigarettes in the First World War to divert servicemen from drink, prostitution and gambling.²⁶ In the Second World War, however, the military had no illusions that controlling minor vices would eradicate more objectionable vices. Moral

purification was not on the agenda. In fact, one of the military's strongest objections to the Sheppard Bill was that it would compel the military to regulate the drinking habits not only of military personnel but also of civilians who resided in the wide dry zones adjacent to military installations.²⁷

Participants on both sides of the revived wet-dry war defined the stakes in highly gendered terms. While dry petitioners envisioned the military as a kind of surrogate parent, entrusted with guarding the morals of its charges, wet petitioners, who not coincidentally were predominantly male, chafed at the notion that army men needed such protection. Anti-prohibitionists such as C.L. Chapin, secretary-treasurer of Repeal Associates, decried the Sheppard Bill as an emasculating invasion of manly space and manly prerogatives: "A man is old enough to drive a tank, fly a bomber, but not manly enough to go and sit down in his barracks without someone saying: 'Now, Johnny, don't drink that stuff—it'll make you dizzy'."²⁸ Echoing Chapin's sneering contempt for overbearing maternalism, an editorial in the *Chicago Daily News* surmised that:

the roots of [dry] agitation probably lie in jealousy of the soldier by "old women in pants"—and there is a word for it in the dictionary. We doubt if there ever was a time when the civilian average of sobriety was as good as the military and certainly there is nothing to justify branding our present Army as an infantile force needing a nurse.²⁹

Such sentiments resonated with a broader cultural backlash against excessive maternal power and feminine influence—or what Philip Wylie's best-selling 1942 screed *Generation of Vipers* described as "momism," a kind of overly protective mothering that made sons weak and passive. In fact, Wylie's quintessential mom closely paralleled Chapin's vision of the frustrated "old women in pants" who organized dry petition drives. "Mom is organization-minded," Wylie wrote,

Organizations, she has happily discovered, ... frighten politicians to sniveling servility and they terrify pastors ... Mom ... builds clubhouses for the entertainment of soldiers where she succeeds in persuading thousands of them that they are momsick and would rather talk to her than take Betty into the shrubs. All this, of course, is considered social service, charity, care of the poor, civic reform, patriotism, and self-sacrifice.

Despite the impressive showing of dry support, the Sheppard Bill went down to stinging defeat, as did several similar measures that came before Congress in 1942, 1943 and 1944. Prohibitionists failed in part because they adhered too closely to their old political playbook. Their maternalist rhetoric had

struck a powerful chord in the First World War, but had grown stale by the Second World War, as the Progressive Era investment in moral purification gave way to a more pragmatic investment in controlling vice. The Progressive impulse to conflate public morale with private morality also diminished. As we shall see, new conceptions of morale—which elevated the importance of preserving ethnic traditions and maintaining at least some access to pleasure foods—conflicted with the previous emphasis on uniform standards of private morality.

Brewers, however, still had their work cut out. Despite dry failures to enact Prohibition measures at the national level, they continued to rack up local victories and saw “an increase in dry areas during the war years.”³⁰ Nor were brewers’ fortunes secure on the national front. Even if Congress rejected prohibitionist legislation, the government could still deny brewers access to railway lines and gasoline or reduce their supply of malt, which was also needed for livestock feed and industrial alcohol. Wartime concerns about food conservation and chronic shortages of tin, rubber and gasoline limited the political mileage brewers could bank on from the tax revenues they generated. In fact, the real question was not whether brewers would face cutbacks in their rations but how severe they would be. Tin shortages required brewers to package domestic beer in glass bottles instead of cans and rely more on wooden kegs instead of steel or aluminum kegs.³¹ Much to the irritation of dries, however, the government allotted brewers enough tin to make bottle crowns and can beer for the troops overseas.³² Conservation of gasoline and tires limited the number and scope of deliveries, prompting some brewers to put their Clydesdales and horse-drawn wagons back into operation.³³ Thanks to a modest 7 percent cut in brewers’ allotment of malt and malt syrup, brewers had to mix in more corn and rice to stretch the supply.³⁴ The new blend produced a thinner and blander brew but still kept the breweries humming. In short, reduced supplies of raw materials and packaging were never severe enough to derail beer production. In the near term, distilleries, which converted their entire production to industrial alcohol for the duration, bore the most significant sacrifices. Brewers, one might say, were sitting pretty with military contracts to supply the troops and no significant competitors to satisfy alcoholic tastes (save for American wineries and the existing liquor inventories). The following sections analyze how and why brewers were able to maintain such advantages.

Softening Rural Opposition to Beer

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The aggressiveness with which brewers responded to the dry resurgence in the Second World War owed something to lessons learned from their failure to defeat Prohibition. The brewers’ most fatal mistake was underestimating

dry political power. In the lead-up to national prohibition, brewers opted to douse prohibitionist fires as they erupted in states and municipalities instead of developing an aggressive national public relations campaign. Even so, dry triumphs in rural local option contests did not overly concern brewers because the beer market was “almost entirely urban” and the steady growth of urban populations was trending in their favor.³⁵ Brewers also gambled that tax revenues from beer sales, which had given brewers political leverage to fend off prohibitionist measures in previous wars, would do the same in the First World War. Divisions within the United States Brewers Association further hindered the formulation of a consistent national strategy. While some embraced saloon regulation and self-reform, others persisted in believing that beer—the beverage of “true temperance”—would be spared from prohibition and resisted aligning themselves with distillers.³⁶

The Second World War gave brewers the opportunity to revisit these failures and develop a coherent national strategy that harmonized earlier divisions within the industry. They embraced self-policing and regulation of army canteens and taverns where beer was sold, but also held fast to their conviction that promoting beer as a moderate beverage could enhance beer’s respectability and blunt the effectiveness of dries. Now they also viewed local option contests in a more sinister light. Conceding any victory to dries in rural elections only abetted prohibitionists in their post-Repeal strategy to reenact Prohibition piecemeal through a string of local option victories.³⁷

The primary responsibility for creating a coherent national public relations campaign fell to J. Walter Thompson, a prominent advertising agency hired by the United States Brewers Foundation (USBF) in 1942. J. Walter Thompson developed a multi-pronged media campaign aimed at distinct consumer and political constituencies. To reach a broad middle-class audience, the USBF ran full-page, sometimes full-color ads in mainstream mass magazines such as *Life*, *Liberty*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Woman’s Home Companion*, *Colliers*, *Time*, *Newsweek* and *US News*. These beautifully illustrated ads, featuring paintings by American commercial artists, situated beer in wholesome Rockwellian scenes of domesticity and private life.³⁸ The USBF’s campaign also targeted Americans who lived in small towns and rural areas where prohibitionist sentiments persisted and local option frequently appeared on the ballot. To win over this more resistant rural audience, J. Walter Thompson created a recurring advertorial column entitled “From Where I Sit” that appeared in farm papers and small-town newspapers. Signed by the fictive Joe Marsh, an avuncular town leader, the advertorials preached the virtues of tolerance through homey stories of small-town life (see Figure 2).

Many Joe Marsh columns aggressively defended the beer industry against prohibitionist assaults. Throughout the war, dries maintained that drinking imperiled the war effort by wasting precious raw materials, encouraging



From where I sit ... *by* Joe Marsh

Definition of a Great Man

At IHI Webster's the other evening, we were kidding IHI about his children always saying that their pop's "a great man."

"Well, the kids are right," chuckles Bill. "Everybody in America's a great man. You just can't be part of greatness and not share in it."

In America (argues Bill) things that used to belong only to the great are common (or) ordinary: a share in government through the right to vote; individual liberties guaranteed by constitution; freedom to speak

one's mind, to work at what one pleases, to choose what one likes to eat or drink . . . whether beer or hotchkiss.

But from where I sit, there's one important point I add . . . to make Bill's definition ring true. We must be worthy of this greatness. We must have the humility to appreciate these blessings . . . never abuse them with intemperance, intemperance, or indifference.

Joe Marsh

Copyright, 1945, United States Brewers Foundation

Reprinted from *Advertising Age*, Feb. 1946

FIGURE 2: Joe Marsh column, United States Brewers' Foundation advertisement, 1945. Courtesy John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Duke University.

"loose speech," and contributing to absenteeism and drunkenness in the army camps. Drys had even blamed excessive alcohol consumption for the failure of American soldiers to defend Pearl Harbor against Japanese attack. To counter such arguments, brewers matched hyperbole for hyperbole. Turning the table on drys who decried loose-lipped drunks, one Joe Marsh column asserted that the "loose talk" of drys undermined morale "as much . . . as any rumor that the Axis could invent." "Loose talk has dug a lot of graves . . . and done a lot of harm here at home, too," Marsh wrote. "You hear, for instance, talk about our soldiers drinking and carousing around Army

Camps.” Marsh debunked those claims by citing a 1941 Office of War Information report that characterized American soldiers as “the soberest ... best behaved in history,” and urged patriotic readers to “spike that kind of sabotage before it spreads.”³⁹ Other Marsh columns charged that rumors about excessive drinking in army camps were in reality “lies planted by the Axis to destroy American morale.”⁴⁰ German propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels eagerly spread such rumors over short-wave radio, Marsh surmised, because he wanted morale-building beer out of the camps. “From where I sit ... the Nazis would a heap rather face an army that already *lost* its rights than one that was fighting for freedom it could touch and taste and feel every day.”⁴¹

These columns rewrote the rhetorical battle-lines of the wet-dry wars, casting brewers as the protectors of American liberty and prohibitionists as the unwitting allies of the enemy. Because some international leaders of the prohibition movement had voiced support for fascist leaders before the war—something the USBF relished repeating in trade journals and press releases—some readers might have inferred from Marsh’s column that prohibitionists were Nazi sympathizers themselves.

Generally, however, the brewers’ campaign focused less on vilifying prohibitionists than touting beer’s positive contributions to the war effort. What better way to answer dries’ claims that beer wasted precious resources than to highlight the government services and war materiel funded by beer tax revenues? “Right here in Iowa, for instance,” Marsh wrote in 1942, “the taxes from beer last year alone were more than enough to pay for fourteen 4-engine bombers, seventy-four fighter airplanes, or one hundred and eleven medium tanks.” J. Walter Thompson adapted the same column to reflect the buying power of beer revenues in the 20 different states in which the column appeared.⁴² By forging such concrete connections between beer revenue and war production, the Marsh column might well have encouraged individuals to imagine their private beer consumption as a patriotic activity—perhaps not on par with purchasing war bonds, but nonetheless a guilt-free private pleasure with public benefits. Like much other wartime propaganda, the brewers’ public relations campaign attempted to establish what historian Mark Weiner has called “the *moral equivalence* of consumer products.” By connecting “the mundane objects of personal life with the materiel of national combat,” Weiner has argued, wartime propaganda “symbolically transform[ed] what was private into what was public.”⁴³

Brewers also reminded Americans of the beer industry’s contributions to economic prosperity. Each day, Marsh reported, the beer industry “pays more than a million dollars” in federal, state and local taxes. By generating jobs and purchasing grain during the Great Depression, Marsh noted, the beer industry had helped to restore prosperity to both the farm economy and the industrial sector. The Marsh column also attempted to curry favor with

rural and small-town Americans by firmly aligning brewers with the New Deal welfare state. Beer tax revenues, after all, had helped fund public health services, emergency relief, old-age assistance, education and public welfare.⁴⁴ Such arguments could appeal to New Deal Democrats who supported the expansion of the welfare state, but they might also sway conservatives who would rather rely on beer taxes than income taxes. Indeed, these very economic trade-offs entered the legislative tug of war over wartime prohibition. In South Carolina, for example, opponents weakened one prohibition bill by making its enactment conditional upon finding an alternative source for the state's \$3 million annual liquor tax revenue.⁴⁵

Central to the brewers' economic case for beer was their contention that the return of wartime prohibition would drain public coffers of beer tax revenues and place that money in unsavory hands. "It wasn't so long ago," Joe Marsh reminded readers, that "a lot of that money was going into pockets of bootleggers and gangsters."⁴⁶ By tapping recent memories of flourishing black markets for alcohol during Prohibition, brewers not only recalled the futility of Prohibition, but they also piggy-backed onto the government's own "Food Fights for Freedom" campaign, which called upon Americans to fight black markets for meat, sugar and other rationed goods.⁴⁷ Patriotic Americans, another Marsh column intimated, might even enlist beer itself in the fight against black markets. A "tangy ice-cold beer" could lessen the temptations of the black market, Marsh noted, by brightening limited menus of "unrationed foods and substitutes."⁴⁸ In raising the specter of bootleggers and black markets, brewers undoubtedly hoped to claim the some of the same moral high ground as the government's "Food Fights for Freedom" campaign.

Boosting Morale and Beer's Public Image

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Stressing beer's economic contributions was good public relations, but it did little to promote the pleasures of beer drinking itself. That task fell to the "Morale is a Lot of Little Things" campaign, a series of wartime advertisements in mass magazines and nearly a dozen farm newspapers. The advertisements likened the pleasure of beer drinking to a host of other pastimes and consumer delights that "lift the spirits" and "keep up the courage" in trying times. For "millions of Americans," the copy noted, the "right to enjoy a refreshing glass of beer," though a "small thing," was nonetheless a cherished enjoyment akin to other morale-boosting pleasures:

If you're a man, it's a shine on your shoes ... the sweet feel of a fly rod in your hand ... If you're a woman, it's a tricky new hair-do maybe ... or a change of lipstick. Morale is a lot of little things like

brighten his walk to work; a pretty woman admiring her new hairdo in the beauty salon (see Figure 3).⁵⁰

Brewers were not the only private industry to present consumer goods as aides to wartime morale. Simmons Mattress ads insisted that “Proper rest is not only a basic *right* ... It is almost a duty.”⁵¹ Similarly, the United States Playing Card Company depicted card playing as an “inexpensive recreation” that provided a revitalizing respite from hard work.⁵² Other less self-interested groups, however, also stressed the importance of retaining some private pleasures and measure of individual choice in wartime. Social scientists, for example, recognized that food and drink played a central role in “keeping up spirits.”⁵³ The National Research Council’s Committee on Food Habits, a group of anthropologists, sociologists and home economists charged with recommending ways to help Americans adjust to the rigors of food rationing, cautioned that depriving adults of choice in matters of food could significantly lower morale by making adults feel like dependent children. “Wherever possible,” the committee advised government agencies, “some choice, if only between type of bread or type of beverage, should be included.”⁵⁴ In their *Report on the Morale Building Value of Specific Foods in the American Diet*, the committee also warned that the disappearance of pleasure foods—foods associated with relaxation, hospitality and affection—“would impair morale.” The committee even urged rationing of ice cream, candy, soft drinks and alcoholic beverages to avoid black markets and inflationary prices for sugar and other kinds of psychoactive commerce.⁵⁵ Policymakers surmised that rationing in conjunction with price controls would guarantee both rich and poor equal access to scarce foods and damp down rumors of shortages that often fueled inflation.⁵⁶ In addition, the committee asserted, wartime bans on any kind of food (including beer and wine) that particular ethnic groups prized as “specially valued staples” would undermine the sense of fair play essential to a democratic wartime food control system.⁵⁷ Such recommendations suggest some reasons why the federal government rejected reinstating wartime prohibition: doing so would threaten morale and national unity.

In other respects, however, the early phases of the “Morale is a Lot of Little Things” campaign diverged from other wartime advertising trends. Many private companies typically associated the purchase of their product with support for the war and instructed consumers that their wartime sacrifices would be rewarded with the opportunity to enjoy greater consumer abundance after the war. Promises of future consumer abundance were especially common in ads by home appliance manufacturers and other companies who had diverted consumer production to war needs.⁵⁸ Indeed, domestic wartime propaganda often stressed, “This is no time to relax” and warned of dire consequences if public commitment slackened. Beer ads were a far cry from the common emphasis on immediate sacrifice and

deferred gratification, as they seemingly promised to erase the war, if only momentarily.

Brewers' invitations to relaxation and personal pleasure, however, could potentially backfire with American consumers. For one, overemphasizing pleasure might revive associations of alcohol and excess. Brewers avoided supplying dries with easy ammunition by stressing the temperate qualities of beer. Americans, USBF ads noted, enjoyed a "glass of beer"—note the single serving—"with friends" and "wholesome American food ... as a beverage of moderation after a good day's work." Beer in this light provided a "moment of relaxation" that left drinkers "refresh[ed]" (presumably for another "good day's work") rather than anesthetized.⁵⁹ The campaign was potentially problematic in other respects. Some might think that beer consumption flouted government requests to save money and buy more war bonds by decreasing luxury spending.⁶⁰ The brewers' call to relaxation might also have alienated the 70 percent of Americans who, according to an August 1942 poll, felt they "had not been asked to make enough sacrifices for the war."⁶¹

That brewers felt compelled to ease such guilt was most directly apparent in a Marsh column centered on the curmudgeonly Doc McGinnis, who complained at the church supper in Marsh's fictive town that "we oughtn't to be enjoyin' ourselves when American soldiers are over there fightin' a war."⁶² Such sentiments echoed concerns raised by the Committee on Food Habits. In a memo to committee members, Margaret Mead observed that some groups in wartime—especially soldiers, but even defense workers—feel more entitled to pleasure foods because they bear heavier burdens and experience greater deprivations.⁶³ To be effective then, the brewers' advertising and public relations campaign could not simply affirm beer's value as a morale booster. It needed to give Americans permission to indulge while still preserving some notion of sacrifice. It needed, in short, to make beer consumption a patriotic activity.

Small variations in the "Morale is a Lot of Little Things" campaign accomplished that goal. J. Walter Thompson tied the morale of soldiers to the preservation of beer drinking traditions on the home front. For many a GI stationed overseas, ads observed, enjoying a glass of beer ranked among "the little things—the small familiar pleasures—that he thinks of when he dreams of home."⁶⁴ Small insets featuring a GI writing home about what he missed most shifted the advertising campaign's focus from the need for rest and recreation on the home front to the yearnings of soldiers on the battlefield. A thirst-quenching glass of beer appeared in the backdrop of some advertising images, but the primary illustration usually depicted the soldier's longing for the distant pleasures and comforts of civilian life: his "hammock ... hanging in the orchard," his "spry old mare," or the family's pumpkin carving tradition on Halloween (see Figure 1).⁶⁵ Making beer a secondary focus in the advertising images, however, paradoxically elevated

its cherished association with home. How better to Americanize beer than to associate it with images of American holiday rituals, lazy summer days and a favorite animal on the farm. Even more strikingly, advertisements never depicted young men enjoying beer in uniform or in military settings, even though brewers had dedicated 15 percent of their production to military needs. GIs consumed more Coca-Cola, Wrigley's gum and Hershey's chocolate than beer, but all of these producers, including brewers, had won access to rationed goods because the military and government policymakers had deemed their products good for morale.⁶⁶

Brewers joined scores of other private advertisers in the Second World War who defined war aims in private, individualistic terms that associated consumption with the American way of life. The Marsh column insisted that soldiers would want Americans to “keep up the little friendly customs they remember—like the evening get-togethers and a glass of beer with friends and all the little pleasures *they* look forward to enjoying.”⁶⁷ “From where I sit,” Marsh counseled, “one of our most sacred obligations here at home is to keep those little things exactly as they remember them—to keep intact the world they're fighting for.”⁶⁸ Americans who felt guilty about enjoying beer while soldiers made bolder sacrifices on the battlefield could comfort themselves that their beer consumption was preserving a “right” cherished by GIs—the right to enjoy beer with friends and a good meal. Because the Marsh column targeted readers in areas where prohibitionist sentiments thrived, Marsh urged his readers to actively defend such rights against external threats. A vignette about Esther Curless, a soldier's mom who chased away a tramp sleeping in the hammock her son loved to lounge in with a cool glass of beer, made the point well. “It ain't only that I don't like laziness,” says Esther, “specially in wartime. It's that that particular hammock is Ned's hammock—and Ned's *fightin' for it* overseas!” Marsh not surprisingly applauded Esther for “wanting to defend those ‘little things’ from all intruders.”⁶⁹ By equating those who would trample cherished consumer freedoms with slackers—the true home-front villains—brewers sought to reclaim the moral high ground that prohibitionists ostensibly occupied in small towns and rural America. Just as the rolling-pin wielding Esther Curless had chased away a freeloading intruder, brewers hoped that patriotic voters would deliver a knockout punch to prohibitionists in the next local option election.

Foregrounding the wants and needs of GIs not only helped brewers define beer drinking as a patriotic activity, but it also afforded brewers the opportunity to strengthen generational allegiances to beer. Brewers candidly acknowledged such ambitions. A 1941 issue of *Brewers Digest*, for example, viewed the establishment of army camps as “a chance . . . to cultivate a taste for beer in millions of young men who will eventually constitute the largest beer-consuming section of our population.”⁷⁰ Drys immediately pounced on

such politically inept statements as evidence of alcohol producers' intentions to corrupt the nation's youth, but their outcries failed to dampen anti-prohibition sentiment among GIs. In fact, GI opposition to wartime prohibition was strong and well publicized. An overwhelming 85 percent of American servicemen polled by the British Institute of Public Opinion described themselves as wet.⁷¹ Many GIs viewed the reinstatement of Prohibition, even as a temporary wartime measure, as an infringement on their rights. As journalist Ernie Pyle reported:

There is a great deal more talk along the line of "Those Bluenoses back home better not try to put prohibition over on us while we're away this time" than you hear about bills and resolutions looking toward the postwar world.⁷²

From the GIs' perspective, reinstating wartime prohibition represented an affront to the principle of equality of sacrifice. Much as the student sit-ins at Woolworth stores later in the 1960s "used the image of *denied* hamburgers and Cokes" to challenge the denial of black civil rights, GIs (or so the brewers imagined) saw the denial of beer as a denial of personal liberty.⁷³

Generational shifts in attitudes toward drinking gave credence to brewers' efforts to link support for beer to support for the troops. Making beer drinking on the home front into a patriotic act required a bit more imagination. The Marsh column frequently coupled beer drinking with notions of home-front sacrifice, as deserved compensation for civilian hardships and civilian contributions to the war effort. In some columns, for example, Marsh reported that the residents of his small town enjoyed beer after a "good day's work" collecting scrap metal or harvesting food.⁷⁴ Gasoline rationing and the use of trains by servicemen may have curtailed vacation travel, but Americans instead, Marsh testified, were learning to vacation at home and enjoy barbeques with family, friends, and a "glass of cold beer."⁷⁵ "We're all of us working hard at our jobs, doing our level best to pull our weight," Marsh wrote. "And we're learning the *little* rewards ... are more welcome now than ever ... because we've earned them!"⁷⁶ For Americans inclined to view alcohol consumption as detrimental to the work ethic, these vignettes about hard-working, patriotic beer drinkers provided a more reassuring vision of the morale-boosting effects of beer. In contrast to the earlier advertising images of relaxed fly-fishermen, the Marsh column strengthened beer's moral legitimacy by associating it with industrious civilians and housewives who shunned slackers.

Toward the end of the war, the USBF abandoned the defensive positioning of beer as a patriotic morale booster for the bolder assertion that "Beer belongs ... enjoy it."⁷⁷ The "Home Life in America" advertising campaign unveiled in *Time*, *US News* and the *American Legion* targeted middle-class consumers—a market segment brewers had struggled to



Western Barbecue by FREDERICK BARKIN
The enjoyment of light, delicious and unique food by America's greatest cooks.



*As delicious as one of our great western steaks, this
beef is from England's finest. Well known as a food for
the land we love, the land that today we fight for.*

*In this America of bold men and good horses, of courage
to face our greatest enemy, perhaps the bravest man
travels. Perhaps that's why we're friendly here, and the
right to enjoy this is a way of remembering. They, too,
are a part of our own American history of personal freedom.*

THE UNITED STATES BREWERS' FOUNDATION

Beer belongs... enjoy it

FIGURE 4: United States Brewers' Foundation advertisement, 1945.

capture since Repeal. The ads in this series forged new associations of beer drinking with Americanness by linking beer to time-honored American pastimes in various regions of the country: raising the community roof, the western barbecue, a Boston Pops concert (see Figure 4).⁷⁸ Beer also appeared in homier settings as the celebratory beverage that welcomed home an uncle from the West or toasted the arrival of Christmas when grandmother hung the mistletoe. Painted by leading American artists, the advertising illustrations evoked nostalgia for small-town life, where extended

families, community involvement, and white picket fences symbolized the stability many Americans yearned for in the wake of wartime disruptions and separations. The popularity of Norman Rockwell and the small-town pastoral musical, a film genre that included *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) and *State Fair* (1945), attests to the powerful appeal of such nostalgic images in the last years of the war.⁷⁹

For brewers, however, invoking the wholesomeness of small-town life to promote the wholesomeness of beer was not without its ironies. Brewers, after all, sought to reform small-town America—to inspire in its residents a more cosmopolitan tolerance for drinking—yet they happily appropriated nostalgia for small-town life to gain mainstream acceptance. Other forms of nostalgia also inspired the “Home Life” campaign. Brewers traded on familiar images of family togetherness and material abundance in wartime advertising and poster art, most famously evoked in Norman Rockwell’s *Freedom from Want* poster. For many Americans in the Second World War, historian Amy Bentley has argued, observing familiar rituals, particularly those surrounding food, helped to ease feelings of uncertainty about all the social upheavals caused by war.⁸⁰ Like Rockwell’s *Freedom from Want* poster, the brewers’ ads provided a reassuring vision of the private life and material plenty that Americans were fighting to preserve.

At the same time, however, the USBF exploited the transformative possibilities of war by trying to generate new food traditions and new cultural expectations of which foods and beverages were essential to multigenerational family gatherings and marital harmony. The beer industry made the new familiar by situating beer in such iconographic representations of domesticity, leisure and material abundance. Relocating beer consumption to the private sphere and public sites of heterosocial recreation, such as the Boston Pops concert, normalized drinking as respectable and also revised older gendered connotations of beer drinking.⁸¹ Once the focus of male sociability outside the home, beer drinking now called forth a new kind of “masculine domesticity” that encouraged men to spend their leisure in the company of their wives and families.⁸² Even when beer appeared in traditionally male settings, such as the iconic Western barbecue, the USBF ad presented a domesticated vision of male sociability. How much tamer could beer drinking be with one ranch hand tending the grill (one of the few domestic duties assigned to men), two more absorbed in private reverie, and the five others conversing with each other or with a cowgirl, as the Indian woman waited on their table (see Figure 4)?⁸³ Traditionalizing beer in these ways testified to brewers’ hopes and conviction that beer would have an enduring place in American life and leisure beyond the war.

If the visual rhetoric of the brewers’ campaign gestured toward Rockwell’s *Freedom from Want*, its verbal rhetoric found far more resonance with the

libertarian strains of the “Four Freedoms.” Aligning too closely with freedom from want posed significant risks for brewers. Doing so would not only limit brewers’ ability to link beer with some notion of sacrifice—consumers had the right to choose beer not an entitlement to it—but it might also revive negative associations of beer with indulgence and excess. Instead brewers invoked the positive freedoms associated with liberty of conscience to promote beer. The Marsh column equated consumer freedom—be it the right to choose “beer or buttermilk,” as Marsh frequently framed it—with the most basic political and individual liberties: the right to vote, freedom of speech and freedom of contract. Even if Americans did not agree with another’s choices in matters of politics or personal consumption, Marsh counseled, the guiding American principles of “self respect and tolerance” entitled Americans to exercise those choices freely.⁸⁴

Brewers brought the point home by valorizing tolerance as both a civic and personal virtue—one that fostered liberty in the public sphere and harmony in the private sphere. Messages about the stabilizing effects of tolerance in the home typically targeted women. Brewers actively sought women’s consumer allegiance as women shoppers often acted as the gatekeepers who decided how much—and what kind—of alcohol got purchased for home consumption. Women’s historical legacy as temperance advocates and crusaders for national prohibition made brewers especially sensitive to the challenges of courting women consumers and the risks of alienating them. A March 1942 ad in *Life* magazine attests to such concerns. A gray-haired elderly woman, looking every bit the old-fashioned matron with her wire-rimmed glasses, pearls and lace collar, proposed new means for women to achieve the traditional ends of making the home a peaceful refuge from “the vexations and worries of the average man’s daily work.” Urging tolerance for a husband’s desire to relax “with a glass of mild and friendly beer,” the woman advised wives to consider beer “an ally in keeping their men happy, fit, contented ... and above all, men of moderation.”⁸⁵ Similarly, the Marsh column counseled readers that tolerance for different tastes was the “recipe for happy marriage.” Watching married friends toast their Golden Wedding Anniversary—“Dee with his glass of beer, Jane with her buttermilk”—convinced Marsh that “moderation, tolerance and understanding can build lasting happiness and solid homes.”⁸⁶ If the temperance agitators of an earlier era had envisioned the home as a refuge from vice and worldly corruption, the modern age now called for women to transform the home into a site of pleasure, emotional satisfaction and mutual understanding.

A wife’s traditional duty to create a refuge from the outside world acquired additional importance in the Second World War. Advertisements and government bulletins entrusted homemakers with responsibility not only for obeying rationing and conservation provisions and preparing nutritious meals, but also for providing emotional sustenance that could regenerate

workers and boost their productivity on the home front.⁸⁷ The Marsh column echoed such mandates by valorizing acts of kindness to war-strained husbands as important war work on par with tending the household, “work[ing] on salvage drives and lend[ing] a hand at the Red Cross.”⁸⁸ By linking the morale-boosting effects of beer to home front demands for boosting productivity, brewers simultaneously provided a patriotic rationale for purchasing beer and answered dry critics who complained that alcohol contributed to absenteeism and lower productivity. A household that permitted moderate beer consumption was also one that kept entire families intact, even as the centrifugal forces of war pulled family members in different directions. Never was a spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding more essential, Marsh contended, with sons serving in the navy, daughters working in the airplane plant, mothers supervising the canteen and fathers toiling in the tool shop.⁸⁹

The brewers’ emphasis on tolerance resonated more broadly with other wartime rhetoric that stressed the US commitment to ideals of cultural pluralism. Newsreels, Hollywood movies and government-sponsored war-bond drives frequently contrasted American tolerance for diversity with Nazi totalitarianism and fascist theories of a master race.⁹⁰ Similarly, the Committee on Food Habits argued that respect for cultural differences and unfamiliar food practices separated us from the fascist enemy.⁹¹ Although the United States failed to live up to these ideals—most dramatically in the internment of Japanese Americans and the racial segregation of the military—such values nonetheless represented what many Americans were fighting to protect. Brewers amplified the patriotic appeal of beer in numerous Marsh columns that tied tolerance in the private sphere to the promise of peace in the postwar order. Intolerance in the home, Marsh asserted, “spreads to intolerance among neighbors, and intolerance among nations.”⁹² “Unless we make up our minds,” Marsh counseled, “to respect the other fellow’s rights and liberties—whether it’s the right to enjoy a glass of beer occasionally or the right to vote according to our conscience—all our postwar planning won’t be worth the paper that it’s printed on.”⁹³ More boldly still, Marsh claimed that beer itself fostered tolerant mindsets that contributed to recent military victories and would underwrite postwar peace. “The success of our Invasion began months ago—when the English Tommies and the GI Joes got together over friendly beer, and games of darts—and learned to like each other in spite of differences in tastes and habits,” Marsh wrote. “And that spirit of tolerance and understanding between men and nations will go far towards building a secure Peace, too.”⁹⁴

Brewers’ repeated appeals to honor American ideals of cultural pluralism in the Marsh column highlight a significant tension within their broader advertising and public relations campaign. To win respectability and middle-class consumers, beer advertisements in mass magazines erased beer’s roots

in ethnic food traditions and relocated its consumption to homogenized white, middle-class settings. Such contradictions attest to the challenges brewers and admen faced as they negotiated the changing meanings of Americanness to legitimize a still suspect commodity. Constructing imagined communities of beer drinkers required distinct appeals to rural and small-town Americans who continued to flirt with prohibition and to middle-class women, some of whom still questioned beer's respectability for home consumption. It is not surprising then that the central tensions and strains in American national identity all surfaced in the brewers' wartime campaign: tensions between private pleasures and public obligations, tensions between visions of sacrifice and visions of consumer plenitude, and tensions between ideals of cultural pluralism and the continuing salience of whiteness as a marker of American identity. Brewers, like Americans themselves, straddled competing visions of American national identity to define for themselves a more secure place in the economy and the postwar world.

Brewers' Yeast Fights for Freedom

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Advertising could symbolically transform beer into an emblem of American national identity, but brewers' most innovative act of industry self-preservation was to position brewing as an essential *food* industry (see Figure 5). Framing the debate over wartime prohibition as a contest over virtue and vice—the traditional battleground of the wet-dry wars—had lost much of its resonance in the wake of Repeal. Framing the debate as a fight over the nation's food supply, on the other hand, offered brewers and prohibitionists alike a better chance of gaining traction. In both world wars, American policymakers tied food conservation on the home front to victory on the battlefield. The First World War posters assured Americans that “Food Will Win the War” if citizens did their part by planting war gardens and limiting their consumption of scarce foods. Compliance with the First World War food regime of “Meatless Mondays” and “Wheatless Wednesdays” was however purely voluntary—a far cry from the mandatory rationing of coffee, butter, meat and sugar instituted in the Second World War. The nation's new “Food Fights for Freedom” campaign encouraged homemakers to avoid waste, starve black markets for scarce foods, and plan meals that skimmed on rationed goods—all to guarantee a sufficient food supply for American troops overseas, the nation's allies, and peoples in countries newly liberated from Nazi control.⁹⁵

Prohibitionists had good reason to believe that they could turn the “Food Fights for Freedom” campaign to their advantage. In the First World War, dries scored a major victory when the government, citing concerns about the waste of vital foodstuffs, curtailed the production of whiskey and limited the

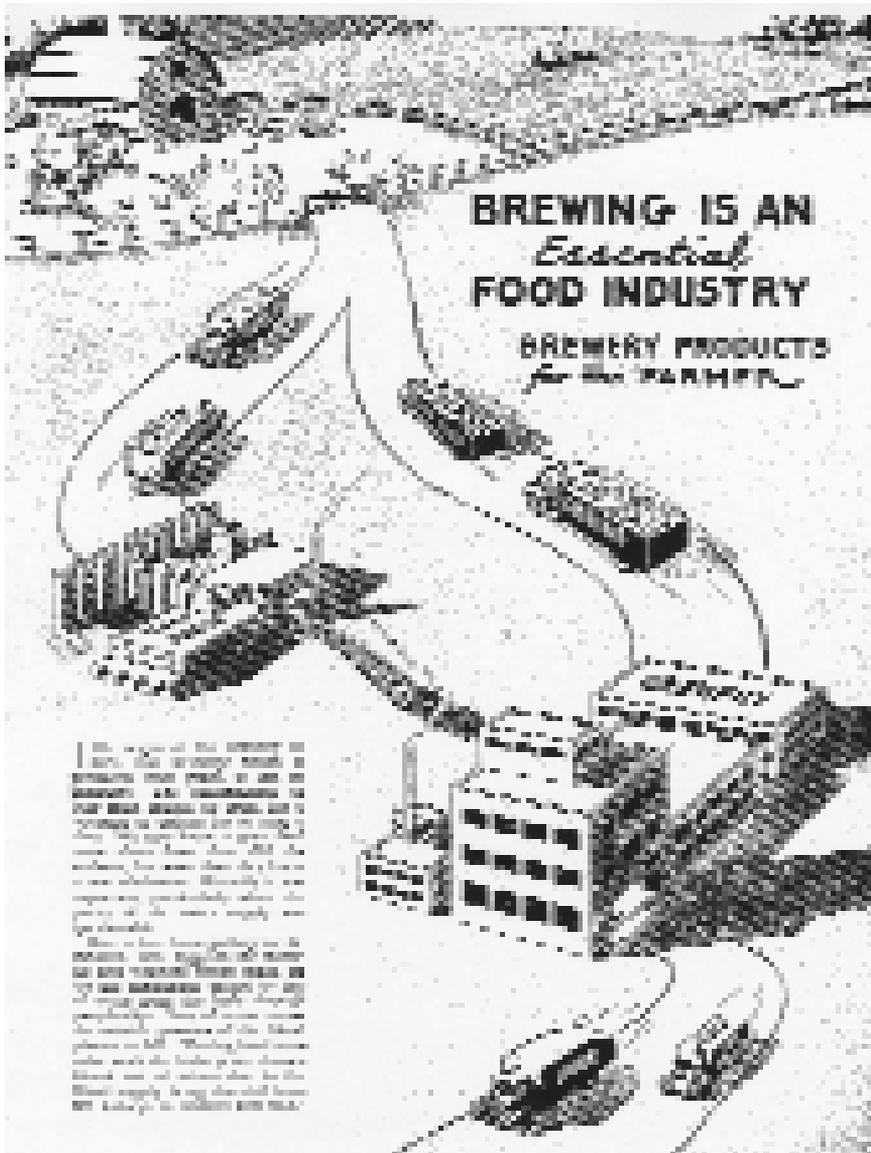


FIGURE 5: “Brewing is an Essential Food Industry,” 1942. Reproduced with permission of *Modern Brewery Age*.

production of beer, paving the way for wholesale prohibition. Prohibitionist petitions to Congress in the Second World War hoped the same argument would accomplish similar results—in their view, equality of sacrifice demanded no less. “Since limitations are put upon automobiles, refrigerators, articles of clothing and even certain kinds of foods,” the Prohibition Party of Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, wrote Congress, “why should alcoholic beverages be permitted?”⁹⁶ Nothing aroused dry indignation more than special regulatory treatment for alcoholic beverages

when Americans were being asked to limit their consumption of other prized foodstuffs. In a contest between meat and sugar, on the one hand, and alcoholic beverages, on the other, the choice seemed clear. “Why is sugar rationed when it is used as a food,” petitioners asked, “but is not rationed when it is distilled into liquor—a poison? Why are trucks which carry cattle and hogs to market to feed our nation and our allies restricted, while liquor trucks roll merrily along?”⁹⁷ Notions of food justice also galvanized prohibitionists across the Atlantic during the Second World War. Drys in Great Britain decried their government’s hypocrisy in urging people to save food and grow their own while allowing “vast quantities of valuable food supplies ... to be destroyed in brewing and distilling.”⁹⁸ This time around, brewers had a ready—and inventive—answer for drys: brewers were not wasteful profiteers who put their interests before the nation’s but ingenious recyclers who made every grain count. The chief byproducts of brewing (spent grains, malt sprouts and dried yeast), brewers argued, actually supplied beneficial nutrients, “superior in many ways” to those initially extracted from barley to produce beer. The trade journal *Modern Brewing Age* reported that the brewing industry’s annual consumption of 50 million bushels of barley returned to farmers 720 million pounds of dry spent grains, 75 million pounds of malt sprouts and 25 million pounds of dried yeast—close to one-third by weight of the original barley.⁹⁹ Brewers largely steered clear from the politically clumsy notion that beer itself was a “liquid food” and instead touted the nutritional benefits of brewers’ yeast as a dietary supplement for humans and farm animals.¹⁰⁰ As a rich source of vitamin B complex, brewers’ yeast could be added to a variety of foods to boost crucial nutrients often lacking in the American diet.¹⁰¹ When added to commercial cattle feeds, irradiated brewers’ yeast increased the milk production of cows as well as the fat content of their milk. Brewers’ yeast also improved the nutritional value of pig and chicken feed.¹⁰² British brewers also sought to fend off dry attacks by touting the nutritive value of brewing’s byproducts for humans and animals, but unlike their American counterparts they did not shy away from extolling the food value of beer itself. A barrel of beer, a British trade journal claimed in 1939, was the nutritive equivalent to “10lbs of ribs of beer, 8lbs of shoulder of mutton, 4lbs of cheese, 20lbs of potatoes, 1lb of rump steak, 3lbs of rabbit, 3lbs of palice, 8lbs of bread, 3lbs of butter, 6lbs of chicken and 19 eggs”—combined!¹⁰³

Brewers imagined brewers’ yeast as much more than a convenient rhetorical weapon in the wet-dry wars. They hoped to persuade government and military officials that brewers’ yeast could help win the Second World War by boosting the productivity of defense workers and the nutritional value of soldiers’ rations. Brewers had good reason to believe they would find a receptive audience for their bold claims. Maintaining a well-nourished workforce and fighting force ranked high among the government’s concerns,

particularly in the wake of reports that 40 percent of the first million draftees had been rejected as physically unfit to serve.¹⁰⁴ Government officials worried, too, that a sluggish workforce, suffering the lingering effects of widespread malnutrition during the Great Depression, would impede production in key defense industries.¹⁰⁵ Policymakers recognized that victory in modern warfare hinged as much on industrial efficiency as it did on armies, navies and air forces.¹⁰⁶

Brewers' yeast was also not such a tough sale because cereal companies and vitamin manufacturers were already hyping Vitamin B as a "pep" pill. In an address before a national conference on nutrition in 1941, Vice President Henry Wallace was even inspired to quote a radio announcer who described Vitamin B as the "oomph vitamin" that "puts the sparkle in your eye, the spring in your step, the zip in your soul."¹⁰⁷ Dr. Russell M. Wilder, a physician at the Mayo Clinic, was an especially influential champion of Vitamin B, as he also served on the National Research Council (NRC) Committee on Food and Nutrition, a group of physicians, home economists, nutritionists and agricultural economists whose dietary recommendations helped set government policies. Dr. Wilder had conducted a variety of vitamin B experiments at the Mayo Clinic in 1940 and 1941 that convinced him of Vitamin B1's importance to national defense. The studies found that thiamin deprivation caused a range of symptoms—many associated with neurasthenia—including depression, irritability, moodiness, sluggishness, indifference, fear, inattentiveness and fatigue. Boosting thiamin in the diet, according to his studies, did not simply neutralize the negative effects of thiamin deprivation but actually increased productivity, mental alertness and morale. Based on these findings, Wilder recommended supplementing the diets of defense workers by adding yeast, vitamin-rich oils or rice polishings to juices and soups.¹⁰⁸ In 1942 the NRC's Food and Nutrition Board designated dried yeast as an "essential" wartime food and advocated the enrichment of white bread, corn grits and flour with thiamin, niacin and iron.¹⁰⁹

The brewing trade press also trumpeted brewers' yeast as the miracle supplement that could "help win the war."¹¹⁰ A feature article in *Modern Brewery Age* on "Brewers' Yeast in Industrial Nutrition" underscored the connection between industrial nutrition and military success with an illustration that recalled Soviet social realist poster art and the larger-than-life workers celebrated in Works Progress Administration mural art. Who could doubt that military victory was at hand after viewing the photograph of a heavily muscled, bare-shirted man swinging a sledgehammer? (see Figure 6). "Workers who don't eat the right food," the article argued, "slow up the production of the guns and tanks and ships needed to blast the Axis."¹¹¹ Thiamin deficiencies were even thought to reduce women's manual dexterity, an ability widely believed to make women industrial workers

superior to men in performing precise and delicate work.¹¹² Fortified diets and supplemental feeding in industrial plants, on the other hand, guaranteed “greater working efficiency, fewer absences from work, and a decrease in the number of accidents,” according to Dr. Frank G. Boudreau, chairman of the Committee on Food and Nutrition and its Subcommittee on the Nutrition of Industrial Workers.¹¹³ Dr. Wilder even went so far as to suggest that thiamin deficiencies in workers and employers could contribute to industrial unrest.¹¹⁴ Although this controversial claim pushed the limits of credibility, the broader effort to promote B vitamins in industrial nutrition struck a positive chord. The Coca-Cola Company so feared that industry cafeterias might begin substituting more nutritious drinks for soda pop that they commissioned their own experts to dispute “unsubstantiated claims” about the morale value of Vitamin B.¹¹⁵

While we cannot be sure how much direct influence trade journals such as *Modern Brewery Age* had on government policies, brewers would not have

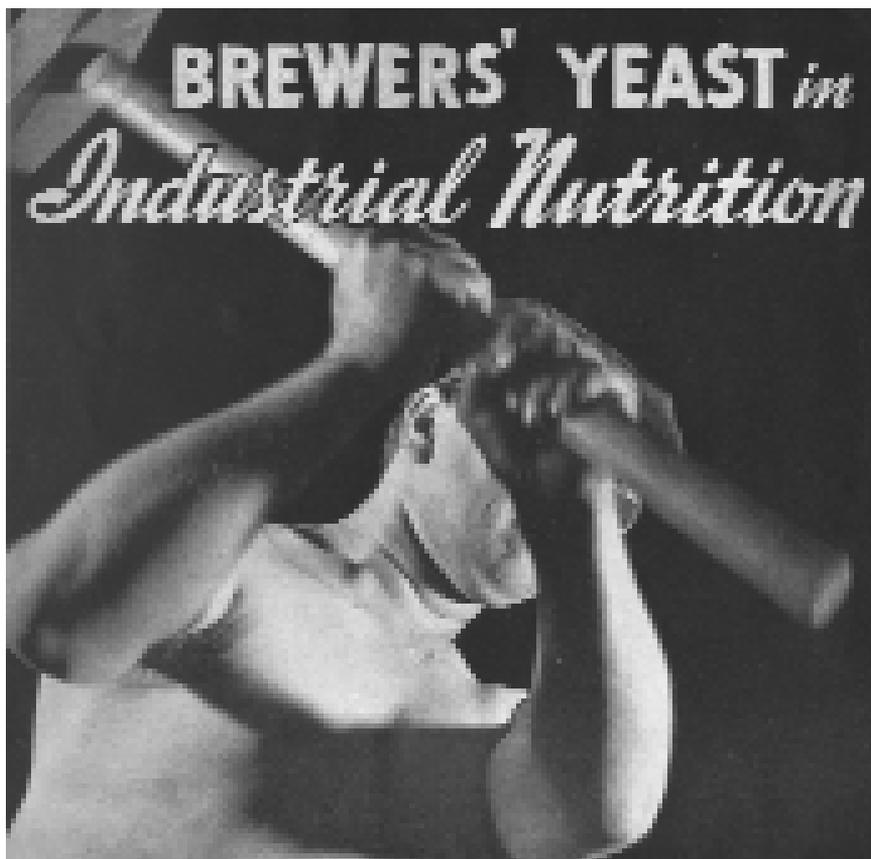


FIGURE 6: “Brewers’ Yeast in Industrial Nutrition,” 1942. Reproduced with permission of *Modern Brewery Age*.

enjoyed as much credibility in asserting the national importance of brewers' yeast had policymakers not already given food such a prominent role in defeating the fascist enemy. *Modern Brewery Age* claimed the mantle of wartime patriot for the entire brewing industry when it hailed brewers' yeast as "an important weapon in the 'Food for Freedom' program." *Modern Brewery Age* even boasted that brewers' yeast would help liberate the United States and other nations of the world from want, one of the four freedoms that Americans were fighting to defend. Such lofty rhetoric further strengthened brewers' link to the nation's war goals and the New Deal state. "Not only will [brewers' yeast] help in the fight for the freedom of nations by taking its place in the food production line," *Modern Brewery Age* wrote, "but even more so in another equally important fight"—the fight to free nations from "one of civilization's greatest enemies—the nutritional deficiency diseases which undermine the physical and mental health of millions everywhere."¹¹⁶

Public investment in vitamin education during the war facilitated the promotion of brewers' yeast as a food supplement. In the two decades before the war, scientists on both sides of the Atlantic increasingly associated hunger not simply with caloric deprivation but also with nutritional deprivation.¹¹⁷ Wartime pamphlets and posters issued by the US Department of Agriculture, the Bureau of Home Economics, and private industry promoted vitamins as the essential elements of a "Victory Diet." One company even created a "Vita-Min-Go" board game to help Americans of all ages learn which foods packed a nutritional punch. The game's instructions enjoined Americans to "Protect your health, Steady your nerves, Get new pep and vigor" by consuming the right amount of calcium, iron and vitamins A, B and C.¹¹⁸ The storm of vitamin publicity also aimed to help Americans cope psychologically with the dramatic wartime changes in the availability of valued foods. If Americans understood the nutritional equivalences of foods, the Committee on Food Habits surmised, then they would more likely accept unfamiliar—and sometimes odd—food substitutions.¹¹⁹ Wartime cookbooks, for example, recommended "variety meats," soybeans and other "meat stretchers" as worthy substitutes for the traditionally meat-centered American meal. Favorite dishes might not taste or look exactly the same—what counted now was the homemaker's ability to prepare nutritious, vitamin-packed meals, a task that many cookbooks touted as vital defense work.¹²⁰

Home economists and nutritionists promoted brewers' yeast in much the same vein, promising that its use would transform ordinary foods into "Victory Foods." Some suggested that homemakers and defense plant cooks use brewers' yeast to fortify tomato juice, milk and dehydrated vegetables, and to enhance the flavor of vegetable soups and purées.¹²¹ Dr. McCay of Columbia University's College of Home Economics recommended that

industrial workers eat two mid-shift snacks that “provid[ed] protective foods rather than mere caloric pick-ups.” Instead of the typical pastry cart fare, Dr. McCay advised, the plant snack cart might include such nutrition-packed “protective” foods as milk and doughnuts fortified with brewers’ yeast.¹²²

The one downside of brewers’ yeast—its bitter taste—tested the culinary imaginations of brewers’ yeast advocates. Jane Holt, a *New York Times Magazine* food columnist, recommended adding brewers’ yeast to gingerbread, baked beans and meatloaf—foods with strong distinctive flavors that could mask its pungent taste. Some recipes, however, might have left readers wondering which was more disagreeable—the taste of brewers’ yeast or the effort to disguise it. Consider “Miss Spinella’s Sweetmeat,” a mixture of sugar, vinegar, butter, cheddar cheese, dry skim milk, peanut butter, brandy and brewers’ yeast creamed and cooked into candy of fudge-like consistency and appearance. Developed in the medical nutrition laboratory of the Army Medical School, the candy, Holt noted, had a long shelf life, making it suitable for shipping overseas—perhaps to the horror of soldiers longing for a bit of mom’s home-cooking. Homemakers could purchase brewers’ yeast in debittered form from health food stores, but culinary adventurers could also shop at Bloomingdales and other retail outlets for a new product called Bakon, a hickory-smoke flavored brewers’ yeast that promised to spice up uninspired meatless meals and relieve the tedium of meat rationing.¹²³ Tired of porkless baked beans? Why not simulate the real thing, *Modern Brewery Age* suggested, by seasoning them with a bouillon of savory brewers’ yeast—or jazz up kids’ fare with a luncheon of deviled eggs, toasted muffins, and “zest[y]” coleslaw flavored with brewers’ yeast?¹²⁴

For some industry advocates the bigger selling point of brewers’ yeast—its flavor-boosting potential aside—was its promise as a form of “health insurance” against bad cooks, time-challenged workingwomen and constrained food budgets.¹²⁵ *Modern Brewery Age* imagined that brewers’ yeast could provide compensatory nutrition for the families of women defense workers who cooked on the run and for the casualties of inept homemakers who drained food of nutritive value by boiling it into a mushy pulp.¹²⁶ If wartime homemakers were not up to the task, brewers’ yeast could come to the rescue.

The brewing industry also promoted brewers’ yeast as a Victory Food in military nutrition. In early 1944, the Quartermaster Corps Subsistence Research and Development Labs began studying the use of brewers’ yeast to fortify soups and ration biscuits for soldiers overseas and civilians liberated from the Axis powers.¹²⁷ Brewers’ yeast was an appealing prospect because it cost 40 percent less than primary-grown yeast and, the Quartermaster hoped, it might improve upon other unwelcomed dietary supplements. Only half the troops would eat vitamin tablets.¹²⁸ Fortified food, however, was no

guarantee of success. Margaret Mead, upon returning from a trip to the American fronts abroad in 1944, had come to appreciate the perils of concentrated diets. “The real point,” she told the Food and Nutrition Board, “is can one chew enough fast enough to get enough energy ... The sheer effort of eating the biscuits wears them out.”¹²⁹ At the end of 1944, after several months of testing and development, the Quartermaster Corps approved the use of debittered brewers’ yeast in ration biscuits and crackers, and combat troops in the army and the navy were consuming them within a few months. Soldiers still had to put up with notoriously tough biscuits, but the Quartermaster worked hard to assure that their taste, at least, was nonoffensive. To win an army contract, breweries had to persuade a taste panel of army officers and food technologists that soldiers would not detect any bitterness or off-flavors.¹³⁰

Brewers also publicized the health benefits of brewers’ yeast in the mass media. Though publicity for brewers’ yeast was not as comprehensive as the J. Walter Thompson ad campaign, brewers got favorable notices for “supplying ‘morale vitamins’ to the armed forces, the war workers, and the people of nations liberated from Axis domination.”¹³¹ City newspapers periodically ran stories on the role of brewers’ yeast in the nation’s food mobilization program and featured menus of dishes using brewers’ yeast.¹³² The most politically advantageous reporting aired on radio programs for farmers.¹³³ If rural voters who tuned into those broadcasts could be swayed by the virtues of brewers’ yeast, they might decide against local option, even if they still disdained beer.

Far from wasting vital foodstuffs, as dries contended, brewers had found a way to spin the byproducts of brewing into nutritional and political gold. Americans who had lived through Prohibition and were now being sold the virtues of brewers’ yeast as a nutritional supplement likely greeted such claims with a mix of skepticism, amusement and curiosity. After all, many Americans had first encountered brewers’ yeast when they surreptitiously added it to malt syrup to make homebrew in the 1920s and early 1930s. Anheuser-Busch’s Budweiser Yeast and Budweiser Barley Malt Syrup, ostensibly created in the 1920s for cookie makers and bread bakers, kept thousands of home brewers well supplied.¹³⁴ By the end of the Second World War, however, the once illicit connotations of brewers’ yeast had acquired entirely new patriotic associations with victory over fascism and freedom from want.

Conclusion

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Despite the resurgence of prohibitionism and wartime demands for conservation, the American brewing industry emerged from the Second

World War a stronger industry with solid prospects for postwar growth. The Second World War may not have been the economic bonanza for beer that it was for food companies such as Coca-Cola, Hershey and Wrigley, but “compared with many other industries,” *Business Week* observed, “the brewers floated through the war tumults on a bed of hops and roses.”¹³⁵ Beer consumption increased dramatically over the war, with sales rising from 56.8 million barrels in 1941 to 80 million barrels in 1945, well above the pre-Prohibition high of 66 million barrels a year.¹³⁶ Indeed, despite boosting its wartime production, brewers could not keep pace with demand. Rising disposable incomes, higher liquor prices (a product of fixed inventories), and the rationing of distilled liquor by state monopolies, *Business Week* reported in August 1943, had “transformed some whisky thirst into beer thirst.”¹³⁷ Beer consumption by servicemen and women defense workers also contributed to the rising demand. “With hard liquor tabooed,” *Business Week* wrote, “beer was often the only liquid solace available to the fighting man between battles.”¹³⁸ Brewers, not surprisingly, counted returning veterans among their staunchest supporters, both as beer consumers and readily mobilized opponents of postwar prohibitionism.

The brewing industry’s changing fortunes cannot simply be explained by the government’s need to protect tax revenues and minimize the social costs of black markets—although these were certainly major concerns. This explanation overlooks brewers’ agency in protecting their access to rationed goods and their status as an essential wartime industry. While we cannot know for sure just how much the brewers’ public relations campaign influenced federal policies, government policies were certainly consistent with that campaign. As food crusaders and morale boosters, brewers were in synch both with military needs and the recommendations of social scientists entrusted with national food policy. Brewers rendered the industry less vulnerable to shifting political winds not only by strengthening generational allegiances to beer, but also by forging new relationships with the military, social scientists and other government bureaucracies.

Just as striking as the reinvigoration of brewers’ ties to the state during the Second World War was the transformation of beer’s cultural identity from a still morally suspect commodity to a symbol of the American way of life. The Second World War did much more than simply reaffirm the liberalization of attitudes toward drinking that had ushered in Repeal. The repoliticization of beer was part and parcel of the broader wartime politicization of food consumption and production. Brewers jettisoned the discourse of virtue and vice and created new associations of beer drinking with American liberty, the struggle for freedom from want, and the nation’s pluralistic values. Perhaps the best testament to brewers’ success in reinventing the meanings of beer can be seen in the revised priorities of postwar prohibitionists, who now put a national ban on alcohol advertising at the top of their agenda.¹³⁹ Even

more than Repeal itself, the Second World War represented a transformative moment in which alcohol consumption acquired new legitimacy as an emblem of American national identity.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

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- 6 John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1987).
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- 11 “Rising Dry Tide,” *Newsweek* 25 (May 17, 1945), p. 64.
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- 13 Veit, "We Were a Soft People," pp. 167–90.
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- 15 State legislatures in Colorado, Iowa, Maine, and Minnesota had petitioned Congress to pass the Sheppard Bill in 1941; see "Dry Scare Raised" *Business Week* (June 7, 1941), p. 42.
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