

Your Friendly Neighborhood Marketeers

By former friendly neighborhood marketer Don Meinshausen

'All politics are local and so are social changes'

How does the marketer function as neighbor and as agent for social change? Money, culture, power and drugs come together in strange ways in a neighborhood. What happens with this dynamic community? Alcohol, always a target of prohibitionists has been currency from time immemorial. The Whisky Rebellion fought in 1790 was about how grain farmers who fermented their product into something fun and transportable were angered by attempts to tax them. In science fiction author's F Neil Smith's "The Probability Broach" the small farmers win their revolt against Washington and return to the Articles of Confederation to achieve a libertarian society.

Fortunes in many nations, large and small, and in many ruling families have been based on tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Prohibition and taxation can be seen as a form of warfare against these economies and cultures. Prohibition was a racist or cultural war of the rural Anglo Protestants against the recently arrived Italian, Irish, German and other European ethnics who enjoyed the social use of alcohol and handled it largely responsibly.

In my former hometown of Hoboken, NJ about a hundred years ago Germans began to predominate both in population but also in business (North German Lloyd shipping lines was there) and culture. Sidewalk beer cafes and bars lined the main street. These were banned by the WASP dominated temperance movement in response to these social changes. A hundred years later as property values zoomed because of the chic, older architecture and proximity to NYC sidewalk cafes tried to serve beer and wine to their yuppie patrons and the town discovered this ancient law prohibiting such *gemutlichkeit*. Fortunately this bad law was repealed and Hoboken has at least 3 sidewalk cafes per block on its main street responsibly serving wines, champagne cocktails and beer.

In the South where Prohibition began the mountain folk who descended from poor Scotch and Irish indentured servants have always had their stills in rebellion against the revenue agents. During Prohibition these hardy folk souped up their cars to outrun the police. Thus stock car racing or NASCAR was born. These cars, fittingly fueled on alcohol, run in huge televised events and these races are seen as family entertainment. Alcohol is sold at these events and sponsors many cars. The most dissolute people seen there are politicians, drunk with power cadging votes.

As tobacco becomes increasingly taxed, regulated and even banned from most public spaces there arises smoking social clubs focused on tobacco. Some are focused on using hookahs or water pipes or hookahs recreating a smoky Mideastern atmosphere. There are cigar clubs to attract the Yuppies and even a High Times type of magazine, Cigar Aficionado for them.

I once went to this nightclub called NASA for a possible article that was located in NYC in the Tribeca neighborhood. It was a rave club where there was a lot of suspected drug use in the 90's. People would go there supposedly on ecstasy and LSD to dance to techno music which is what raves are about. I didn't see any drugs but I suppose that was because that I looked like someone's parent. I had a talk with the owner or manager about what happened there. The club had no license to sell alcohol so many of the patrons were teenagers. There was no metal detector

machine that was so prominent at so many clubs because there was no violence. Many clubs at the time required prospective patrons to have a pat down search for weapons as well. I was told that since the patrons were not drinking they did not become problematic. In the 6 months that they were open there were 2 cases where patrons were put in a cab and sent home and that was because they came in drunk and rowdy. One parent even called this person to thank him for his care and thoughtfulness. It was a nice club and if I were their age I am sure that I would have enjoyed it. I went through and the kids were nice to me and asked questions about the 60's. I felt as if I was intruding and left. I felt that that I had been given good information since I was a patron of a similar neighboring nightclub called Wetlands.

Wetlands is the only nightspot that I had ever been to that had a theme and stuck to it. On the main floor there was a huge mural showing a Woodstock type gathering. There was a bar and a stage for live acts as well as a painted VW microbus, a large bulletin board for flyers of various environmental causes. Many benefits were held there. Many big name groups would perform there such as Hootie and the Blowfish and Blues Traveller. They served food as well there. In the basement were a lounge and another bar where smoking of herb was tolerated. I never saw an occasion where police needed to be called in. They did not have metal detectors or frisking. Supposedly they had off duty cops for bouncers. It closed due to someone buying the property to build a condo and the last performance happened September, 2001.

I have been told by anarchist theoretician Peter Lamborn Wilson that bars and beer halls are places for right wing assembly and discussion while coffee houses do the same for the left. This was especially true for Germany in the 20's. At Starbucks and other coffee house you will find fair trade coffee while there is no such phenomenon on the right. When I went to Amsterdam and visited the many coffee houses that sold more than coffee and alcohol. These numerous cafes had 2 menus. One had the usual menu for food and drink. The other menu had a list of various exotic weed and hashish from local farms and faraway places. There was hashish available from Afghanistan, Morocco, Lebanon and India. Some of this stuff was baked into space cakes. Once when I was there I saw a Dutch policeman come and take a hit. There were also computers available to check your e-mail for a small fee. These Dutch have such a wonderful, civilized country. There were also two museums of hemp as well as a museum of sex. Since Amsterdam has legal prostitution. The Cannabis Cup is an event with lectures, panels, concerts, tours and even a fashion show to celebrate hemp as clothing. 60 Minutes covered the event once. Stay in Amsterdam for an extra week and see the documentary film festival.

I have seen other restaurants and coffee houses serving marijuana products in other countries. Always the clientele and staff were polite and well behaved. When and where it was illegal, even when tolerated, one was either overwhelmed with vendors or had to deal with unsavory circumstances and characters. This can become a charm or even a fetish as some people love illicit affairs with the thrill of doing something naughty or even forbidden. But it is grossly inefficient and makes an unnecessary drama. Amsterdam has less violence, police corruption and teenage drug use than American cities. Amsterdam is racially diverse and has many international tourists. Because of their enlightened attitude they are a center of international trade, culturally attractive and quite prosperous.