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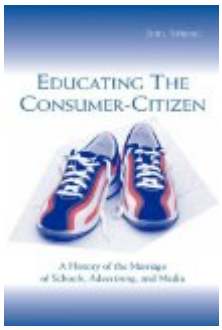

Joel Spring. *Educating the Consumer-Citizen: A History of the Marriage of Schools, Advertising, and Media.* Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003. 254 pp. No price listed, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8058-4273-9.

Reviewed by Ning de Coninck-Smith

Published on H-Education (November, 2004)

If you, dear Reader, should live in the belief that the historical mission of the educational system is to bring up children as responsible citizens, then you will have to change your mind. At least after having read professor Joel Spring's entertaining and wise overview of the relationship between American schools, advertising, and the media, this reviewer is convinced that the educational system has been influenced by other agendas. Spring argues convincingly that the contemporary involvement of companies like Pepsi, Coca-Cola, MacDonald's, or KFC in the educational world has historical roots.

Consumer education has been part of the school system since its early days in the nineteenth century. The puritan universe of the Sunday school curriculum taught children to accept social inequality and differences in spending. Around 1900 girls were taught in home economic classes to become careful spenders and efficient housewives. In the mind of some of the early pioneers, this efficiency, in combination with the use of ready-made food, could even lead to a liberation of women, since a well-organized housewife would have more time to educate herself and to engage herself in society.

This close connection between education and consumption, built on reason, was gradually replaced by an understanding of consumption as driven by lust. It became visible in the early high school culture of the 1920s, where the senior prom as well as the introduction of high school sports gradually turned into spectacular consumption events.

The new media, like the film but especially the radio and the television, brought the consumption dreams into the hearts of the family. From the 1930s onwards--most markedly during the years of the Cold War--consumption became a patriotic necessity, identical with the American Way of Life. High material living standards, measured on the amount of household technologies such as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, and cars, became the measuring tool in the competition between the two world systems, the United States and the Soviet Union. Consumption became the cement that held the nation together, even more so after the civil rights move-

ments of the 1960s had contributed to the development of independent consumer markets for Afro-Americans and other ethnic groups of non-white descent.

These developments also had an impact on the youngest citizens. With the creation of the Disney Mickey Mouse club in 1955 and later the educational program Sesame Street in 1969, consumption gained a strong foothold in child culture both in and outside school. This did not happen unnoticed. Parent-teacher associations protested the development as teachers organization had done earlier, when the movie made its way into teen and child culture of the 1920s and 1930s.

The book is based partially on professor Spring's earlier research into the relations between the media world and the educational system--published in his book ***Images of American Life: A History of Ideological Management in Schools, Movies, Radio and Television***, now out of print.[1] Other parts of the book draw on recent historical research into American consumer culture, gender, and sexuality. This leaves the reader with the impression of wide reading on one hand--and with a feeling of coincidence on the other. One will look in vain for Joan Brumberg's work on American girl culture in the twentieth century. The computer and the World Wide Web is not mentioned at all, nor are the development of new mobile media, where children can be reached at any time of the day--a new playground for the advertisement business. Given the fact that the history of the department store is described in detail, it is quite surprising that a more recent phenomenon like the mall is just barely mentioned.

These omissions seem to reflect the fact that this is an overview that focuses on the years before 1970--and to a certain degree is more occupied with changes in masculinity than in femininity. We hear a lot about new masculine ideals, but comparatively less about new feminine ideals and practices. Not a single word on dieting can be found, even though the beauty industry is touched upon, not to mention the impact on gender roles of women's entry into the paid labor market.

To conclude, as a foreigner to the United States there is--despite this critique--a lot to be learned from this highly readable overview of the role of the educational system in the development of modern consumer culture or civic consumerism, as Spring terms it. It is provocative and challenging--and it is a necessary book, seen from a Danish perspective, where the history of education has been intimately related to the idea of citizenship.

But not only foreigners should read this book. The more general lesson to be learned by all historians of education is that a broad social and cultural approach to the history of education can bring about a row of new insights into the dynamics of educational change. Studying educational reforms and educational ideas have taken up a lot of the time of historians. ***Educating the Consumer-Citizen*** reminds us that life has other dimensions--and that schools can only be fully understood in relation to these dimensions.

Note

[1]. Joel Spring, ***Images of American Life: A History of Ideological Management in Schools, Movies, Radio and Television*** (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

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Citation: Ning de Coninck-Smith. Review of Spring, Joel. *Educating the Consumer-Citizen: A History of the Marriage of Schools, Advertising, and Media.* H-Education, H-Net Reviews. November, 2004.

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