encouraged to find moments when Brazil's "market empire" made Americans "Americans" and maybe even offered evidence of "America's Brazilian century."

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Jessica Borge. *Protective Practices: A History of the London Rubber Company and the Condom Business*. London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020. 306 pp. ISBN 9780228003335, $39.95 (cloth).

Jessica Borge warns readers that, in *Protective Practices: A History of the London Rubber Company and the Condom Business*, she has taken most of the sex out of the subject. Rather than delving into the societal notions surrounding birth control in Great Britain, Borge follows the trials and tribulations of the London Rubber Company itself, from 1915 to the 1990s, particularly as they relate to the creation of a near-monopoly of condoms, led by the brand name Durex. The company survived and thrived, she argues, through "relentless efforts at self-preservation" (3). Those efforts are at the center of the book.

Many contraceptive histories have emerged over the past two decades, such as Andrea Tone's wide-ranging, United States–focused *Devices and Desires* (2001) and Kate Fisher's *Birth Control, Sex, and Marriage in Britain, 1918–1960* (2006). As the foreword to *Protective Practices* indicates, though, the commercial production of rubber goods, and the marketing and distribution of condoms in Great Britain specifically, remains underexplored. Borge intervenes with a clear corporate and industrial focus. The London Rubber Company's growth from a backstreet wholesaler to a global contraceptive powerhouse is intrinsically engaging. Biographies, technological developments, and analyses of marketing strategies help Borge answer the question of how this business grew, thrived, survived, and then, finally, succumbed. The broader societal context of birth control history arises only when directly relevant to London Rubber's own calculations. In other words, there really is not much sex.

The topical limits of *Protective Practices* keep Borge's penetrating attention trained on the interactions between scientific and

technological developments, legal boundaries, and corporate ambitions. London Rubber's early marketing of condoms (or "protectives") responded to the 1917 Venereal Disease Act, which prohibited the sale of condoms as protection against disease but not as a contraceptive. The United States faced the exact opposite limitations, and businesses were forced to focus on condoms' prophylactic qualities for decades. An examination of the tactics of condom sales in Great Britain offers a fascinating glimpse into how advertising needs responded to colloquial legal proscriptions. Those tactics often stray beyond clearly ethical bounds.

After 1930s regulations limited package design and marketing display, London Rubber tried to manipulate the nonprofit group Family Planning Association (FPA) into supporting the use of condoms, for the financial benefit of the company. As Borge describes its motives, London Rubber sought to mitigate the condom's associations with disease and prostitution and to recast them as middle-class tools of married life through an alliance with FPA. However, even before 1960 saw the approval of the oral contraceptive pill, FPA favored female-controlled methods, which prompted London Rubber to pursue production and distribution of its own brand of diaphragm—even while it continued to aggressively push the condom. The details of London Rubber's expansions are supported by dozens of images that help create an industrial portrait of London Rubber's contraceptive kingdom. Most photographs focus on production and packaging. Although many are visually striking, at times they border on repetitive and do not wholly cohere with the accompanying text. Conversely, the book's occasional reliance on oral histories to make important claims would be more convincing with an increase in the number and variety of such interviews. At times, Borge's trust in a couple of key interview sources risks tenuity, a detriment of her laser focus on the inner workings of the London Rubber Company.

Borge's use of sources is otherwise creative and productive. Her diligent gathering and interpreting of veiled and scattered sources reward the reader with moments of real intrigue, such as when the company "waged a below-the-line disinformation campaign against oral contraceptives" in the early 1960s (155). Many histories of barrier contraceptives (such as condoms and diaphragms) end with the advent of "the pill," and miss how businesses pivoted in the face of this new, exciting form of birth control. Fortunately, Borge follows London Rubber as the female-managed oral contraceptive threatens the primacy of the male-controlled condom. First, London Rubber forms "front organizations" to agitate against public trust in the new birth control pill but then seems to pivot, funding the research and creation of its own pill. On the face of it, these tactics are in

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keeping with London Rubber's earlier approach to FPA approval, with the pitching of new scientifically supported (but company produced) pamphlets and product diversification. However, Borge digs deep, and her analysis of the possible corporate motives for the company's in-house development of its pill, Feminor, shows clear intellectual agility. Was it a case of "can't lick 'em, join 'em" and product diversification—or was the company seeking to legitimize its public criticism of the pill by developing its own product and then sowing distrust of it? Was it looking to bring down the enemy from within? Borge makes a good case for the latter without tripping over into specious reasoning.

At times, Borge's attention to company drama steers the book away from potentially rich arguments and results in the abrupt treatment of important events. For example, Borge summarizes the effects of the Anti-British National Liberation War in Malaya on the price of rubber and stockholder confidence as part of a "run of bad luck" for London Rubber (53). Aside from abruptly dismissing colonial resistance and the fight for independence, this characterization opts out of offering analytical context that might furnish the book with a more resilient central argument. Beyond just *how* the company persisted, global interactions such as these could expand discussion to the broader ramifications of the company's trajectory. Borge does succeed in providing welcome social context to the company's reactions to the AIDS crisis—even though her assessment of London Rubber after the 1960s is brief—but her incorporation of such analysis is uneven. Despite these detractions, Borge's tight focus creates a valuable look at a powerful company's methods and failures. Overall, *Protective Practices* is an appreciated addition to British contraceptive history from an in-depth business perspective.

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