

# Traditional Camping

## A Syllabus of Readings and Assignments

By David Wescott, 2010©

With reference to the works – published and unpublished - by Watts & Wescott ©

---

### Case Study #3 - Camping As Commodity - Sporting Goods and the Shaping of Leisure

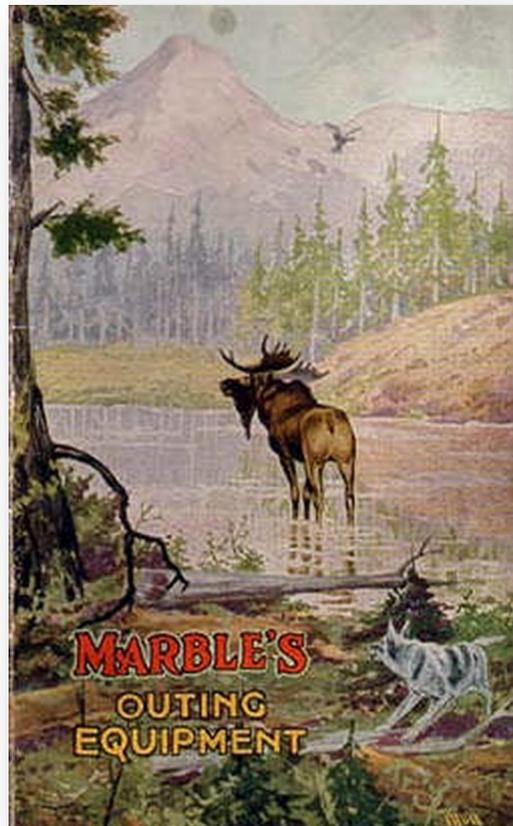
*A man's outfit is a matter which seems to touch his private honor. I have heard veterans sitting around a camp-fire proclaim the superiority of their kits with a jealousy, loyalty, and enthusiasm they would not exhibit for the flesh of their flesh and the bone of their bone. On a campaign you may attack a man's courage, the flag he serves, the newspaper for which he works, his intelligence, or his camp manners, and he will ignore you, but if you criticize his patent water-bottle he will fall upon you with both fists.*

Richard Harding Davis, 1917

Through the first half of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century, consumers who could read about sports in specialty publications tended to play sports with goods furnished through homecrafting, merchant importers, or local artisans. Not until the mid-century would they enjoy the products of large-scale, integrated manufacture from American specialty firms [catalog salers].

Homecrafting was the most traditional form of production, for which many nineteenth-century books provided instructions... Homecrafting continued as a popular and necessary art throughout the century, though the mention of "shops" indicates that wealthier sportsmen might opt to buy custom or ready-made equipment. In a sample of Maryland estate inventories, Nancy Struna found that the ratios of sporting goods to total inventories rose from under 6 percent in 1770 to over 26 percent in 1810. While the lists do not distinguish homemade from finished goods, they probably do reflect a movement toward the latter, as well as wider sporting interests among wealthy and middling well-to-do Marylanders.

Stephen Hardy, 1990



There was a time in our camping tradition when everyone had the capacity to make nearly everything or at least had someone in their vicinity they could call upon to make it for them.

A number of factors changed our society in such a way that “do-it-yourself” was no longer a valued ethic. The “consumer” displaced the “maker” and along with that replacement came the forgetting of valued traditions, hard-earned techniques, availability of resources, and the knowledge needed to put it all together in a usable way.

Fortunately the “lost arts” aren’t lost. Still practiced in small shops, locked away in dusty books or lived in remote places where no one is watching, the skills and knowledge of the old ways are intact. What’s most interesting is that our latest form of information retrieval – the internet – has made much of what was “lost” available to anyone interested via a simple key stroke and word-search. In an effort to have “every book ever written” available electronically, rare volumes full of exciting practices are once again accessible. It has also provided a platform for every outdoorsman (wanna-be or not) to present a visual smorgasbord of skills 24-7.

But as we saw in the last Case Study, there are those to whom these skills are an anachronism (*no longer appropriate for our time*). We could ignore them, but indoctrination has rolled forward for so long that showing your face in the woods wearing cotton or wool, and using gear made of canvas and cast iron makes the traditionalist look like a *luddite* or even the “cheechako” of bygone days. Is it too late to change the tide? *David Wescott*



**Start by reviewing *Section One: Life Under Canvas in Camping In The Old Style***

## **The Axemaker's Gift**

*They are the axemakers, whose discoveries and innovations, over thousands of years, have gifted power in innumerable ways. To emperors they gave power of death, to surgeons the power of life. Each time the axemakers offered a new way to make us rich or safe or invincible or knowledgeable, we accepted the gift and used it to change the world. And when we changed the world, we changed our minds, for each gift redefined the way we thought, the values by which we lived, and the truths for which we died. And because each axemakers's gift was so attractive, not evil or ugly, we always came back for more, unmindful of the cost. Each time there was no choice but to adapt to the effects of the change that followed. This has been true for every generation of our ancestors since the process began, well over a million years ago. When we used the first*

*tool to cut more food from nature than nature was ready to offer, we changed the future. As a result, there were soon many more of us. And as our numbers grew, so did the power of those who could wield the axe most efficiently. They became leaders. Most of the rest of the group followed the axe.*

*At first, the effect of the new tools on the world was insignificant. Early human beings lived in small, widely scattered groups, and with their hand axes and spears they often hunted and harvested their local area until it was empty, at which moment they moved on. The Earth was so rich and so vast that for a long time the damage caused by the indiscriminate axe was not worth consideration. But by about 12,000 years ago, this had already changed. The number of people and tools had reached a critical mass, and our presence began to make itself more widely felt. The rate of change accelerated.*

**From *The Axemaker's Gift: A Double-Edged History of Human Culture*  
By James Burke and Robert Ornstein, 1995.**

### **Optional Reads - Very good books that shed light on the subject**

- *The Axemaker's Gift: Technology's Capture and Control of Our Minds and Culture* By James Burke and Robert Ornstein, 1997
- *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*  
Edited by Richard Butsch

- *From Working At Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* By  
Cindy S. Aron
- *The Tent Dweller* By Bannerman  
Brown - From Pathways, 1998-1999



### **Hegemony**

**he·gem·o·ny** (hə'jemənē) – 1. preponderant influence or authority of one individual or social group over another. 2. term derived from the work of Antonio Gramsci which refers to the ability of a dominant group to exert or maintain control through a combination of overt and subtle mechanisms. 3. *the dominance of one group over other groups, with or without the threat of force, to the extent that, for instance, the dominant*

*party can dictate the terms of trade to its advantage; or more broadly, that cultural perspectives become skewed to favor the dominant group.*

**Excerpt From *Adopted By All the Leading Clubs: Sporting Goods and the Shaping of Leisure, 1800-1900***

When *Camping In The Old Style* was first published (2000), there was no concise history of camping published anywhere...it was a first attempt \*. The book *Working At Play* by Cindy Aron (1999) had a great (and very accurate) chapter titled “Unfashionable, but for once happy! Camping Vacations. She had a good grasp on the historic sequence of events that established our camping heritage.

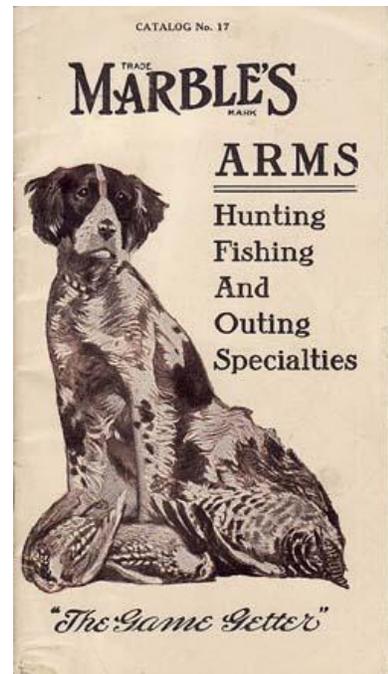
The 1990 publication *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption* by Richard Butsch made a few references to camping, but the focus of the chapter titled “Adopted By All the Leading Clubs: Sporting Goods and the Shaping of Leisure, 1800-1900” mainly addressed the changes experienced in the games of football and baseball – from home-grown back-plot games to the highly regulated sports we know today. With a lot of research and connecting the dots, we have been able to recreate the history of camping; the similarities in how things evolved is really interesting, especially when it comes to the influence exercised by manufacturers and the control they are able to parlay into codification and access to gear – from woodcraft to LNT.

\*Look at the listing of books under “New History Literature” in Case Study #1., almost all of them cite *Camping In The Old Style* as a reference source. Pretty cool.

### Refer To - Case Study #3 Worksheet - Text and Context questions Quotes from Stephen Hardy

A “**physical expressions of ideology**” - ... *sporting goods are not value free. Like all goods, they are physical expressions of ideology, and that is precisely their importance. As anthropologist Mary Douglas argues, goods are the markers of culture itself. Consumers of goods share names, legends, histories, and behavior patterns that correspond with special products and brands of products: in all segments of life, "the stream of consumable goods leaves a sediment that builds up the structure of culture like coral islands."*

**Sporting goods emerge as an industry - 1860-1880** saw the clear emergence of a sporting goods [and camping] industry. The conditions - social, economic, and cultural - were ripe for it, despite or perhaps because of the Civil War. The expansion of rail lines, improvements in printing, and advances in production technology combined with anxieties about social dissolution, exhaustion, and degeneracy to provide a most opportune moment for marketing products linked to wholesome recreation. ...It was one thing to write an article or book promoting the value of a new activity; it was quite another to risk capital and credit in the production or sale of sports equipment...During this period two types of entrepreneurs emerged, both in manufacturing and in retail. The first were those who diversified into the "new" sports, either from field sports



or from a non-sports product. The second, often athletes or former athletes, opened businesses solely devoted to sports. Their combined activities meant that Americans could for the first time enjoy a steady and increasing supply of finished sporting goods.

**“Books for men disguised as if they were books for boys”** - *The Boy's Own Book* an often-praised "bible" for middle-class youth — noted that footballs should be made of "light materials a blown bladder, cased with leather, is the best." It also advised that the easiest method of making fishing line lay in the use of a "little machine which may be bought at most of the shops where also you purchase your lines, if you think fit." *The American Anglers Book* (1865), aimed at an older audience, contained a chapter on rod-making that listed the equipment a nineteenth-century do-it-yourselfer would need —

## Sporting Goods Industry Major Trends

---

- 1800-1860 - Foundation Years
- 1860-1880 - Market Recognition
- 1880-1900 - Competition
- 1900-1915 - Golden Age Market Expansion
- 1915-1930 - Inter-War years
- 1930-1950 - Renaissance
- 1950-1960 - Modern Age Market Explosion

bench, vise, knife, jack plane and fore plane, files, paper — and included a picture of a steel template of notches and gauged holes of various diameters. One can imagine that many anglers found the instructions simpler on paper than in practice.

**Manufactured goods and the Public, 1880** - Improved economic conditions doubtless had an encouraging effect. So did the

nation's stronger embrace of physical activity. The calls had been issued by reformers for over forty years; the 1880s, however, brought peace, relative prosperity, and expanded public space to go along with a heightened consciousness of the benefits of sport and exercise. Equally important, increased numbers of sporting goods manufacturers and retailers expanded their efforts to attract consumers.

**How do goods shape practice in our field?** - Not only do certain game forms dominate interest, but certain clusters of organizations begin to control the practices surrounding those games. The National Football League, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the United States Golf Association, and the United States Tennis Association are examples of dominant groups that manage dominant game forms. They supervise the playing and the players; moreover, they exercise extraordinary influence on the career plans of young Americans who base educational and life-style choices on regulations governing eligibility and competition.

John Clarke and Chas Critcher note that a similar process has occurred over the last two centuries throughout much of the leisure domain: though informal pastimes remained a central part of most people's life styles, "the major forms of organized leisure were outside the control of those who enjoyed them".

**Institutionalization** - The term institutionalization is widely used in social theory to denote the process of making something (for example a concept, a social role, particular

values and norms, or modes of behavior) become embedded within an organization, social system, or society as an established custom or norm.

"Further, through involvement with nascent governing bodies [such as] as the National League, the Intercollegiate Football Association, and the United States National Lawn Tennis Association, sporting goods firms helped turn informal activities into commodities of fun and spectacle. This collaboration set the foundation for an even larger sports industry: an interlocking network of the rules committees, trade associations, manufacturers, and professional groups that have heavily influenced both the range and styles of sports in America.

Sociologists refer to this process as "institutionalization." Richard Gruneau, Alan Ingham, and John Loy have emphasized its importance to the world of sport by posing the question, "**How does a way of playing become the way of playing?**"

### Optional Reads -

- *Minimum Or Displaced Impact - About Leaving No Trace* By Tim Smith  
<http://blog.jackmtn.com/minimum-or-displaced-impact-about-leaving-no-trace/>

- *ASAP - As Sustainable As Possible: A Working Model to Assess and Improve the Sustainability of Outdoor Education and Recreation*  
Developed by Sustainable Backcountry Travel By Paul Van Horn  
<https://sites.google.com/site/wildernesssurvivalarts/sustainability-in-outdoor-programming>

- *Consuming Nature: The Uneasy Relationship Between Technology, Outdoor Recreation and Protected Areas* By John Shultis

<https://www.noexperiencenecessarybook.com/7ljxY/consuming-nature-the-uneasy-relationship-between-technology.html>



### Refer To - Marketing, Wilson and the Woodchuck Shop - Discuss in class

*A volleyball named "Wilson" plays an award-winning role alongside Tom Hanks in the box-office smash hit "Cast Away." Directed by Robert Zemeckis (Forrest Gump), Tom Hanks finds himself stranded on a deserted island where he befriends what appears to be an ordinary volleyball. When Hanks finds the volleyball which was washed up on shore, he quickly gives the volleyball a face and names him "Wilson". Wilson becomes an amazing confidante for Hanks. Wilson left such an impression on moviegoers that The Broadcast Film Critics Association created an award exclusively for Wilson.*

**Wilson traveled to Los Angeles for the 6th Annual Critics Choice Awards and received the award for Best Inanimate Object in a Motion Picture.**

*COMMODIFICATION – Anything bought or sold*  
*Hegemony – Power through cultural influence*  
*Democratization – From Authoritarianism to Democracy*  
*Institutionalization – Imbed a custom or norm*

*Example of those in power affecting outdoor gear – axe handles, saw blades, “self-repair” zippers, quality cotton gear*

**Optional Reads -- free downloads - Great Classic Reads**

• *The Tent Dwellers* By Albert Bigelow Paine

<https://archive.org/details/tentdwellers00compgoog>

• *The Forest* By Stewart Edward White

[https://books.google.com/books?id=CZgnw9k9Tr4C&printsec=frontcover&source=gb\\_s\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=CZgnw9k9Tr4C&printsec=frontcover&source=gb_s_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

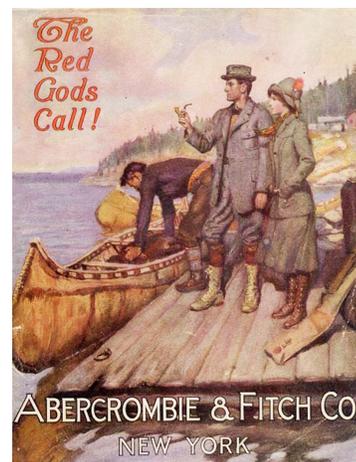
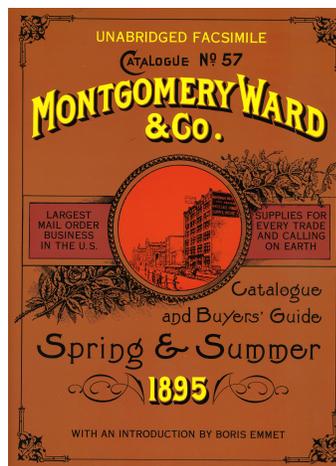
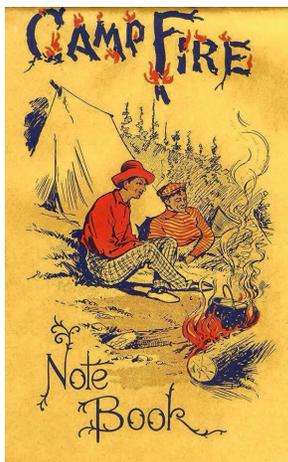
• *Tenting Tonight* By Mary Roberts Rinehart - read on-line

[https://books.google.com/books?id=kQDHCgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gb\\_s\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=kQDHCgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gb_s_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

---

**Do the codes created by the “Ruling Class”  
in the outdoor industry create friction?**

---



## How Ethics Defined By Others Affect "Best" Practices (Style) for Us All (NOTE: See also Case #5: Style vs Ethics)

### UNITED BY PRACTICE

From *Zip Lines - The Voice For Adventure Education*, Summer 1996.  
Character-based Ethics. by Jasper Hunt - P 12-15.

*Before proceeding with the discussion of character-based ethics, it would be useful to explore the issue of what a practice [a practice should allow for style] is in some detail. When someone pays you money to do certain things for them, you are engaged in a practice with them, e.g., the practice of medicine. We are connected by ethics because we are participating in the same practice together. Like families, we might have our fights about one thing or another. Families fight, but families stay together.*

*A "practice" in the sense in which MacIntyre\* uses the term, is a context involving human beings where certain goods can be realized. For instance, a cobbler makes shoes and other footwear. There is a difference between quality and shoddy footwear. MacIntyre makes the point that the best judges of quality footwear are the cobblers themselves. They set the standard by which a particular cobbler is judged as good, bad or mediocre. [I disagree. The market should set the standard for what is acceptable and what is not. Practitioners react to market demands – At some point someone will recognize the market demand and redefine the practice] Practices set standards by which practitioners are judged. It is my assumption here that experiential educators are as much engaged in a practice as are surgeons or dentists. [I'll agree with this statement so long as the practitioners are ethical about what they decide to offer or teach their customers, and that they do not use their control to influence the choices their customers make – hegemony. Right now, our field does exactly that; and those in power use that power to their advantage.]*

*When you are engaged in a practice, you have the possibility of achieving certain excellences. When you step into a practice, you automatically step into an arena for fellow practitioners. And those people who you are in the practice with are **the people that help define what it is that you do**. This is really a problem for experiential education people because we are proud of our individualism. But when we step into a practice, we shed a good bit of our individualism in order to participate in and achieve excellence in that practice. [If a practice is to evolve it must allow room for innovation and diversity.]*

- Alasdair MacIntyre - philosopher, *After Virtue*.

**What implications does this idea hold for  
those who choose not to adhere to  
the popular hegemony of a practice?  
David Wescott, 2010**

Let's look at this from the perspective of traditional camping techniques and those who choose to use classic style. Does the use of classic gear affect the way in which you practice your craft? Absolutely. Does such simple technology affect your relationship to the environment through the practice of woodcraft ("*We call it Woodcraft whenever we use nothing but material found in the woods*", D.C. Beard, 1926)? Absolutely. Can classic style be applied so it is not found guilty of the environmental impacts that it was responsible for in the past? Absolutely – almost every impact can be mitigated or avoided in fragile or restricted-use areas. It is accepted that the production of some commercial gear creates impacts that can be mitigated (organic Egyptian cotton), but the use of natural fibers creates a more long-lasting piece of gear, reducing impact through less consumption. Classic style is a beautiful and inviting way to camp; if camping in general is a flirtation with nostalgia and romance, why not do it in the most nostalgic and romantic way possible?

Emerging technologies, on the other hand, **brag** that their use separates the user from the environment (and they have a law – *The Wilderness Act* – that defines that separation) – the use of modern “one-size-fits-all” gear has nothing to do with the place you camp. A camp can be set up in a gymnasium and create no impact as well as leave no trace of having been in that space – the slight of hand is in misdirecting the user into thinking the technology creates no impact anywhere and sort of magically appears in the marketplace; the whole charade is based on deferring impact to another unknown location that the user never sees or cares about. ***Emerging technologies*** revel (through hype and marketing) in the fact that their production, consumption and disposal creates no impact. The impacts of such items cannot be mitigated – only camouflaged. The lifespan of emerging technologies is less than that of classic gear – the average family tent is built with a lifespan of 21 nights of total use. Emerging technologies are designed and sold with a backpacking paradigm – lightweight, compact, etc. Backpacking is only one way of camping and the average modern user is not a backpacker, but a family car camper. Designs are expanded to accommodate larger parties but the engineering is not altered, thus creating inferior products that play to the romance of the woods and mountains reflected by the modern model adventurer, yet provides the user with lesser quality. It's all a scam perpetrated by emerging technology producers and those who spread their gospel – ie. LNT Inc. ***Long live classic style!***

To put all of this in perspective, the reader really needs to start by looking through James Turner's seminal paper *Woodcraft to LNT* to see just how we got to this point. I chose years ago to defy the “standards” set by my peers and the hegemony they now use to influence the relationship of people to the outdoors. It's interesting to see how the pendulum has swung and how many people now see that this “Emperor” has now clothes. Everyone should be able to choose their own practices (style) and use them as a pedagogy so long as there is a market interested in what they have to say – and they do no harm (or admit to the harm they do and mitigate it's impact), and don't mess it up for the next guy.

The battle against traditional camping and classic style was started in the late 50s-early 60s to create a constituency that would support the preservation of wild lands without “loving them to death” through overuse or the use of techniques that were not compatible with preservation ethics. Traditions were labeled as anachronisms and their

use was only by those who were uneducated or lacked “good ethics”. The argument should be that the use of any technique, regardless of its heritage - traditional or emerging – if used improperly or to excess is inappropriate. And if someone chooses to stroll the woods in cotton and wool instead of lycra and fleece, they can do so without threat of moral judgments so long as their “ethic” does not impinge on the activities and style of the other.

DW2010

**Why I left “the practice”**

*The customer is generally wrong – they seek to be educated.*

*Risk Management policy – stupid people should die.*

*Nature demands diversity.*

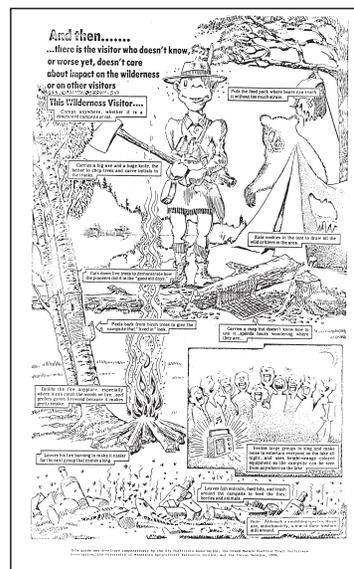
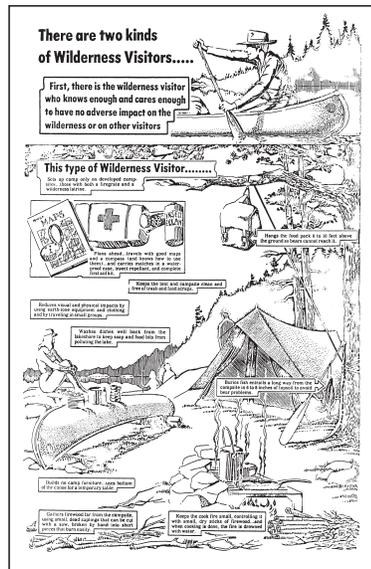
*Ethics vs Style or Ethics with Style?*

“Many of the solutions to our complex environmental problems will not be achieved with increased complexity. Question every technology. Reject the unnecessary... As a sport matures it doesn’t necessarily get better”.

“There will always be a few contrarians with different priorities”.

*Yvon Chouinard, Climber’s Bill of Rights*

**1970s educational posters from the Boundary Waters that perfectly illustrate the bias created against traditional ideals (some having nothing to do with tradition but rather poor style practiced by Cheechacos – who abide in both camps).**



**Refer To - Mass Marketing and the Dangers of Cultural Appropriation**  
**Discuss in class**



# History of Leisure Practices

## 4 Periods

### 1700-1830 Pre-Industrial

Commodities

Traditional Authority  
Household/Small Shops

Work & Leisure  
Equal Access

### 1830-1880 Industrial Revolution

Goods

Class Struggle  
Government Intervention

Work vs Leisure  
Fight to control work  
Class Entertainment/Parks Movement

### 1880 - 1960 Post-Industrial

Service

Corporate/Class  
Mass Marketing  
Upward Mobility

Work For Leisure  
Standardization/Branding  
Gender Shifting

### 1960- Present

Experience

- \* 1880-1920 Upper and Middle Class builds on Working Class
- 1900-1950 Working Class Enters the Consumer Market
- 1950-60s Bottom-up / Consumer Rights / Community
- 1980s Consumer Economy - Stage Memorable Experiences

**\*\* The Birthday Cake Analogy - From Service to Staging**  
 Pre-Industrial Age - Gather the eggs, grind the wheat, milk the cow, bake the cake  
 Industrial Age - Use a prepared mix to make the cake  
 Post-Industrial Age - Buy the cake at the bakery  
 Present - Schedule the birthday experience - Chucky Cheese's

\* From *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure Into Consumption*, by Richard Butsch, 1990.

\*\* *The Experience Economy: Work is Theater and Every Business is a Stage* by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, 1999.