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Thomas Jefferson’s house at Monticello was preserved intact from the moment the statesman closed his eyes for the last time. A tourist visiting the home two hundred years later could see the residence as it was in use, just as the great leader and thinker lived in it. And yet that twentieth-century visitor got a false impression.

Monticello appears to be a home on a hill, an isolated haven perfect for study and thought, a quiet retreat for gentlemen of state to gather and discuss the key questions of a new republic. In Jefferson’s time, however, the house was surrounded by a substantial collection of homes and shops, full of the bustle of many activities required to support the life of comfort that patricians required. Indeed, though the house itself rose slightly above the settlement of its servants, it was then surrounded by what amounted to a small village, rather than being the oasis of self-sufficiency it appears to be now. Thus the house on a hill created the false image of an imagined past for those who came to see it.

The docents, archivists and foundations that worked to preserve Jefferson’s home did not think it necessary to maintain the places in which the ordinary folks, many o’ them African slaves, lived and worked to make Jefferson’s exemplary life possible. So the small town that originally surrounded Monticello rotted, wasted and finally disappeared into the ground. It was not until about 15 years ago that efforts to excavate the places used by the commonfolk and slaves began.

The decision to restore the small town that supported Monticello coincided with a sharp turn in the path of those who write history. Much of history, not only in America but throughout the world, had been written to focus on the lives of ‘Great Men’ and the events in which they were involved, such as wars and the formation of governments. Virtually all history, until the late twentieth century, had a strong ruling-class bias, not only because of selectivity about what (and who) was important to write about, but because of the pattern of preservation decisions such as those that made a misleading Monticello. Consider also that history is heavily dependent upon written sources – diaries and letters for instance – and it is easy to see that the literate segments of any population have an inordinate influence on the way history is told. Since literacy has been the province of the rich and male during most of the world’s past, the stories of women, of slaves, of immigrants and of common people everywhere are badly underrepresented in the annals of the human experience.

The effort to correct this problem was manifest on many fronts, though it was particularly evident in women’s studies, African-American studies and other areas of scholarly discourse founded on the study of disempowered groups. In the United States, the new focus produced a variety of fascinating new books taking a different view of the American past, beginning with Howard Zinn’s A People’s History of the United States (1980). The new spotlight on the lives of ordinary people also created fresh topics of interest, notably
a growing fascination with the realities of material culture and the economic behavior of common citizens (for instance, Bushman, 1992; Hawke, 1989; Larkin, 1988). Thus, in the last 15 years of the millennium, an explosion of books appeared that focused on consumer culture, advertising, markets and everyday life (for instance, Hoy, 1995; Marchand, 1985; Vinikas, 1992).

As Daniel Miller and his colleagues have argued in Acknowledging Consumption (1995), the focus of history as a discipline on the phenomenon/institution of consumption is, as with other primary disciplines, long overdue. However the turn toward consumption in history is more clearly an outgrowth in the change of emphasis from documenting the lives of the powerful to narrating the experiences of the common and marginal than it is an epiphany about consumption. Though it is certainly true, as Paul Glennie has argued in Miller's book, that consumer culture seemed suddenly to take center stage as an explanation for a variety of social conditions at the end of the twentieth century, it is also the case that a shift in focus from the leaders of government or military to the people who keep house, plow fields and otherwise tend the fires of daily existence necessarily leads to a greater concern with material culture. This is important to acknowledge because the embryonic state of consumption history is inextricably tied to the status of its narrative characters: because common folk, especially women and servants, were so seldom literate and their belongings so rarely seen as the raw material from which history would be written, the relative paucity of evidence is a key reason for the late coming of this history—and it is the primary driver behind the sifting through unusual evidence that marks consumption historiography now.

Coincident with this sudden turn in the interests of historians was a cluster of efforts to bring history into consumer research. Articles by Russell Belk (1992), Terrence Witkowski (1989) and others gave examples of how history could enlighten the study of consumer behavior; Ruth Ann Smith and David Lux (1993) outlined the basics of historical method; Ronald Fullerton talked about the principles of an historicist perspective (1987). Smith and Lux (1993) claimed to have reviewed 31 historical articles appearing in five marketing journals between 1983 and 1990 (a number of these are classified as chronicles or presentations of trend data, which would not typically be considered history by historians, and a number are concerned with the history of the field rather than the history of consumption). The stage seemed set for history to become an important part of consumer research, much as consumer behavior was becoming a hot new topic in history. Yet, in the years since the first of these articles appeared, little more has been written about historical consumer behavior within this discipline. Indeed, of the approximately 930 articles published by the Journal of Consumer Research since 1987, only five of them have been historical.

In contrast, other areas of interpretive work in consumer behavior have grown (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Explanations offered for the lag in historical work range from the difficulties that marketing academics have with the methods, objectives and writing style typical of history (see Witkowski in this volume) to the fact that journal-length articles do not allow historians enough space to do the theory building demanded by marketing journals (ibid.). Given that history is a far better established field than either marketing or consumer behavior, we feel it is incumbent upon marketing academics to come to grips with history's ways rather than vice versa, and we feel that such acceptance will be forthcoming if the discipline realizes the kinds of contributions that can be expected from historical
research. In this chapter, therefore, we wish primarily to demonstrate the ways that historical perspectives could be used in the future to bolster or challenge the theoretical perspectives of other consumer behavior work.

The producer as elite

Popular books on commercial history, cultural studies analyses of consumer culture and historical articles appearing in the marketing literature show a pronounced tendency to overemphasize the producers of consumer culture: that is, most works focus on firms and their leaders (an example is Kreshel, 1990) or show a strong bias that attributes all control of the market to corporate actors (see Holt, 2002). In spite of growing evidence in both studies done in the present as well as research on the past that average people consume, in support of their own agendas and gather product information from multiple sources (see Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Miller, 1995; Scott in this volume), the conceptual tendency is to put control of the market in the hands of producers: ‘Marketing is a form of distorted communication in that marketers control the information that is exchanged. Marketers organize the code, and we as consumers have no choice but to participate’ (Holt, 2002, p. 72). In this way, market producers take the place of elites like the gentlemen statesmen who led the American Revolution. They are the focus of most of the work and they dominate the perspective from which the history and theories are written: to the extent that the enormous number of people who fought the battles or consumed the products play a role at all, it is only as the masses at the beck of these leaders.

The bias of gender, class and race infects even the histories of corporations. For instance, in advertising histories, the focus on men in agencies is marked. Holt cites Stanley Resor of J. Walter Thompson in his 2002 article as one of the leaders who advocated a science-inspired, ‘hard sell’ approach to ads. Yet the evidence in the J. Walter Thompson Collection at Duke University suggests that Resor split agency responsibilities with his wife, Helen Lansdowne Resor: Stanley took care of the finances but she was Helen who led creative development (Fox, 1984; Scott, 2005). Helen Resor seldom appears in the histories, but she was one of the leaders of the ‘image advertising’ school in the early twentieth century (her childhood chum, James Webb Young, is given far more credit, even though Helen was his boss). Helen Resor’s famous campaigns for Woodbury Soap, Pond’s Creams, Cutex manicure treatments and other products are well documented in the Duke collection. The testimony of others as to her influence is clear, but she herself was said to be ‘publicity shy’, so there are few interviews or photographs of her in the record of the trade. Helen Resor was also a feminist activist and a brilliant woman. It seems unlikely that she was actually a timid person; instead, her avoidance of personal publicity seems calculated to give her husband, Stanley, the limelight in the ‘woman behind the man’ way acceptable in her lifetime. Thus the record of Stanley’s contribution (and Young’s) versus Helen’s is skewed by patriarchal prejudice, much as is the record of other history.

After women became more publicly prominent in advertising, the bias continued to be evident, even in source material. One book, The Benevolent Dictators, includes interviews with key figures from the mid-twentieth century, but none of them are women, even though the interview base from which the book is drawn included tapes (now decayed) of Shirley Polykoff, Rena Bartos and other well-known female advertising executives of the same period (Cummings, 1984). Steven Fox (1984) gives enormous credit to Bill Bernbach...
for the important campaigns of the 'Creative Revolution', as do most other historians. Scant attention anywhere is given to Mary Wells Lawrence, though she was famous in her own time as one of the key players of the Creative Revolution, the brains behind Alka-Seltzer, Braniiff and other campaigns thought to mark the period. Her autobiography, *A Big Life*, was released in 2002, but by then Bernbach and others had dominated even the coffee table books for decades. Omitting women from the advertising histories underpins a frequent error in feminist commentary, in which critics regularly assume that the ads aimed at women are written by men, when, in fact, advertisements for products aimed at women, including especially beauty and fashion items, have traditionally been written by female creative groups (Scott, 2005).

A similar skew is discernible in matters of race. While books and articles have been devoted to the way the dominant culture stereotyped African Americans in ads and other marketing materials, there is not yet any work to document the considerable efforts of people like Claude Barnett, John Johnson, David Sullivan, Tom Burrell, Frank Mingo and Caroline Jones to market products, establish market research or even to wrest away the control of advertising campaigns from the 'dominant' agencies (Chambers, 2001, and forthcoming). Yet the inclination of ad agencies today to showcase the 'Urban Culture' mentioned by Holt (2002) and the efforts of 'mainstream' agencies to wrest back business from minority shops is testimony to the success of those entrepreneurs (Turow, 1997).

Particularly when looking at the earliest days of the consumer culture 'revolution', the matter of class also presents problems for the 'imagined history' of marketer-controlled culture. The modern market in America (and by this we are referring to the beginning of factory production, national distribution by mail and rail, and so-called 'mass media') emerged in the wake of the War for Independence, which substantially changed class relations by removing the monarchy as the primary point of hierarchical reference (Scott, 2005; Wood, 1992). The merchant class and the new middle class that were empowered by both the Revolution and the new economy were not of the leisureed stratum that led the nation only a couple of decades earlier. Thus the market itself represented a challenge to an older order – the agrarian aristocracy as represented by men like Jefferson – and much of the critical commentary of the market and consumption that comprises the historical record (see Witkowski in this volume) expressed the status deprivation felt by these elites as their control of the culture began to slip away (Bushman, 1992; Scott, 2005; Wood, 1992).

Readers should remind themselves that most businesses in America were small enterprises until very recently. Owners of such businesses in the early 1800s were automatically defined as 'commonfolk' because they had to work for a living. In fact, a key marker of class status before the industrial and political revolution in the American colonies was the right to consume versus the obligation to produce: gentlemen were to consume, but commonfolk were to produce. Consumption by commonfolk was seen as immoral and a threat to the social order; the same behavior among gentry was seen as almost a kind of public service because it provided a market for the outputs of the common class (Wood, 1992). Thus the merchants of the preindustrial period were members of that class charged with supporting leisured men like Jefferson. To attribute the class dominance of today's corporate leaders to those early challengers is an example of what historians called 'presentism', the historical analogue to 'ethnocentrism'.
Presentism and the consumer

The error of presentism is even more evident in today's theoretical constructs of 'consumers' in the imagined past. Assumptions and agendas of the present are projected upon the buyers of the past, resulting in a consistent pattern that denies the existence of commodities before industrialization, that overlooks the participation in markets prior to mass production, that overly romanticizes earlier consumer behaviors as more 'rational' than today's consumers, or that, in contrast, overstates the gullibility of purchasers of the past (who are assumed not to have yet developed the irony and skepticism said to mark the generations of today).

Many, for instance, laud the 'self-sufficient' American of the preindustrial period, yet the histories emerging show, through analysis of wills and probate records, for instance, that few households had the means to produce everything they needed. Therefore most families traded what they produced—even unfinished goods—for the things they needed that they could not make (Hawke, 1989; Larkin, 1988). 'Self-sufficiency' could only be claimed by aristocrats like Jefferson who owned enough land and implements and employed enough people to produce everything at his own residence. In fact, the need to engage in trade in order to survive was a marker of common class status: this is probably the origin of the pejorative tone in the word 'consumer', as it comes down from similar negative connotations in 'commerce' and 'trade' (Wood, 1992). Yet, here, too, there is an ideological sleight of hand: we can only say that Jefferson was 'self-sufficient' if we do not acknowledge his dependence on the village that once surrounded Monticello. But since history prior to 1980 used mostly the records of the literate and powerful and since our visits to national landmarks seldom exposed us to the daily lives of commonfolk, it was easy to assume that preindustrial Americans were 'self-sufficient' in the way that Jefferson appeared to have been.

Very early and even on the frontier, trading circles that spanned large geographic areas brought in items made by factories or craftsmen elsewhere (Dyer, Dalzell and Olegario, 2004; Scott, 2005). Manufactures imported from already industrialized nations like Britain showed up on the very edges of the wilderness, much as they did in Niger in the late 1970s, as documented by Eric Arnould (1989). Such trades occurred in both places and times despite the absence of local factories or advertising, though their distribution was hampered by long trade lines and a low supply of currency.

In America, small manufactured goods were brought to settlements (before rural free delivery and railroads) by itinerant peddlers. The Yankee peddler is, in fact, a repeating character in early American documents and literature (Benes, 1984; Wright, 1976). These peddlers were anxiously awaited and welcomed both for their goods and for their news, but they were also known for their ability to trick locals in trade. Thus the basis for a 'trickster' salesman in American literature was formed early, long before P.T. Barnum, whose nineteenth-century antics are usually used to mark the beginning of modern advertising (Twitchell, 2000; Wadlington, 1975).

Clever peddlers had to be careful of the local propensity to take advantage in trade, however. Historians of everyday life tell us that the ability to make a shrewd exchange was admired by early Americans, sometimes leading to outright deceptions even among neighbors. This is hardly surprising since the anthropological literature (especially Mauss, 1954) reveals that so-called 'gift societies' have consistently used the practice of gaining advantage through exchange (that is, profit taking). Thus the consumers of the past...
cannot be assumed to have been gullible, any more than we can assume they were self-sufficient.

Indeed one of the most salient prejudices of today’s academic literature is the emphasis that is put on ‘resisting the market’ (Holt, 2002). Scholars often assume that the efforts of groups like Adbusters represent a newly-emergent ability to see through a market scam, but they also tend to overemphasize the importance of the institution of the market as a site of resistance as opposed to other institutions that have been more oppressive in the past. This oversight is a particular problem in the history of disadvantaged groups. For instance, while Jefferson and his kind were threatened by the emergence of the modern economy, the slaves who worked their plantations, having little interest in perpetuating the old agrarian order so romanticized by cultural critics today, pushed relentlessly toward a modern work and consumption ethic (Genovese, 1976). And, though the urban employment typical after the Great Migration offered little dignity, the consumption of the modern economy’s products has frequently been an avenue for political expression in African-American culture. Eating lunch at a whites-only counter and riding at the front of the bus are just the most well known and recent of consumer actions that attacked the racial segregation system. Such acts of resistance have been observable since Emancipation, as African-Americans have displayed and used goods formerly reserved for whites in a bid for equal treatment. And, more recently, blacks have offered a preference for the chain stores compared to the local retailers — in a distinctive departure from the norms of leftist politics — because nationally owned stores were more likely to treat them well (Cohen, 2003). While it is easy to dismiss such politically motivated actions as ‘mere consumption’ or to discount them as ‘still occurring within the market’, such rejoinders fail to recognize that blacks have had restricted access to the ‘normal’ venues of politics (voting, membership in Congress), that material goods are a key site for bringing the social hierarchy to bear in all societies, and that the system of racial discrimination may understandably have had a higher priority on the African-American agenda than resistance to consumer culture.

Indeed the fact that restricted access to the market is often a marker of oppression is seldom recognized by today’s literature, blinded as we are by a society in which ‘free personal choice in the private sphere of everyday life’ (Holt, 2002) is unfettered by anything except the availability of cash and in which the call to conform demands ‘aggressive consumption’ (Fullerton, 1987). In preindustrial societies such as Niger, as described by Arnould, and in America, as described by the scholars we have already cited here, family patriarchs and aristocrats have controlled the consumption and labor of entire communities. Further, laws regulating consumption — called ‘sumptuary laws’ — restricted goods ownership by class, as they did in Niger and have done in many other parts of the world. Indeed the original meaning of the word ‘luxury’ referred to those things that were rightly owned by aristocrats, but crimes if purchased by commoners (Tiger, 1992). It is remarkable that a field dedicated to consumption appears to have missed how frequently in history denying access to goods appears as a primary method used to humiliate, break and control large populations.

The freedom to consume is very often one of the first and most threatening acts taken by people who have broken the grip of dominance. The Revolution led by Jefferson and the other American ‘patriots’ upset the sumptuary customs that had originally been law in all of the American colonies. The newly equal citizens of the republic rushed to consume
can assume they were self-generated.

Academic literature is the emphasis. Blacks often assume that the efforts to see through a market scam, the transformation of the market as a system, have been more oppressive in the consumption of disadvantaged groups. For example, the emergence of the modern consumer good in black interest in perpetuating the fraud, the consumer push relentlessly toward a new reality, the consumption of the commodity for political expression in the United States, and riding at the front of the consumer actions that attacked the privileges have been observable since the 1960s. Under this, blacks have often demonstrated that the retailer in a distinctive and profit as a socially owned store was more likely to dismiss such politically motivated actions as 'still occurring within the system'. If they had restricted access to the products, that material goods are a marker priority on the African-American

When a marker of oppression is or to a society in which 'free' people (2002) is unfettered by anything but the need to demand 'aggressive consumption' as Niger, as described by both self and family, and labor of entire communities with 'the policy laws' - restricted goods under consumption in many other parts of the world. This is one of those that were rightly called market failures (Tiger, 1992). It is remarkable that we have missed how frequently a particular environment used to humiliate, break the market.

And most threatening acts taken to the market evolution led by Jefferson and that had legally been law in the United States. The republic rushed to consume goods that were formerly off-limits, especially after factories made such products affordable and modern-economy jobs regularly put cash in the hands of ordinary people for the first time (Bushman, 1992; Scott, 2005). Similar behavior was frequently observed among freed blacks after the Civil War, and the contemporary commentary among whites shows the same discomfort with 'inappropriate' consumption among the formerly disenfranchised (Genovese, 1976; Hale, 1999). Throughout the history of race in America, in fact, blacks have recognized that consumption would not itself produce freedom, but that the restrictions on their consumption were an additional (and highly visible) marker of their social inferiority (Molnar and Lamont, 2002).

Because consumer goods are often used to enforce the hierarchy by making it visible (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996), the effect of sudden freedom to consume can actually cause the breakdown of the dominant order. In Arnould's account of Niger, those who had been controlled by the previous order - women, especially, but also slaves, workers and young people - caused the former system to 'disintegrate' quickly by exercising their new freedom to consume. Arnould remarks that, once this happened, there was 'no going back'. If you were advantaged by the old system, you might have viewed this outcome as a tragedy; if you were a member of the majority disadvantaged by the system, you might have seen the coming of the modern market in a much different light.

And yet it is common to dismiss such examples as the illusions of people who thought they were breaking through a dominant system, but in fact were 'merely complicit with the market'. Again the present assumption that the social evil trumping all others is today's consumer culture ignores the vicious, totalizing institutions of the past. As histories and biographies coming out of post-socialist countries in the past 20 years attest, the neglect of consumption and 'consumer culture' by these regimes was understood by consumers as a tool for breaking the human spirit (Drakulic, 1991; Sredl, 2004a). Comparisons with pre-industrial societies and socialist states, in fact, point to the increasingly problematic status of terms like 'market', 'commodity' and 'consumption'. Though much of the work in academia has been for granted that these terms apply unproblematically to the goods and systems of the here and now, historical work (and cross-cultural work) continues to produce counterexamples that muddy that certainty (Sredl, 2004b).

The rush to demonize the present often leads to generalizations, therefore, for which there is little evidentiary support. For instance, in an article in Consumption, Markets and Culture, David Clarke argues that people today define themselves by their consumption, as opposed to the past, where they defined themselves by work (1998). Yet, even in our own literature, evidence suggests that religion profoundly structured the lived experiences of the past, including both work and consumption, and that the connection of work to selfhood gave special status to implement of skill owned by our forebears, thus imbuing those objects with meaning beyond their utility (Belk, 1992). And, though present-day commentators continue to use the ability to distill goods to an inanimate 'use value' as the acid test of agency and autonomy (Holt, 2002), histories thus far suggest that consumption was used to constitute the self in the past, and that these acts of purchase, use, display and disposal have always been complex, contentious, political and, above all, infused with meaning (Belk, 1992; Bushman, 1992; Scott, 2005; Witkowski, 1989). Finally anyone who wishes to argue that the sensibilities of the American 'forefathers' were somehow a more rationally 'utilitarian' approach to material culture should dig into the details of living
under Puritan rule to see how thoroughly religion could control and pervert material life (for a particularly enlightening and unsettling account, see Earle, 1968).

When we delve deeply into the evidence and thinking of our ancestors, we often enter into a world very unlike what we imagine and find, instead, something quite alien. As one historian has remarked, ‘the past is a foreign country’ (Lowenthal, 1985). In a sense, then, history is much like ethnography, only it is a form of study that crosses the boundaries of time rather than space.

Archival bias
We began this chapter with the Monticello example in order to emphasize that class bias underpins the basis for history such that the evidence itself is profoundly skewed. This is true not only in the preservation of artifacts but in the archives of written material. It is common, for instance, to argue that the advertising and marketing materials of the past have been text-oriented and ‘rational’ in their approach, listing ingredients and prices, rather than making broad, imagistic allusions. Such generalizations are often based on little more than impressionistic projections, but they are sometimes supported by studies that have purported to analyze the historical record (e.g. Leiss, Klein and Jhally, 1990).

Yet what is the record? In every case, the data being used are an archive of magazines or newspapers in a university or public library. There are three problems here. One is that there is not much left of the image advertising of the early years of consumer culture. The print technology prior to 1875 did not allow much sophistication in the way of image reproduction at all, but other forms no longer available, such as painted signs and transit ads, did. We know that these forms were often fanciful and seldom full of text, because such forms then, as now, did not lend themselves to reading \textit{and} because most of the population were not literate anyway. By 1900, new print technology produced a boom in image advertising, but nearly all of it was in posters and ephemera, little of which has survived to the present day. The newspapers of the early ‘penny press’ contained many illustrations, since those who looked at those papers were often not literate and many others did not speak English. These papers were not collected by libraries. The same can be said of the truly ‘mass’ magazines that came later (like \textit{True Story} and \textit{Physical Culture}). Deemed too ‘common’ to be collected by libraries even though their circulations were far larger than those of magazines used in studies (like the \textit{Ladies Home Journal} or the \textit{Saturday Evening Post}), these materials are now almost entirely unavailable to historians. So this is the second problem: the materials that \textit{were} read by the common people (that is, if one among them who were literate) are seldom available. Similar practices hold today: though \textit{TV Guide} is one of the biggest circulation periodicals in the US, university libraries (and even public libraries) almost never collect it. The third problem is the common practice of binding periodicals through most of the twentieth century, in which the advertisements were removed to reduce the bulk by eliminating ‘superfluous’ material. In many cases, binders would insert a notice that an ad had been removed, but since that is not always true, we cannot even count how much of the record has been omitted, never mind comment on how ‘imagistic’ the missing matter was. Thus we cannot reasonably make the kinds of conclusions that have been drawn because the record is too incomplete and the known literacy rates of the past suggest that any theory of consumer consciousness (and rationality) built on an assumed ability to read is fundamentally biased by class (and race and gender).
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Theory and antitheory
We would expect, in sum, that the work of history in consumer behavior would be much like the work of ethnography and would have similar applications to theory. The interaction between research questions and data (see Witkowski, this volume) is quite comparable. There may be somewhat more need for attention to absent data (that which has been destroyed or allowed to decay) in history than in ethnography. The limited ability to build theory from one example would be the same. Though the attention to the uniqueness of each specific finding would be crucial, the summing of general notions—though perhaps not 'laws'—from many cases is, we think, possible (in contrast, see Fullerton, 1987; Smith and Lux, 1993). Though Smith and Lux argue that history cannot be used for theory testing because it is vulnerable to falsification from one case, we feel that this potential is actually history's strongest suit in research: as a kind of 'antitheory', history, with its infinite array of messy, alien particulars is a strong site for testing the generalizations built from present observations.

Let us offer some examples. Crockett and Wallendorf, for instance, have presented data to suggest that African-American consumers are influenced by political beliefs in their consumer behaviors (2004). The historical sources we have cited here support Crockett and Wallendorf in a very solid way, not only by showing additional cases within African-American culture where this has been true in the past, but by forming the basis for a potential argument that such behavior within that community is a long-standing tradition being brought to bear on the present. In trying to take Crockett and Wallendorf a little farther, we might add that the evidence presented by Witkowski (1989) showing the political basis for the nonimportation movement suggests that further research on politics as a frequent basis for consumer choices across many different times and groups would be a fruitful avenue for future research. Thompson and Arsel (2004) present evidence to suggest that coffeehouse consumers construct a critique of corporate capitalism. If we couple that argument with the historical record used by Hirschman, Scott and Wells (1998), we find that coffee has long been connected to insurgent thought and activity across a broad range of past cultures. Indeed Americans were big coffee drinkers at the time of the Revolution and several despots in world history have actually outlawed coffee because it was believed to lead to political unrest. Some have even suggested that consumption of coffee, which stimulates both cognition and sociability, does in fact lead to circumstances conducive to critical political thinking and conspiratorial conversation. So, while Thompson and Arsel's argument would also be consistent with the historical record. Douglas Holt's recent book, How Brands Become Icons, takes on a number of marketing shibboleths on branding, and ultimately destroys their credibility through painstaking historical research across several important historical counterexamples (2004). Scott, in her book, Fresh Lipstick, traces the feminist critique of the fashion and beauty industries in order to show its basis in class and race prejudice, and ends by smashing the critique's underlying theories. Thus history can be used cumulatively as a theory-building strategy, especially in connection with ethnography and in combination with other studies and methods, but it can also be especially strong at testing or countering theories, particularly those built on the false image of an imagined past.

Conclusion
The key points here are several. First, it is important to bear in mind that the extant history of ordinary life—that is, of consumption by most people of the past—is extremely
thin. Generalizations about how things were ‘then’ versus how things are ‘now’ are, in many cases, based on an imagined past for the simple reason that there is not enough evidence saved or history written yet to make such remarks. Therefore it is important for consumer behavior researchers to be mentally vigilant about theories based on some implicit trajectory for which the starting point, in all honesty, cannot yet be reliably documented.

We tried to suggest that historical examples can be used both to support and to falsify theories as they are built on consumer behaviors. It is crucial, however, for researchers to respect the foreignness of their own past. Doing history is rather like doing fieldwork in another culture: even if you speak the language, you must be constantly vigilant against the presumption that your cultural precepts are shared by those you are studying. The values and viewpoints, as well as the material conditions and social restrictions, of the past are quite different from those of our own time and should be respected (but not romanticized) as we are attempting to piece together a coherent picture or narrative of consumption in earlier times.

Even in study and policy making that seems to focus exclusively on the present, there is often an implicit narrative of ‘how we got where we are now’ and, owing to the relatively new emergence of consumption history in the academy, these unspoken assumptions are often false – the projections of the present’s agenda, a rhetorical history created by and for a particular argument. If our conclusions and decisions are to stand up to the test of time, it is important that they be founded on solid research into the habits and practices of the past, so we can be as informed as possible about the actual trajectory of events forming consumer culture. Therefore the astounding paucity of history on consumption is, we would argue, the most compelling reason that the field itself should begin to emphasize historical work.

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