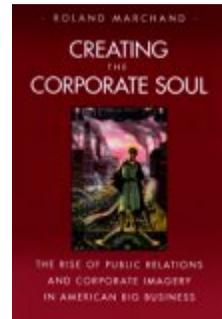


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Roland Marchand. *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. xi + 461 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-08719-4.

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On January 11, 1999 *Time Magazine* devoted a special edition to the future of medicine. This issue featured a series of striking full-and double-page advertisements sponsored by the pharmaceutical firm, Pfizer. While some of the company's thirty-nine pages of advertising promoted Pfizer's products, many others were designed to create a favorable public image of the firm. Through this institutional advertising, readers learned about Pfizer's history, its concern for women's health, its innovative research programs and its longstanding commitment to service. Pfizer presented itself as a friend of the family and an institution dedicated to improving the life of each American. In each institutional ad, the firm proclaimed that life, not profits, "is our life's work." Having established its concern for the public, Pfizer shifted from image-shaping institutional advertising to advocacy advertising, using one of the issue's back pages to editorialize against government-led reform of the healthcare system. Only the free market, CEO William Steere sermonized, could provide quality healthcare.

Pfizer's efforts to associate its firm with technological progress and service and its attack on government regulation have deep historical roots. Roland Marchand's study of the creation of the corporate image uncovers the origins of many of the themes and images still used today by corporations like Pfizer in their institutional and advocacy advertising campaigns. It is a major contribution to the growing literature on the history of public relations, consumer culture, and advertising. This meticulously researched work draws upon the records of major corporations, advertising agencies and public relations counselors to analyze the strategies big business used to attain legitimacy by creating a favorable public

image during the first half of the twentieth century. It combines a survey of the activities of a broad cross section of firms with in-depth case studies of major companies such as AT&T, the Pennsylvania Railroad, General Motors, General Electric, Du Pont and Metropolitan Life Insurance.

In the early twentieth century, large corporations faced a "crisis of legitimacy" (p. 3). Appalled at the growing power and corruption associated with newly emergent big businesses and by increasing industrial strife, elements of the public began calling for greater state regulation. Some even demanded the dismantling of the "soulless" giants who seemed to endanger democracy and the traditional American way of life. This threat to corporate freedom helped give birth to a host of public relations initiatives, ranging from welfare capitalism and institutional advertising, to factory tours and elaborate exhibits at the great world's fairs, all designed to create a positive image of the corporation. Like Andrea Tone, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America*, Cornell University Press, (1997), Marchand argues that welfare capitalism, which provided services such as medical care, recreation, pensions, and housing, was more than just a mechanism to undercut unionism and promote worker productivity. By publicly demonstrating compassion for employees and presenting the human face of American capitalism, welfare programs served as a "safeguard against perceptions of soullessness" (p. 15). Welfarism also helped address corporate concern over the growing distance between management and the rank and file, which Marchand labels "the Lament." The employee magazine, radio broadcasts, company films and employee representation reunited "the family at one great dining table" (p. 113).

Much of the book is devoted to analyzing the evolution of institutional advertising. Marchand uses corporate records to reveal companies' multiple goals and multiple audiences. Metropolitan Life's 1922 institutional campaign, for instance, was aimed at both employees and the public. It sought to shape political opinion, promote employee morale and corporate consciousness, and develop for the insurance company a reputation for community service. Similarly, General Motors' 1920s advertising campaign aspired both to portray GM to the public as an agency of public service, and to stimulate a corporate consciousness among the often hostile divisions of the firm. Marchand pays close attention to the language and visual imagery of the ads themselves. This book lavishly reproduced almost two hundred of these advertisements, both color and black-and-white. While some of the advertising seems archaic, many of the themes and metaphors that the author identifies have become ubiquitous in modern-day institutional advertising. Early ads projected the corporate image through architecture, using pictures of the factory or corporate headquarters to symbolize qualities like stability, efficiency, and security. More familiar, however, are the AT&T ads from the early part of the century. A trailblazer in corporate public relations, AT&T advertisements identified the telephone with economic progress, featured women, sought to humanize the company, and emphasized the firm's commitment to public service.

In the midst of the depression of the thirties, corporations worried less about their soulless image and more about the future of capitalism. Competing with the New Deal for public favor, business attempted to sell itself and the capitalist system. It looked to new mediums, especially radio and movies, and reached out to insurgent workers with a common-folk style. New converts, like Du Pont and U.S. Steel became committed to the mission of carrying their "corporate message directly to the American public" (p. 223). Other firms, like General Motors, longtime advocates of public relations, expanded their image building activities. GM's striking 1939 World's Fair exhibit, Futurama, helped convey "the corporation's optimism about the capacity of private industry to promote prosperity and create new jobs," and suggested the "modernity, benevolence, and forward-looking social vision of the corporation" (p. 303). World War II saw yet a further expansion of corporate public relations as companies connected their images to the war effort and fought to offset growing wartime regulation of the economy.

In the early part of *Creating the Corporate Soul*, Marchand offers an intriguing analysis of the roles of gender and shifting boundaries in the development of corporate imagery. As he explains, public relations and welfare capitalism, which were distant from production and catered to public opinion, were initially viewed as feminine and potentially subversive. Gender considerations shaped the content of ads. Uncomfortable with having too "feminine" an appeal, AT&T's early institutional advertising shied away from depicting the social role of the telephone. Welfare capitalism also pushed the boundaries of conventional business behavior, creating expectations of stewardship that firms were often hesitant to assume. The themes of gender and boundaries appear, however, only in the first part of the book. One might have wished for an extension of this promising analysis through the entire work.

Throughout, Marchand makes realistic appraisals of the corporate image building campaigns. Many of the corporate assertions were hypocritical, contradictory and downright false. Firms, for instance, commonly employed the metaphor of corporation as family. But, as Marchand observes, "what family would 'fire' its children when expediency so dictated?" (p. 107). AT&T's depiction of itself as an investment democracy was deceptive. Similarly, the sitdown strikes made GM's 1930s portrayals of employees happily rushing to work hardly credible. Marchand acknowledges that the "precise effect of institutional advertising campaigns was difficult to estimate" (p. 201). Companies with political goals at times found the payoff in favorable legislation. In the 1930s professional polling services began surveying popular attitudes toward large firms. They helped provide business the necessary evidence of the effectiveness of corporate image building. By the end of World War II big business had gained acceptance as a legitimate social institution, and corporate ideology was well on its way to becoming a dominant force in political discourse.

Roland Marchand died before *Creating Corporate Soul* was published. It is an important work and a beautiful book that will stand as a fitting tribute to his distinguished career as a historian.

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