

MERGER ANTITRUST LAW

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Georgetown University Law Center
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Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:00-5:00 pm
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Class 6 (September 16): Merger Antitrust Litigation (Unit 5)

In this class, we will explore merger antitrust litigation. There is a lot of material here. If you are pressed for time, I would concentrate on the class notes and the case study.

Inquiry risk. After reminding yourself about the possible outcomes of a merger investigation (slide 4), read with some care the slides on the means and incentives to raise challenges (slides 5-6) and plaintiffs and forums (slides 7-13). You should also review the statutes providing for rights of action to the DOJ, the FTC, and private parties (which, for this purpose, include the states) (pp. 5-8). The typical litigation paradigms for the DOJ and FTC (slides 14-16) will be critical to understanding merger antitrust litigation. Since we will see this material in application when we began to read case opinions, you can quickly read the slides on litigation timing (slides 17-21), the contrasts between the DOJ and FTC (slides 22-25), types of interim injunctions in merger antitrust litigation (slides 26-27), the *Winter* test for injunctive relief (slides 28-29), preliminary injunctions (slides 30-41), temporary restraining orders (TROs) (slides 42-44), and permanent injunctions (slides 45-46). Finally, Rule 65 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure applies to all injunctive proceedings in federal district court, and you should at least skim it (pp. 10-11).

There is a vigorous debate on whether the preliminary injunction standard for the FTC under FTC Act § 13(b) is more lenient than the preliminary injunction standard for the DOJ under *Winter*. You might find the excerpts from the briefs in the *Ardagh/St. Gobain* case interesting to see how the FTC sought to exploit this difference while the parties sought to minimize it (if not eliminate it altogether) (pp. 29-44). As a practical matter, however, the debate to date has been largely academic: while judges pay lip service to the different articulations of the standards, at least in the D.C. District Court, where most government merger antitrust cases are brought, the judges understand that deals never survive the entry of a preliminary injunction and so they treat merger antitrust preliminary injunctions under a permanent injunction standard (even though they never say this in the opinion, which would be reversible error).

I also have included some charts on the recent history of merger antitrust litigation by the DOJ and FTC (slides 47-58), but there is no need to study them in any detail. Just try to get an idea of the steps in the process and the length of time it typically takes.

I thought about including a docket sheet for a fully litigated merger antitrust case so that you could see the types of papers filed in these proceedings. However, I ultimately decided we will have killed enough trees with the other materials. But I have created a separate packet in the supplemental materials on the DOJ's challenge to Energy Solutions' proposed acquisition of Waste Control Specialists. It is worth skimming the docket sheet to get an idea of what happens in court when the DOJ challenges a merger.

There is a very short order in *Arch Coal* on "litigating the fix" (pp. 14-18). The idea here is that if the investigating agency refuses to settle an investigation on terms the parties are willing to accept

and proceeds to litigation, the parties can restructure the deal on their own. The court will then adjudicate the merits of the restructured transaction and not the original transaction on which the challenge was based. Initially, the agencies were very opposed to this, but now the principle appears to be well established in the courts. There remain, of course, questions of how far the parties have to go in the restructuring—do they have to have a signed agreement with a divestiture buyer or is simply a promise to divest enough?—and how much advance warning of the restructuring the merging parties must give to the prosecuting agency. There is also the question of how much opportunity the agency should have to vet the restructuring before the court adjudicates the merits. Finally, the question of whether the parties’ “fix” is adequate to eliminate the competitive problem, of course, is a subject for litigation.¹

The notes on appeals—both when an appeal can be taken (slides 59-68) and the standard of review on appeal (slides 69-72)—contain details fundamental to litigation practice and antitrust counseling. If you already know all this from another course, you can just skim these slides. If this material is new or you have forgotten the details, the appeals section of the class notes is well worth studying with some care. I also have included the relevant statutes and rules in the required reading (pp. 20-27). You should read 28 U.S.C. § 1291 (final decisions of district courts) and 28 U.S.C. § 1292 (interlocutory decisions) with some care. These are important statutes and you should know them. There is no need to study the remaining appellate materials in depth, but you should at least skim them so that you have a general idea of what is in them.

Finally, we spend the last half of the class on the DOJ’s challenge to the ABInbev/Grupo Modelo transaction. The ABInbev/Grupo Modelo case study reads like a soap opera. There are a lot of pages here—over 150—but there is no opinion, so they are very quick to read.

Here are some questions to help focus your reading. We will go through these questions in class.

1. What was the original transaction that ABI was pursuing? (pp. 46-52) Why do you think ABI thought the original transaction would pass antitrust muster (or did ABI think this)?
2. What did ABI do with Constellation Brands before filing its HSR forms in an attempt to allay possible DOJ’s concerns? Why did ABI do this? (pp. 53-54)
3. What happened between the announcement of the ABI/Modelo (June 29, 2012) and the commencement of the litigation (January 31, 2013)—a period of roughly seven months? (No reading for this)
4. What were the DOJ’s concerns about the transaction? What was its formal theory of anticompetitive harm? Why was the fix not enough? (pp. 55-84)
5. Why did Constellation Brands try to intervene in the DOJ litigation? (pp. 85-89—you can skip the reading here and just intuit the answer if you want, although the papers are interesting)
6. What was the revised agreement between ABI and Constellation Brands and in what way did it significantly alleviate the DOJ’s concerns? (pp. 90-96)
7. Why all of the motions to stay the proceedings? What was going on here? (pp. 97-116)

¹ We will see an example in Unit 12 when we study the T-Mobile/Sprint merger. The DOJ accepted a consent decree, but multiple states—led by New York and California—rejected the fix as inadequate and sued to block the transaction. The district court’s decision largely analyses the adequacy of the fix.

8. What was the deal that ultimately resolved the DOJ's concerns? (pp. 117-196). All you really need to read, however, is the press release and the DOJ's competitive impact statement.
9. When did the ABI/Modelo and the Constellation deals close? Was the consent decree final at the time? (pp. 200-05)

If you have any questions or comments, send me an e-mail. See you in class.

P.S. Since there is more than enough reading here, there is no homework assignment for this class.