Smoking is one of the leading causes of lung cancer and inevitably death. It is however, incredibly fascinating to see the world, with this knowledge, continue to smoke. What is the draw to this cancerous hobby? Society’s outlook and revision on the smoking industry has been fairly productive in the past twenty years. Within my lifetime there used to be smoking and non-smoking sections of restaurants, and going back just fifty years, you could smoke inside of hospitals. But, how did smoking become so popular, that at one point, nearly half of the U.S. population smoked tobacco?

Julia Corbett published an article entitled, “A Faint Green Sell: Advertising and the Natural World.” Wherein she talks about how companies started using “green” advertising to help the environment, but also how companies just use nature as a backdrop in their ads to make people seem larger and more powerful than the natural world. Enticing buyers to stand bold, and dominate nature.

Our first advertisement is an ad for the cigarette company, Camel. It shows a rugged man with shaggy hair and a handlebar mustache, atop a snowy mountain. He is sitting in the snow beside his makeshift campfire, wearing a fur lined leather coat and winter boots. Behind him stands a beautiful white wolf staring, almost longingly at him. He is crouched over the flames and lighting a cigarette with a twig from the fire. Across the top of the image it reads, “Camel Lights.” At the bottom left of the image, a picture of the camel cigarettes pack is superimposed,
standing open and inviting. Under the pack of cigarettes it says, “Camel lights. Low tar. Camel Taste.” And in the bottom right of the image it shows the surgeon general’s warning against smoking tobacco products.

The advertisement was published in the 70’s in a magazine. It is clear to all, that the target audience for this advertisement is men. The snowy mountains in the backdrop give a feel of total isolation to this man. The wolf is representing the danger that the man faces, by hiking alone in these mountains. Yet he sits with a calm expression on his face because all he needs, all that matters, is the cigarette that he is lighting. The wolf almost looks like it is enjoying the man’s company, wanting to partake in the campfire and sharing the smoke. The main focus of the image is in the man, lighting the cigarette. He is wearing brown, and is directly contrasted from the surrounding, blues and purples of the mountains and the bright white snow. The only other thing that really stands out in this advertisement is the “Camel” across the top, colored a warm yellow.

This ad is certainly not a “green” advertisement, in terms of Corbett. It is almost the opposite of a “green” ad. The man is dominating over the natural world around him, smoking and paying no heed to the majestic mountains. There is no trash can for him to throw the cigarette in either. Such starts the trend of polluting the environment with the non-biodegradable plastic filters in the “butts” of tobacco products.

Taking a look at our second ad, we see a dusky yellow-orange glow as the sun sets behind a plateau off to the left of the image. In the forefront of the image you can see a wild stallion leaping, with mud flying off the backs of its hooves. Behind the magnificent creature is a “cowboy,” riding his own steed with a lasso whipping wildly over his head. The man, wearing a
brown coat over a white shirt, a tan cowboy hat and what look to be sunglasses is chasing down the stallion. But, across the top of the image, in large, bold, red letters; is superimposed, “Marlboro Country” and shows an open pack of Marlboro cigarettes. The backdrop is a slew of rolling hills far off, bathed in the bright glow of the sun.

This ad is from a magazine in the 60’s and it goes even one step further than our last ad in terms of the “domination of nature.” First and foremost, there is no cigarette to be seen, besides the superimposed pack. The focus of the image is directly on the cowboy, about to literally capture nature in its flesh, and take it for his own. The ad is so far, “not-green” that it is probably one of the catalyzing ads that brought about “green” ads and Corbett’s investigations into the advertising world. Furthermore, the ad has a yellow-orange dominant color scheme. This combination of colors, in nature, is most often seen in fire, and the death of vegetation. Take the dying leaves of trees for example, or the color of corn stalks after a barren harvest. This color scheme brings a very intense feel to the ad, like the situation is dangerous and the cowboy is daring.

The ads are from different tobacco companies, but feature the same sort of “masculine” feel in their ads. Taking control over nature, or not caring about the world around them. Their “courage” and “daring,” capture buyer’s attentions. So much so, that the country is swarmed with more and more cigarette ads, competition between brands and a general lack of caring for “green” advertising. With a far larger emphasis, on having smoking seem cool and who can get the most amount of dedicated buyers.

These types of ads promoted an already out of control phenomena in American history. Who knew that such an aggressive form of advertising would take off so rapidly and create such
an issue? Advertising such as this spilled into automobile companies around the turn of the
century and even now, into clothing companies.

With this knowledge, it is very easy to see how companies can create such a high flow of
consumers, and how the tobacco epidemic started. By using aggressive “non-green” ads, the
large tobacco companies could target consumers that wanted to feel strong, and dominating over
nature. Twisting them and molding them into addicted, cancer ridden, grave plots. Wherein only
the companies succeed, and the great wheel of capitalism keeps on turning.