



Distilling Democracy: Alcohol Education in America's Public Schools, 1880-1925

Jonathan Zimmerman

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Drug and alcohol education in public schools may be important, but its authoritarian stance often invites skepticism among teachers and students alike. Yet this program has its roots not in modern bureaucracy or even Prohibition but in a social movement that flourished over a century ago.

Scientific Temperance Instruction was the most successful grassroots education program in American history, championed by an army of housewives in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union under the leadership of Mary Hanchett Hunt. As Hunt and her forces took their message across the country, they were opposed by many educators and other professionals who believed that ordinary citizens had no business interfering with educational matters. STI sparked heated conflict between expert and popular authority in the debate over alcohol education, but it was eventually mandated as part of public school curricula in all states.

The real issue surrounding STI, argues Jonathan Zimmerman, was not alcohol but the struggle to reconcile democracy and expertise. In this first book-length study of the crusade for STI, he shows Mary Hunt to be a wily and manipulative politician as he examines how citizens and experts used knowledge selectively to advance their own agendas. His work offers a microcosm for observing Progressive Era tensions between democracy and professionalism, localism and centralization, and social conservatism and liberalism.

Distilling Democracy points up a crucial and ongoing dilemma in our education system: educational directives handed down by experts deny citizens the right to transmit their values to their children, while populist educational values sometimes stifle classroom debate. By using history to demonstrate the public's participation in shaping public education, Zimmerman suggests that however unappealing the program, society needs to embrace such popular movements in order to uphold true democracy. His book offers fresh insight into an overlooked chapter in our history and will spark debate by raising fresh questions about lay influence on school curricula in modern America.

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