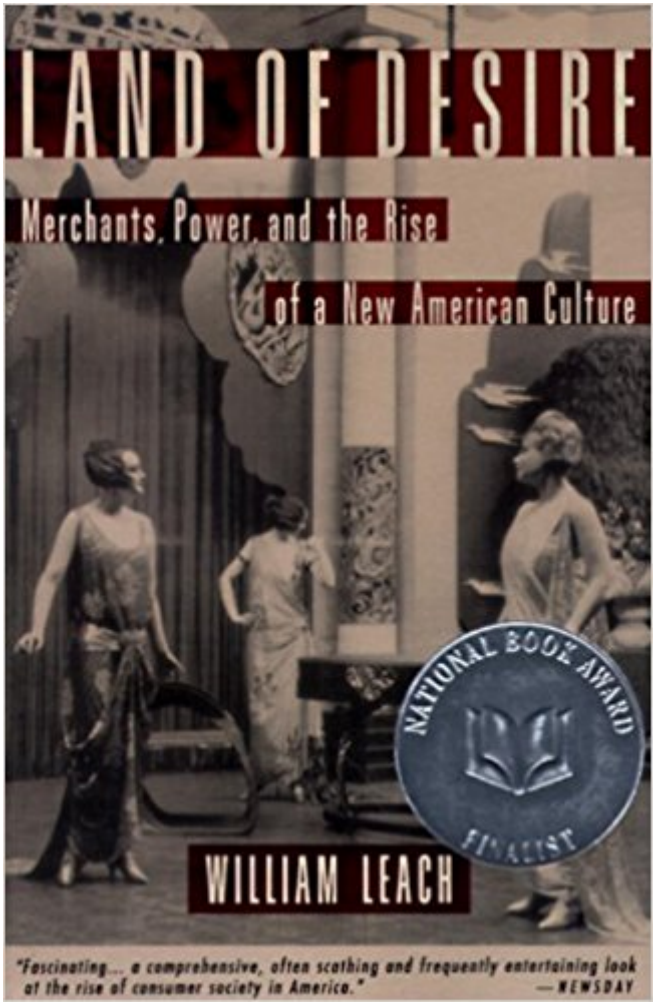
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# Land Of Desire: Merchants, Power, And The Rise Of A New American Culture




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## Synopsis

This monumental work of cultural history was nominated for a National Book Award. It chronicles America's transformation, beginning in 1880, into a nation of consumers, devoted to a cult of comfort, bodily well-being, and endless acquisition. 24 pages of photos.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This NBA nominee is an outstanding cultural history of America's turn-of-the-century transformation into a nation of consumers.Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In an alternate history of modern American life from 1890 to 1927, Leach (History/Columbia; True Love and Perfect Union, 1980) offers an encompassing, learned, and fast-paced account of how entrepreneurs, manufacturers, bankers, clergymen, and government leaders produced a culture of consumers--as well as the rituals, morality, aesthetics, and institutions that identify the good with the goodies, acquisition with virtue. Innovative merchandising--initiated by the great department stores of the 1890's (Wanamaker's, Marshall Field, etc.) and extending in time to hotels, banks, public utilities, service industries, etc.--began with an excess of production: superfluous pianos, lamps, rugs, cheap jewelry, and food. To dispense with the surplus, merchant princes developed a technology of enticement, the arts of display--including posters, outdoor signs, light, color, glass, window trimming, packaging, catalogues, architecture, and, ultimately, an urban geography with entire shopping districts (epitomized in Manhattan in the showmanship of Times Square, the retail

establishments of Fifth Avenue, the fashion and garment districts, and on Wall Street, the source of the financing). Beyond the visual were the rituals--holiday seasons, pageants, parades, children's culture--and the escalators and credit-granting through which department stores became democratized. Americans' getting and spending produced a standardization of taste and beauty, as well as colleges for business and design, fashion magazines, hotel chains, and intermediaries--brokers and agencies for everything from models to real estate. In 1932, Herbert Hoover's Department of Commerce and its imposing building in Washington made merchandising part of government--incarnating, as Leach sees it, the ethics and fantasies embodied in the Emerald City of The Wizard of Oz (L. Frank Baum also wrote the definitive text on window trimming). Fascinating, detailed, and evangelical: a yellow brick road full of rare adventures, intriguing characters, and surprising vistas. (Twenty-four pages of photos--not seen) -- Copyright Ã Â©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Probably one of the most thorough and comprehensive books ever written on the roots of American commercial manipulation during these formative years.

For anyone who wants to know where and how consumer America got its start, this is the book.

Very well done. Informative, engaging, a pleasure to read; and all too relevant to our own times. This is a very satisfying, as well as thought-provoking read.

Book was more than acceptable. Completely fit the description!

I don't think I've read a better non-fiction work. The prodigious research is presented in a continuously diverting way. The evolution of Salesmanship in its many forms is explored in colorful depth: floor design, window design (Who knew that until the 1930s "all the show windows at Marshall Field's were covered on Sundays out of respect" for the founder's religiosity?), classified ads, mail-order catalogues. The paradigmatic figure of John Wanamaker is presented vividly and multi-dimensionally; anecdotal details along the way illuminate a whole period of American history I'd paid only scant attention to before. Thank you Mr. Leach, you've started a whole new reading list for me! In fact, my only criticism of the book is the lack of a bibliography. There are book (and journal and letter and interview) references among the copious footnotes, but no single list. The

research Mr. Leach did is obviously staggering. How many of us have read "The Dry Goods Economist" or "The Show Window" - the latter founded and edited by L. Frank Baum -? This is a work animated by both a dedication to the highest principles of scholarship, and a passion for the subject that is (in my case at least) contagious.

I found too many cases where I believe the author misunderstood the factors at work, leading to poor conclusions.An example is his statement that, in the 1920s, the CEO of Goldman Sachs dreamed up a scheme where investors were "hoodwinked" into buying companies at market values well in excess of the value of the companies' assets. Many "innocent" people lost their money when the deals failed in 1930.Now maybe the Goldman man was a scalawag and the deals bad, but these statements in the book do not prove that. 150 years ago, if stock was sold for more than book value (the value of assets), it was considered "watered" stock. But over time, investors came to realize that any decent company, except in the direst of markets, was worth far more than that. A company's brand, management talent, business relationships, distribution systems, and above all else future prospects mattered more than the asset tallies of accountants. If the author owns any stocks or mutual funds, he likely paid a multiple of book value. The vast majority of Warren Buffet's investments were bought above book value, sometimes way above. When was the last time his favored Coca-Cola stock sold for asset value? These old ideas die hard, as evidenced by the decision of Massachusetts securities regulators to ban the sale of Apple stock to residents of Massachusetts when that company went public, because they judged it a "bad deal." And of course investments that looked good in the 1920s but busted in 1929-30 were the norm for most investments and investors. Bubbles have been with us since the Dutch Tulip bubble and the South Seas bubble. But rarely if ever is a gun held to any investor's head. Everyone gets caught up in it. Most of the people who jumped out of windows were rich a few months earlier.  Additionally, Goldman was not yet the big investment banking force it later became, and likely focused on rich customers. It was and is not a "wire house" with lots of small customers. Huge losses were taken in bigger, more broadly-held deals: New York's First National or City Investments and Samuel Insull's Midland United made headlines. JC Penney and the founders of Coral Gables and Miami Beach were wiped out in the Florida land bubble a few years earlier. But by the late 1920s, the future looked rosy to almost everyone. Skyscrapers couldn't go up fast enough. Plenty of books have been written on the causes of the crash and depression, including the classic by Milton Friedman and Anna Schwartz. Informed people still argue about i. The human tragedy is undeniable. This is one example of many from the book. I have spent 50+ years studying retailing. This book provides slim

insights into the thinking and motivation of those leading the industry. Even those who find capitalism problematic would be better served by serious thinkers.Words like "hoodwinked" and "innocent" obscure more than they clarify, except the author's biases and lack of understanding. The book is well written and the facts i checked seemed correct, but the understanding of business and economics is weak at best. Many readers might not see this.

I've rarely read a book that was so fabulous from beginning to end. I thought the very last section was going to bog down, but it never did. WHAT GREAT WRITING!

This book will appeal mostly to progressives of the intellectual persuasion and people who have a preference for social democracy or whatever those who seek to find some compromise between the ethics and intents of socialism with the productiveness of capitalism - supporters of a left leaning mixed economy basically. However, for those who do not, it is good to be aware that there is mostly talk about just arbitrary things. A lot of times it seems that the author is more concerned with displaying his vast knowledge of the era than actually creating a comprehensive story about the rise of consumerist culture. There is a lot of talk of fashion, advertising, desire etc, but there is very little talk about the actual work of merchants, the execution of power or the actual process and logic behind the rise of consumerism.At the end of the book, in his chapter on "Legacies", he writes about how many progressive intellectuals embraced the coming of the great depression because it lead to a decline in the momentum of the rise of big business; even though, although as he admits it ended up as nothing more that an a small obstacle. There's a point in the book, where the author referring to Lippmann brings up the fact that most of the rise in big business was due mostly to laws, it is telling that the author didn't expand more on this, but rather talked endlessly about colors, fashion and basically the "brainwashing" and "childishness" indoctrinated into mass culture. It has always tickled my fancy that the greatest supporters of the public and defenders of masses, think so lowly of them, yet so highly of themselves.

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