



American Consumer Society, 1865 - 2005: From Hearth to HDTV

By Regina Lee Blaszczyk

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This startlingly original and highly readable volume adds a new richness and depth to an element of U.S. history that is all too often taken for granted. In *American Consumer Society*, Regina Lee Blaszczyk examines the emergence of consumerism in the Victorian era, and, in tracing its evolution over the next 140 years, shows how the emergence of a mass market was followed by its fragmentation. Niche marketing focused on successive waves of new consumers as each made its presence known: Irish immigrants, urban African Americans, teenagers, computer geeks, and soccer moms, to name but a few.

Blaszczyk demonstrates that middle-class consumerism is an intrinsic part of American identity, but exactly how consumerism reflected that identity changed over time. Initially driven to imitate those who had already achieved success, Americans eventually began to use their purchases to express themselves. This led to a fundamental change in American culture—one in which the American reverence for things was replaced by a passion for experiences. New Millennium families no longer treasured exquisite china or dress in fine clothes, but they'll spare no expense on being able to make phone calls, retrieve emails, watch ESPN, or visit web sites at any place, any time. Victorian mothers just wouldn't understand.

Using materials and techniques from business history, art history, anthropology, sociology, material culture, and good story-telling, this lavishly illustrated and highly thoughtful narrative offers a compelling re-interpretation of American culture through the lens of consumerism, making it perfect for use not only as supplementary reading in the U.S. survey, but also for a variety of courses in Business, Culture, Economics, Marketing, and Fashion and Design history.

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Editorial Review

Review

"[*American Consumer Society*] is a clearly written, well-illustrated exploration of American consumerism, attentive to the need to define terms and make cultural references appropriate for college students today. This book draws on essential and revealing statistics and offers memorable stories to drive home themes. ...Blaszczyk does more than survey her topic. She offers original research from her scholarship on the history of design, advertising, and fashion...whatever your view, you will find this book a gold mine of information and analysis, and an example of just good writing." (Harvard Business School *Business History Review*, Winter 2009)

About the Author

Reginal Lee Blaszczyk, Visiting Scholar in the Department of the History and Sociology of Science at the University of Pennsylvania, received a B.A. from Marlboro College, an M.A. from George Washington University, and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the Hagley Program at the University of Delaware. A specialist in the history of capitalism and consumer culture, Blaszczyk has published numerous books, articles, and reviews. Her first book, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (2000), received the Hagley Prize for the Best Book in Business History for 2001, and her co-edited reader, *Major Problems in American Business History; Documents and Essays* (2006), is widely used in courses on American capitalism. *Partners in Innovation: Science Education and the Science Workforce* (edited; 2005) considers the skills needed to compete in the global business environment, while *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers* (edited; 2008) suggests new approaches to the history of fashion, business, and consumer culture.

Blaszczyk has received fellowships from Harvard University's Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Chemical Heritage Foundation. She has taught at Boston University, Rutgers University-Camden, the University of Delaware, and the University of Pennsylvania, and spent eleven years as a cultural history curator at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. In 2008, she received the Harold F. Williamson Prize in Business History for mid-career achievement from the Business History Conference, the largest international association of business historians.

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