



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

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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