Quotes for WA3:

Different Paths to Mass Consumption – Jan Logemann

“Credit financing is a critical aspect of the rise of mass consumption in the twentieth century. Pioneered in many ways by the United States, credit financing defined a particular form of consumer society that dramatically democratized access to innovative consumer goods, challenging an older division between a subsistence consumer society and a bourgeois consumer society that survived longer in Germany and other European countries.”

“Many Americans came to regard credit as a means of ensuring democratic access to the American dream and to an expanding middle class.”

“Demand[ed] in response to the Depression-era collapse of consumer spending and to reinforce a nascent popular consumer culture built on emulative spending and the rapid diffusion of new goods.”

“Most importantly, the respective uses of consumer credit were affected by notions of social respectability and the social function of consumption.”

“After 1945, a broad consensus among political and economic actors afforded consumer credit an even more central role in an economic growth strategy which was underpinned by a widely shared vision of credit as the key to broad democratic access to middle-class mass consumption and respectability.”

“Several factors made credit more available to consumers in the postwar decades. The competition of commercial banks in the consumer credit sector helped drive down the cost of credit, as sales finance companies and especially consumer finance companies had to adjust their rates.”

“The rate of consumer debt continued to grow into the 1960s when two relatively new institutions gained dramatic momentum: the revolving credit account at retail stores that guaranteed a continuous line of credit to customers (and often replaced down-payments with monthly minimums) and the credit card.”

“To the critics, the focus on a credit-fueled material standard of life not only eclipsed public goods and a broader quality of life, but also threatened an older, "inner-directed" ethics of bourgeois individualism. By the 1960s, however, the critique of consumer credit and with it much of the public debate on this issue shifted away from such fundamental concerns to the question of consumer protection.”

Diners Club Begins a New Industry – Mandell and Holmes

“The Diners Club card influenced the society of the 1950’s by crossing product and store lines. This card was universal rather than product- or store-specific.”

“Technological advances usually were borrowed from other industries rather than created specifically for credit card usage. For example, neither satellite transmission nor computer authorization codes were invented for the credit card industry but were put to good use by it. The credit card industry thus influenced technology by offering a new outlet for innovative products and methods.”

“In 1952, after two full years of operation, Diners Club showed a profit of $61,222 on sales of $6.2 million. By 1986, 55 percent of all U.S. households held at least one credit card.”

“By allowing consumers to spread their debts over a long period of time but still allowing them to take home what they purchased, credit cards made it possible for consumers to live above their means.”

Greening the Red, White, and Blue

“More than ever, powerful corporations and a federal government bent on economic growth were seen by many Americans as threats to human health and the environment. Fallout from atomic testing, air and water pollution, the proliferation of pesticides and herbicides—all connected to the growing dominance of technology and corporate capitalism in American life—led a variety of constituencies to seek solutions in what came to be known as environmentalism. “

“Frustrated in their efforts to attain meaningful environmental laws and regulations in a political system that was dominated by the very corporate power they hoped to contain, environmentally minded citizens turned instead to unconventional civic participation through their actions as consumers in an attempt to assert agency and protect themselves, their families, and their environment from harm. With so much that seemed beyond their control, citizens could at least decide what and what not to buy. Perhaps a country dominated by corporate capitalism could be brought, one purchase at a time, into a new epoch of environmentalism.”

“In addition to consumption, environmentalism constituted an alternative aesthetic of production in its embrace of small-scale methods.”

“When the American Way was stretched to include an allegiance to unfettered corporate capitalism, the budding environmental impulse challenged dominant methods and mechanisms that were shaping the postwar world.

“The expanded industrial capacity financed by the government during the war required increased consumption afterward to sustain the massive systems of production. The government, in partnership with corporations and financial institutions, did its part to assure sufficient levels of consumption by doggedly pursuing easy credit and economic growth.”

“If consumer demand proved insufficient, military spending would help to assure adequate aggregate demand for corporate capitalism’s production. Consumer desires, pent up since the Depression, were met by a flood of new products.”

“After the nearly generation-long deprivations of the Depression and the war, to those concerned about the demoralizing potential of consumption the postwar explosion of consumer culture was particularly glaring and troubling. All of this consumption carried considerable costs, both cultural and environmental”

Mass Consumption and Meaningful Democratic Politics—Luke Corden

“In the synchronistic rise of mass consumption and mass marketing we see dramatic changes in the way a society operates and views itself. One such change is the way citizens and government have become embedded with a consumer ideology that has repercussions for the democratic process.”

“Consumption became a cultural prerogative, mass consumption the prerogative of mass culture.”

“Firstly, it allows for the boom in mass productivity by keeping big business profitable. Secondly, it can be understood as an activity in keeping with the liberal ideal of progress underpinning the American dream.”

“Mass Consumption became further embedded in the American psyche in post war America as a means to creating post war abundance, but not only was abundance a necessary requirement for recovery after the war but on a more fundamental level it became an ideological weapon to be used in the Cold War. “

“Mass consumption has changed American society at a more fundamental and structural level. So far it has been argued that society has gradually moved away from mass consumption as a civic duty to mass consumption as a personal act of self-expression and that the marketing industry has been successful in identifying values that has allowed mass production to successfully sell its products to an individuated mass market.”

“As Aldridge (2003:26) asserts, “For first world societies, consumption is part of their vision of the good society, the good life, and the way to achieve them.”

Echoing Lippmann, another political theorist Herbert Marcuse (2002), was at the forefront of the push against mass consumption and warned against the Freudian techniques used throughout the advertising industry.”

“Moreover, the public voice of consumers was exceptional for whom it brought together. Consumer power at this point may be said to transcend class, gender and race, as Dr. Katherine McHale told Roosevelt: “There is no interest that is more fundamental than that of consumers. All residents of our nation are consumers […] no matter what our other interests, we all have in common one function – that of consumption” (cited in Cohen, 2004:34).”