

THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF TOBACCO AND SOCIETY

BY LESLIE ZGANJAR

The University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society, a part of the College of Community Health Sciences, holds the world's largest collection of original materials related to the tobacco industry – newspaper and television coverage, books, rare advertising, photographs and promotional artifacts that document promotion of tobacco products and the history of efforts to combat smoking.

When he joined the College's Department of Family Medicine in 1999, Dr. Alan Blum established the center to tell the story not just of the successes in countering cigarette smoking and its promotion, but also of the failures and fear of confronting the tobacco industry.

Blum, who directs the center, is professor and Gerald Leon Wallace, MD, Endowed Chair in Family Medicine. He is an expert on the history of tobacco use, cigarette marketing and the anti-smoking movement. He also serves as a public health advocate on the topic of smoking and tobacco use through his writing of op-eds for newspapers and editorials for medical journals, original presentations and research posters at national and international conferences, as well as museum and online exhibitions created from the center's vast collection.

Blum and his staff, including Collection Manager Kevin Bailey and graduate students in The University of Alabama School of Library and Information Studies, have created nearly a dozen exhibitions on tobacco-related subjects, including one in 2014 commemorating the 50th anniversary of the landmark US Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health that confirmed cigarette smoking as a leading cause of lung cancer and other health problems. The exhibition debuted at UA's Gorgas Library before traveling to the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas, the Texas Medical Center Library in Houston, and the LSU Health Sciences Center in New Orleans.

Online exhibitions produced in fall 2018 include "Big Tobacco in the Big Apple: How New York Became the Heart of the Tobacco Industry...and Anti-Smoking Activism," and "Of Mice and Menthol," showing the history of the tobacco industry's targeting of African Americans. This exhibition featured cigarette



Dr. Alan Blum, professor of family medicine and director of the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society.

advertisements with celebrity endorsements from world heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis and baseball greats Jackie Robinson and Hank Aaron.

An exhibition released in November 2018, "The Makin's of a Nation," coincided with the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, which introduced a new generation to smoking via free cigarettes provided to soldiers.

Cigarette advertising has been largely out of sight for nearly two decades, since an agreement was signed by the state attorneys general and US cigarette manufacturers to end cigarette billboards and remove tobacco advertising from television and sponsorship of sporting events. But the tobacco industry continues to maintain a firm grip on the 18-34-year-old population with internet-based marketing, entertainment sponsorship and retail promotions of new products, such as electronic cigarettes, Blum said.