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*Distilling Democracy: Alcohol Education in America's Public
Schools, 1880-1925 (review)*

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Bulletin of the History of Medicine, Volume 74, Number 2, Summer
2000, pp. 384-385 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/bhm.2000.0078>



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Jonathan Zimmerman. *Distilling Democracy: Alcohol Education in America's Public Schools, 1880–1925*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999. xvii + 208 pp. \$29.95.

Scientific Temperance Instruction was a popular movement during the late nineteenth century to persuade schoolchildren to abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages. Led by Mary Hunt—indefatigable leader of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union's Department of Scientific Temperance Instruction, and later of the Scientific Temperance Federation—thousands of American women campaigned for a variety of local regulations and state laws requiring instruction about the evils of the "poison," alcohol. By 1901, every state had mandated some form of scientific temperance instruction, and about half of the nation's school districts had adopted texts approved by Hunt. In this well-crafted monograph, Jonathan Zimmerman, a specialist in the history of progressivism and of American education, provides the first scholarly history of the rise and fall of STI, as it was known. He is especially interested in the interactions between expertise and lay influence in educational curricula. He has concluded that STI represented an important example of how a popular movement enlisted expert opinion on behalf of its agenda. Ironically, although Mary Hunt and the legions of women she motivated to lobby school boards and statehouses never so intended, the effect of their movement was to spark a long-running public discussion over education and the role of experts in controlling curricula.

Mary Hunt believed that the cool light of reason and knowledge would improve human behavior. STI advocates developed texts for adoption in the schools that asserted fundamental "facts" about alcoholic beverages: alcohol was a poison, not a food. Drinking alcohol damaged virtually every human organ (e.g., problem drinkers often suffered from red eyes). And alcohol was addictive. To support these claims, Hunt and her colleagues enlisted expert testimony from a variety of sources, including medical authorities.

Not surprisingly, STI also had legions of critics. In the 1890s, various persons emerged to dispute its claims. The elite Committee of Fifty to Investigate the Liquor Problem attacked STI from several perspectives. Its Physiological Subcommittee, chaired by John S. Billings, included a number of prominent members of the American Physiological Society, leaders in the new scientific medicine. This group, especially Wilbur O. Atwater, challenged the scientific basis of STI's claims about alcohol as a "poison," not a food: they found alcohol to have food value, and in 1899 they began to publish the results of their scientific investigations. Mary Hunt responded aggressively. She first enlisted contradictory testimony from physicians and others whose credentials were in clinical medicine; she then found a way to divide the camp of scientific physiologists by publicizing their criticism of Atwater's research—just what she needed to blunt the experts' attack on STI.

Mary Hunt died in 1906, and STI virtually disappeared by the 1920s. It was not

in tune with the progressive focus on the social effects of alcohol consumption. Some progressive supporters of prohibition faulted STI for its obsession with the harmful effects of alcohol on the individual. The Anti-Saloon League, the main progressive prohibition organization, briefly financed the Scientific Temperance Federation, and STI texts and publicity shifted away from alcohol's harm to the individual to a broader social concern.

In this clearly written history, based on an impressive body of sources, Zimmerman explores how a popular social movement conflicted with professional educators and scientists. The result was a wide-ranging discussion of the curriculum. He argues that understanding this unintended democratic achievement should guide us to a clearer understanding of the dynamic conflicts between expertise and the popular will in other education issues, both historical and contemporary. His book provides an important addition to the history of temperance, women's political influence, and education.

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