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Pamela Walker Laird. *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. xiv + 479 pp. \$35.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-5841-3.

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The Other Side of Roland Marchand

In *Advertising Progress* Pamela Laird tells the story of advertising from the Civil War to 1920, exploring how it became an essential tool for business success. During the period under investigation she clearly illustrates how advertising changed from a rather simple instrument with a less-than-admirable reputation acquired from snake-oil salesmen and the likes of P.T. Barnum, to a business tool increasingly regarded as necessary and legitimate. Linked with this change in attitude was the professionalization of advertising by advertising agencies.

The evolution of advertising's form and function during the period, from notifying customers to creating consumers, was direct influence on its professionalization. The increasing ranks of professional advertising creators, employing new communications technologies and an ever-increasing number of publications, redefined advertising copy and art to persuade people that they needed things which they otherwise would not have purchased—thereby creating consumers out of customers. The author argues that professional advertising people redefined advertising in this way for two reasons. First, the intense competition in an expanding national market required manufacturers to rely more on advertising. Second, as advertising professionals sought legitimacy for themselves and their product, they did so by linking “progress” to material acquisition, and hence, had to convince traditional customers to become consumers. This transformation, according to Laird, brought to the advertising professionals “cultural authority.” The transformation of America to a consumer-oriented society in

the early twentieth century, therefore, can be traced to the transformation of advertising messages directed by a new cultural elite—the professional advertising agent.

Laird outlines how advertising changed from its earlier form of hucksterism to a powerful new business tool. Her work shines as she explains how and why professional advertising people removed the stain of earlier advertising excesses and sought legitimacy for their craft. There are a few problems, however, and one exists in the subtitle of the book. Laird asserts that *Advertising Progress* leads to the *Rise of Consumer Marketing*. As one reads through the book, however, “marketing” becomes more difficult to understand. In some instances it seems to mean sales, while in others she equates it with advertising. Very often, the author simply notes the existence of some firm's “marketing problems” with little explanation of what they are. In her struggle with marketing, Laird is not alone. The work on marketing history is extremely thin, and therefore, Laird had very little to rely on as a guide.

A second difficulty comes from Laird's assertion that professional advertising people sought “cultural authority.” Laird argues that the rise of the consumer culture is a “top-down” phenomenon by which professionals, seeking cultural authority, endeavored to change the behavior of the American population. Advertising professionals, as well as other businesspeople, were surely part of the transformation of consumer America. In Laird's analysis these people all have the same goal in mind—cultural

authority. This argument dovetails quite nicely with the work on the consumer culture by such historians as Jackson Lears and Stuart Ewen, both of whom suggest a hegemonic role for American businesspeople—particularly the creators of advertising. This theme in Laird’s work, however, challenges what Roland Marchand had argued in his book *Advertising the American Dream*—that businesses and advertising agents took advantage of the changes they recognized occurring in American society. Businesspeople boosted the transformation, but did not initiate it or guide it.

While the book has some weaknesses according to this reviewer, those weaknesses point directly to the important role this book serves for those interested in ad-

vertising history. Until Laird’s book, historians relied almost completely on Marchand’s work to understand advertising history. Laird offers us the other side of Marchand, where advertising agents direct American customers toward consumption, as opposed to Marchand’s earlier interpretation which suggests a secondary role for businesspeople. In addition to offering those interested in advertising history a chance to explore a new interpretation, Laird’s work would be useful to people looking for an introduction to the history of advertising.

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