Introduction

THE LAND OF DESIRE AND THE CULTURE OF CONSUMER CAPITALISM

In 1906 the merchant John Wanamaker wrote that "everyone who starts a new thing has to stand where Columbus did when he set sail. Few had faith that he could ever reach the Land of Desire." Wanamaker announced the emergence of a new culture coming to dominate American life. At the heart of it was the quest for pleasure, security, comfort, and material well-being. "It speaks to us," said another merchant, "only of ourselves, our pleasures, our life. It does not say, 'Pray, obey, sacrifice thyself, respect the King, fear thy master.' It whispers, 'Amuse thyself, take care of yourself.' Is not this the natural and logical effect of an age of individualism?"[1]

In the decades following the Civil War, American capitalism began to produce a distinct culture, unconnected to traditional family or community values, to religion in any conventional sense, or to political democracy. It was a secular business and market-oriented culture, with the exchange and circulation of money and goods at the foundation of its aesthetic life and of its moral sensibility. This book is about the growth of that culture, about its character, and about the people and groups that brought it into being.

The cardinal features of this culture were acquisition and consumption as the means of achieving happiness; the cult of the new; the democratization of desire; and money value as the predominant measure of all value in society.

By World War I, Americans were being enticed into consumer pleasure and indulgence rather than into work as the road to happiness. The roots for this enticement lay deep in American and European history. For generations, America had been portrayed as a place of plenty, a garden in which all paradisiacal longings would be satisfied. Many Protestant settlers even thought that the millennial promise—the Second Coming of Christ—was destined to be fulfilled here and that the New Jerusalem would bring not only salvation and spiritual bliss but also temporal blessings and the end to poverty.[2] By the early 1900s this myth was being transformed, urbanized and commercialized, increasingly severed from its religious aims and focusing ever more on personal satisfaction and even on such new pleasure palaces as department stores, theaters, restaurants, hotels, dance halls, and amusement parks. These institutions still carried much of the former mythic message—the message that said Americans can be renewed and remade—but where the old ideas often conceived of America as a millennial land in which many different kinds of dreams might come true (spiritual, vocational, and political as well as material), this new era heralded the pursuit of goods as the means to all "good" and to personal salvation. Thus, pioneer advertiser Artemas Ward dropped the older religious dimension but kept the paradise. "This world," he wrote in 1892, "seems real only when it answers to our individual touch. Yet, beyond our touch, beyond our waking, beyond our working, and almost in the land of dreams, lie things beyond our present thought, greater, wider, stronger, than those we now lay hold on. To each a world opens; to everyone possibilities are present."[3]

A cult of the "new" belonged to this new culture. Here again Americans had been prepared by their own history. Phrases like the "New World," "new heaven on earth," and "new nation" were common currency; and everyone seemed to boast of the country's "innovative ways," as did Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing when he spoke glowingly in 1830 of America as "a new continent" of "new freedom," of "new social institutions," of "new paths," and of "new harvests." Newness and change themselves had become traditional in America. "The world and the books are so accustomed to use the word 'new' in connection with our country," wrote Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi*, "that we early get and permanently retain the impression that there is nothing old about it."[4] It was hard under these circumstances to defend any tradition, any inherited custom or belief, when the past itself was hostage to the new.

Emerson and Whitman expressed a profound side to this cult, inviting men and women to plunge into new experiences, to embrace the full range of expressiveness, to pursue the new on their own terms and not because it was thrust on them by others. One should seek the new, Emerson wrote, not for its own sake, nor for the "squalid contentment" and "excessive concern for comfort" often associated with material ventures but for the spiritual rebirth, insight, and virtue that might be discovered or encountered there.[5] The quest for the new was also fostered by the Western pursuit of knowledge, liberated for both good and ill by the Enlightenment and by the scientific revolution.

By the end of the century, however, commercial capitalism had latched on to the cult of the new, fully identified with it, and taken it over. Innovation became tied to the production of more and more commodities. Fashion and style were at the center, appropriating folk design and image, reducing custom to mere surface and appearance. The cult of the new was, perhaps, the most radical aspect of this culture, because it readily subverted whatever custom, value, or folk idea came within its reach. Science, too, was radical but not intrinsically hostile to custom or tradition or religion. Market capitalism *was* hostile; no immigrant culture—and, to a considerable degree, no religious tradition—had the power to resist it, as none can in our own time. Any group that has come to this country has had to learn to accept and to adjust to this elemental feature of American capitalist culture.

The democratization of desire emerged alongside the cult of the new and the unfolding of the consumer paradise. It, too, had roots—in the great movement in the United States toward democracy. For at least the first half of the nineteenth century, most American white men were self-employed voters, owners of landed property, and producers of foodstuffs and raw materials for a prosperous Atlantic trade largely free from the dangers of manufacturing that relied on disciplined work rhythms and a dependent work force to churn out goods. Americans rejoiced in their widely diffused prosperity. America was "the Land of Comfort" for all.[6]

But after 1885, in the wake of the rapid industrializing of the country, the idea of democracy, like the idea of the new and the idea of paradise, began to change radically. Gradually, wealth lay less in land and more in capital or in the money required to produce new goods. This pecuniary wealth was owned by a small minority; but at the same time, growing numbers of Americans were losing control over their work, becoming dependent on others—on the owners of the capital—for their wages and well-being. In this context a new conception of democracy developed, fostered by growing incomes and a rising standard of living and espoused alike by capitalists and many progressive reformers, a democracy at once more inclusive and more confining than before.

This highly individualistic conception of democracy emphasized self-pleasure and self-fulfillment over community or civic well-being. As the older grounds for economic and political freedom were eroding (ownership of property and control of work), newer and "better" grounds were coming into being. The concept had two sides. First, it stressed the diffusion of comfort and prosperity not merely as part of the American experience as heretofore, but instead as its centerpiece. Thus, progressive Herbert Croly, inspirer of President Theodore Roosevelt, wrote that the "promise of American life" consisted foremost in a "promise of comfort and prosperity for an ever-increasing majority of good Americans"; and business supporter and influential economist John Bates Clark argued that despite the "vast and ever-growing inequality" of wealth in America, democracy could be ensured through the benign genius of the "free" market, which allocated to Americans an infinitely growing supply of goods and services.[7] Second, the new conception included the democratizing of desire, or, more precisely, equal rights to desire the same goods and to enter the same world of comfort and luxury. American culture, therefore, became more democratic after 1880 in the sense that everybody—children as well as adults, men and women, black and white—would have the same right as individuals to desire, long for, and wish for whatever they pleased. The Land of Comfort was becoming the Land of Desire.

This new definition of democracy did not emerge without political opposition. Indeed, following the Civil War, a fierce conflict swept over the country, setting farmers and workers against businessmen over how democracy in industrial America should be organized. By the 1880s and 1890s a vocal populist and union movement had grown up that harkened back to the older republican America and that argued that democracy must be based on the ownership of property and work resources, not merely on the possession of goods. Democratic life and the virtue of the republic rested, they claimed, on independent families owning their own land and tools and producing themselves much of what they consumed. Social reformers and a new breed of economist echoed these ideas and even demanded that something be done to ensure the democratization of property and, thereby, the autonomy of ordinary Americans. "Either you must

establish a more equitable division of property and produce," warned progressive economist Henry Carter Adams in 1879, "or the fatal end of democracy will be despotism and decadence."[8]

But the new market notion of democracy had many advocates and quickly rose to prominence. Democratizing individual desire—rather than wealth or political or economic power—was perhaps one of the new culture's most notable contributions to modern society, and this achievement had many consequences. It acted as a spur to effort, forcing people to compete, discipline themselves, and deny present comfort for future pleasures. At the same time, it often set husbands against wives, children against parents, and friend against friend. It fostered anxiety and restlessness and, when left unsatisfied, resentment and hatred. And because of its association with the new and its attachment to fantasy, it tended to reinforce the American refusal to face death as a fact of life, to divorce desire from death, longing from dread. In most cultures, acceptance of desire and longing has ordinarily been intermingled with acceptance of dread, the passage of time, and mortality. But in the United States, and especially in this cultural context, many of the writers who tried to set the tone took the dread and fear—or as the country's foremost writer of children's stories, L. Frank Baum, would say, the "heartache and nightmare"—out of desire, and gave life a happy face that would never grow old.

Through this culture ran another current that reinforced the anxiety and longing brought on by desire: the influence of money. Historian Perry Miller has written that pecuniary values were already the reigning values in America by 1815.[9] Nevertheless, after 1880, money was entering into the American economy and culture in a way it had never done before. In the past, men and women often made their own goods, relied on different currencies as mediums of exchange (at least before 1865), and sometimes bartered. Gradually, however, more and more Americans, no longer owning land or tools, were compelled to rely on money incomes—on wages and salaries—for their security and their well-being; at the same time, they became dependent "on goods made by unknown hands," as economist Wesley Clair Mitchell, the country's first authority on the business cycle, long ago pointed out.[10]

Such a transformation put money into a position of eminence in the lives of Americans. From now on pecuniary values (or market values) would constitute for many people the base measure for all other values, even for "the dim inner world by which men judge what is for them worthwhile," as Mitchell put it.[11] Charles Cooley, pioneer founder of modern sociology, worried about this trend, viewing it as an excrescence that had formed almost overnight. "Pecuniary values," he wrote in 1912, were not "natural" or "normal"; they were the historical outgrowth of a new economy and culture and "by no means the work of the whole people acting homogeneously." In the past, values had taken their "character from . . . the church"; now they were deriving it from "business and consumption." Increasingly, the worth of everything—even beauty, friendship, religion, the moral life—was being determined by what it could bring in the market.[12]

Consumption as a means to reach happiness, the cult of the new, democratization of desire, and pecuniary value had not been dominant in earlier decades (or anywhere else, for that matter, although Enlightenment philosophers had urged them on states and cultures as early as the late eighteenth century). Before 1880, the United States was largely an agrarian economy, with most Americans living and working on farms. As late as 1870 the average number of workers in any given factory was still fewer than ten.[13] Most markets were local or regional, and the majority of businesses were individually owned and managed. The culture was largely agrarian, republican, and religious; and most people—white people—controlled their own property or land.

This book examines how this older culture was challenged and was gradually superseded by the newer culture. It deals with the new national corporations and the investment banks as they moved almost overnight into the everyday lives of Americans. It focuses on mail order houses, on chain stores and dry goods houses, on hotels and restaurants, and especially on department stores, and it does so in part because most historians have for too long looked down on them—indeed, on the entire field of marketing, distribution, and merchandising—as subjects of only secondary importance compared to the fields of agricultural and industrial production and, therefore, as subjects unworthy of detailed study.[14] But this approach is mistaken; these institutions were—and are—indispensable to the capitalist economy. They brought the reality of capitalism—the dream life of capitalism, that is—directly, concretely home to generations of men and women. They, along with the other institutions, were the shapers of the Land of Desire. Without them, the new corporate economy could not have functioned and the Land of Desire would not have been born.

Land of Desire deals with three other matters central to an understanding of why and how the culture of consumer capitalism emerged in the way it did: the development of a new commercial aesthetic, the collaboration among economic and noneconomic institutions, and the growth of a new class of brokers. After 1880, American business began to create a new set of commercial enticements—a commercial aesthetic—to move and sell goods in volume. This was the core aesthetic of American capitalist culture, offering a vision of the good life and of paradise. Cultures must generate some conception of paradise or some imaginative notion of what constitutes the good life. They must bring to life a set of images, symbols, and signs that stir up interest at the very least, and devotion and loyalty at the most.[15] After 1880, American commercial capitalism, in the interest of marketing goods and making money, started down the road of creating just such a set and system of symbols, signs, and enticements, just such a vision of the good life. From the 1880s onward, a commercial aesthetic of desire and longing took shape to meet the needs of business. And since that need was constantly growing and seeking expression in wider and wider markets, the aesthetic of longing and desire was everywhere and took many forms. After 1880 this aesthetic appeared in show windows, electrical signs, fashion shows, advertisements, and billboards; as free services and sumptuous consumer environments; and as the artifacts or commodities themselves.

At the heart of the evolution of this commercial aesthetic were the visual materials of desire—color, glass, and light. Used for centuries by royal courts and by the military to excite devotion, loyalty, and fear, and by religions to depict otherworldly paradises, these materials were now mobilized in the United States and other industrialized countries to suggest a *this*-worldly paradise that was stress-free and "happy." "Coloured glass," wrote German architectural utopian Paul Scheerbart, who influenced Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright, among others, "destroys hatred." "Light softened by color, calms the nerves."[16] By 1910, American merchants, in their efforts to create the new commercial aesthetic, took command over color, glass, and light, fashioning a link so strong between them and consumption that, today, the link seems natural. By the 1920s so many commercial institutions and people had exploited "color" that, according to *The New York Times*, the word itself had been "worn to a frazzle."[17]

The new consumer direction of American culture was also the consequence of alliances among diverse institutions, noneconomic and economic, working together in an interlocking circuit of relationships to reinforce the democratization of desire and the cult of the new. National corporations, department stores, investment banks, hotel chains, and the entertainment industry joined this circuit, but so did the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum, the Harvard Business School and the Wharton School, Cornell University, New York University, Pratt Institute, and the New York School of Design. Even the nation's most radical labor union, the Industrial Workers of the World, participated inadvertently in the building of this new culture.

American religious institutions, and the spiritual culture transmitted by them, were transformed by the new mass economy and culture and aided in their creation. It is one of the goals of this book to illuminate the character of that change, its spiritual as well as institutional character, its impact on consciousness. By 1900 mainstream Protestant denominations were beginning to bend and redefine their institutional missions in compliance with the new cultural perspective, and, in time, many Catholics and Jews went down a similar road. New religious or quasi-religious groups—the mind curers and positive thinkers like gurus Orison Swett Marden and Helene Blavatsky, and writers such as Eleanor Porter (author of *Pollyanna*) and L. Frank Baum (creator of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*) arrived on the scene, offering an outlook in comfortable harmony with the priorities and perspectives of the business world.

After about 1910, the federal government, too, joined the chorus of support and, with the expansion of the U.S. Department of Commerce under Herbert Hoover, placed a capstone on it in the 1920s.

Cultures of any endurance rest on strong relations among different institutions. After 1895, stores, museums, churches, and government agencies were beginning to act together to create the Land of Desire, redirecting aspiration toward consumer longings, consumer goods, and consumer pleasures and entertainments. A new group of brokers worked at the center of this circuit to facilitate the movement of images, money, and information. In the process they helped change the culture. I use the term "broker" here broadly, to encompass not only the obvious real estate brokers and stockbrokers but also any individual or group committed to helping business in a mediating capacity, among them investment bankers, corporate lawyers, and credit experts; urban museum curators and art school instructors who taught commercial and industrial "art" to up-and-coming designers; university professors who trained business leaders; economists who redefined the goals of the industrial order to include greater consumption; advertising agents and travel agents; "specialists" who created the "light and color" for

places like Times Square; and professional model agencies (such as John Powers Incorporated in Manhattan) that brokered female bodies.

Journalist Samuel Strauss observed in the 1920s that brokers had the distinctive "talent" of being able to "adjust themselves to the time's changing demands."[18] Since time immemorial, they served as dispassionate go-betweens, bringing people together, arranging deals, negotiating contracts, and, most important, lending money. While earlier on the fringes of economic life, brokers—especially moneylenders—were regarded with contempt and fear for exploiting the resources of others but, as the market grew and new kinds of brokers appeared (jobbers, real estate agents, commodity and stock traders, and so forth), such prejudices began to weaken, although brokering's marginal character held on.[19]

After 1895 or thereabouts, the brokering class took on unprecedented size and began to fill a place in American life that turned the twentieth century into a century of intermediaries, and cities like New York into huge havens for brokering. The brokering style—repressing one's own convictions and withholding judgment in the interest of forging profitable relationships—is among the most modern of styles. It occupies a preeminence in today's political and moral economy. Brokers are now busy in nearly every sphere of activity, and they have helped inject into American culture a new amoralism essentially indifferent to virtue and hospitable to the ongoing inflation of desire. As with the merchants and the manufacturers, they were and are interested in expanding markets and volume turnover, in the movement of commodities from producer to consumer, in money, not people, and in the future, not the past. Don't worry about the past, advised one such broker, Emily Fogg Mead, an advertising expert and mother of Margaret Mead, in 1901, in an economics journal. "Accompanying all the early stages of innovation," she reassured businessmen, "is a fear of wrong-doing, of disloyalty to ideals, and of the coming destruction of the foundation of society; but the next generation has no conscientious misgivings."[20]

No country, it seems to me, developed the kind of commercial aesthetic, the type of brokering class, the form of institutional circuitry, or the variety of spiritual accommodations as those that emerged in the United States. The United States was the first country in the world to have an economy devoted to mass production, and it was the first to create the mass consumer institutions and the mass consumer enticements that rose up in tandem to market and sell the mass-produced goods. More effectively and pervasively than any other nation, America (or, more precisely, the dominant business class in America) forged a unique bond among different institutions that served to realize business aims. This book traces the history of these institutions and shows why they, along with the commercial establishments themselves, along with the Wanamakers, the Fields, and the Strauses, helped initiate and perpetuate the world's most powerful culture of consumption.

The culture of consumer capitalism, which became over time the very culture of America, did not appear without resistance or opposition—nothing this new or of this magnitude could have simply waltzed in and taken over. Nor were its effects felt everywhere in the same way. There were still many places—rural towns, religious communities, even urban enclaves—untouched to some degree by consumer capitalist culture. At the very time, moreover, that this culture was unfolding, another institutional complex was also emerging—the new public schools, the public universities, and the private colleges—which were not connected closely to the commercial system and which offered countless numbers of young Americans other paths to success and fulfillment (although, as we shall see, these institutions, too, yielded to the educational priorities of business). And, as I hope this book demonstrates, many groups and individuals raised their voices against the new cultural changes taking place and rebelled against them. These included farmers and workers who fought the large corporations; the small, independent merchants of the era who took part in the "retail wars" against the big department stores; religious believers and leaders as well as Congressional democrats and municipal socialists; insurgent economists and literary intellectuals; and numerous "ordinary" citizens. Many of these people were principally loyal to the older democratic producing tradition, a powerful tradition that claimed people themselves should determine the fate of their culture, the shape of their politics, and the conditions of their labor. Others simply feared the impact of capitalist culture on spiritual and creative life. And the very newness of this culture disturbed and alienated many men and women who lived through its creation and who felt, toward the end of their lives, like strangers in their own country. But despite this opposition and dissent, the culture did take hold and came to dominate and to reshape the American experience.

I

Strategies of Enticement

Chapter 1

THE DAWN OF A COMMERCIAL EMPIRE

"They have emerged," wrote economist Edward Mead, husband of Emily Fogg Mead, of the new business corporations, in 1910, "like the trees in the primeval forest, wide and deep in the desires and necessities of mankind."[1] From meat-packing firms like Armour and Swift to giant U.S. Steel, corporations overshadowed the economy and took the collective American breath away. They belonged to a large array of economic groups and firms that altogether populated the new primeval forest with a host of trees, from such mass consumption companies as Sears, Roebuck, Woolworth's, and the hotel chain of Ellsworth Statler to such department stores as Marshall Field's of Chicago, Siegel-Cooper's of New York, and John Wanamaker's of Philadelphia, each run by aggressive merchants who invented the sometimes dreamlike, sometimes nightmarish world of modern merchandising.

By the turn of the century, the retail dry goods houses of the past—even Alexander Turney Stewart's white Marble Palace in downtown Manhattan—had been surpassed by the huge department stores that appeared virtually everywhere in America. Led by men who took risks and occasionally ended up bankrupt or even in prison, the mass retail businesses plunged into an extraordinary whorl of competitiveness. The department stores in particular, symbolic of the very essence of the consumer revolution, rose to dominance through a multitude of means. They sold a vast range of goods under single roofs and controlled masses of capital (their own and other people's), thus attempting to eliminate their small-scale competition. When this failed, they crushed their enemies in the retail wars of the 1890s, using, among other means, the arm of the state.

Growth was fast and furious, and often too dangerous or intense for many men accustomed to old-fashioned forms of quiet marketing and selling. By the late 1890s so many goods, in fact, were flowing out of factories and into stores that businessmen feared overproduction, glut, panic, and depression. A crisis in distribution struck the new economy, menacing the gains achieved in production. And out of the turmoil (the threat of which, however, would never disappear), businessmen would turn to new kinds of merchandising. Out of the turmoil would come a steady stream of enticements—display and decoration, advertising, fashion, style, service, and so forth—to break up the logjam of goods and to awaken Americans, as Emily Fogg Mead wrote, to "the ability to want and choose."

"The Master Institutions of Civilized Life"

At the center of the creation of the new economy and culture was a revolution in the production of industrial and agricultural goods and the advent of the profit-driven corporation. This revolution begot the brokers and was the principal cause behind the creation of America's new institutional circuitry. In just six years, between 1899 and 1905, American food output grew by nearly 40 percent. The quantity of cheap artificial jewelry doubled between 1890 and 1900, as did the amount of men's and women's ready-wear clothing. Production of glassware and lamps jumped from 84,000 tons in 1890 to 250,563 tons in 1914, and Americans were walking on more rugs by the end of the nineteenth century—so it was claimed—than were all other people in the world combined.[2] A multitude of goods were produced to satisfy needs that no one knew they had. Now "we have pickle and olive forks," Emily Fogg Mead wrote, "strawberry and ice cream forks, oyster and fish forks; we have also berry spoons, sugar spoons, soup spoons, salt spoons, mustard spoons in ever-increasing variety."[3] In 1890 a total of 32,000 pianos were marketed; by 1904 it was 374,000. There was an equally voluminous output of cheap sheet music. Today, only one or two American piano firms survive (most successfully, Steinway), but in 1900 there were perhaps hundreds of "name" pianos—among them Chickering, Baldwin, Kranich and Bach, Mason and Hamlin, Emerson, Vose, Kimball, and Brewster, most flooding the middle-class market with relatively cheap instruments.[4]

All this production was the result of the addition of new tools and "continuous-process" machines, and of the discovery of new energy sources such as coal, steam, gas, oil, and—crucially—electricity. The machines and energy speeded up and increased output to mass-production levels, allowed businessmen to build factories and offices in any direction anywhere in the country, and created the potential for what Fogg Mead called a "never-ending scale of expansion."[5] Major railroad trunk lines, as we know them today, were completed by 1895, and telephones and telegraph connected voices across great distances, increasing the rapid movement of goods and money.[6] Reserves of labor to operate the machines also grew, consisting of a vast army of immigrants and of native unemployed workers from the countryside and small towns. So, too, business had at its disposal, for the first time ever, huge amounts of capital for investment, capital pooled by new commercial and state banks and, above all, by the new insurance companies.[7]

In the vanguard were the large business corporations or combinations, which superseded the typical mid-nineteenth-century firm in economic importance. The earlier firm was small-scale and low volume and strove for success through product differentiation or by manufacturing a single unique product in a secure, relatively noncompetitive niche. The newer corporations cared little for differentiation, everything about high volume, full capacity production, and domination of mass markets. They came on the scene (especially after 1895) in response to a rapid fall in prices, high labor costs, and market volatility—all caused by intense competition. Corporations sought to end this competition by getting "control over prices, labor, and middlemen"—but above all, as Edward Mead insisted, "control over prices." "The essence of competition," he wrote, "is the sacrifice of prices to the buyer, and the essential principle of combination is the control of supply by the seller." Corporations wanted to be free, with intervention from no one, to "charge what the traffic will bear" and to "get from the buyer all that the buyer can be induced to pay."[8]

Unlike entrepreneurial firms, which were (and are) owned and conducted by individuals or partners, corporations were legal entities designed to provide limited liability and to ensure continuity of ownership beyond the lifetime of the original owners. They were social organizations marked by administrative hierarchies, managing machines, tools, and labor. But they were above all economic institutions, created to generate capital through private and public stock ownership and, through consolidation and often mergers, to seize market control in behalf of making profits. "The modern industrial corporation," wrote Harvard economics professor Arthur Hadley in 1907, admiringly, "was developed as a means of meeting the need for capital by large industries," capital "far beyond the power of any one man or any small group of partners to furnish."[9]

Modern business corporations were profit-driven machines. By 1900, many of them, in alliances with promoters and investment bankers who helped form the consolidations and mergers, were remaking the economy into a system preoccupied with "making profits" rather than with "making goods." The investment bankers especially—as Thorstein Veblen was perhaps the first to note—were directing economic life along a largely pecuniary path; these men, who were little concerned about the intrinsic value or utility of goods, supplied corporations with credit to expand, merge, and control markets, often sitting on their boards of directors and even managing the businesses themselves. They brought into play a new form of capital—"business capital," as Veblen called it. By 1895 "investment for gain" had begun to "supersede commitment to industry and workmanship," a shift in outlook Veblen described as "one of the most significant mutations in man's history."[10]

Corporations carried out on a grand scale what Robert Heilbroner has argued is the essence of the capitalist process—"the continuous transformation of capital-as-money into capital-as-commodities, followed by a retransformation of capital-as-commodities into capital-as-money." (Edward Mead again: "Great corporate beings grow continuously" and are "constantly adding to [their] equipment in order to increase [their] profits").[11] It was this potentially convulsive process that gave to the American economy and society its dynamic, innovative, thrusting-forward character—more goods this year than last, more next year than this, profit on profit. It led, inexorably, to the amassing of more and more capital in the hands of the owners of productive resources and capital, and conferred on those owners the power to decide who should be or should not be employed and the character of the work itself. The process endowed them with the power to

direct the activities of society and to control access to wealth, goods, and happiness.[12] In the words of Veblen, the corporation had by 1900 "come not only to dominate the economic structure but to be the master institution of civilized life."[13]

Not all businesses adopted the corporate form—not the building and garment industries, for instance, both of which consisted of many individually operated firms that eluded incorporation (often to be free to rely on subcontracting and to employ the cheapest labor).[14] But corporations became preponderant in both the producer and consumer sectors of the economy. In record-breaking time, as business historian Alfred Chandler has shown, they took over the production and distribution of goods in the United States, displacing in importance small employer-owned businesses. Giant producer-goods firms were built, from E. I. Dupont, maker of explosives, to U. S. Steel and Standard Oil. Close behind or at the same time were the big consumer-goods corporations: soap companies like Procter & Gamble; tobacco conglomerates like R. J. Reynolds and P. Lorillard; and meat businesses like Gustavus Swift, Inc., with its "full line" of lamb, pork, beef, and poultry, its numerous branch meat packing houses, and its branch marketing outlets spanning the country by 1890.[15]

Americans also witnessed a great surge forward after 1895 in the expansion of the service industry. The hotel and restaurant business was virtually nonexistent throughout most of the nineteenth century, mostly small-scale, confined to a few cities. After the Civil War, the new railroads changed all this, building or helping to build plush hotels and restaurants in cities coast to coast that catered to traveling wholesale buyers and sellers, politicians, traveling actors and circus troupes, swelling numbers of tourists, and con artists of all stripes. The greatest growth came after 1900, marked by the arrival of the first "skyscraper hotel" and of the first chains of large hotels, multistory monoliths run like factories and staffed by thousands of workers toiling from dawn to dusk.[16]

Merchandising underwent a similar burst in development, including dry goods houses, chain stores, mail order and specialty houses, and, most spectacularly, department stores. Although many of these businesses, as Chandler has argued, remained independently owned and operated (as many are today), merchandising as a whole experienced the same impulse toward expansion, concentration, and even incorporation that overtook the rest of the economy.[17]

From Marble Palaces to Masses of Goods and Capital

Before 1880 businesses like department stores did not exist; what did exist were neighborhood dealers, small dry goods firms, and large wholesalers that fanned out through distributing outlets into cities, towns, and villages. In the next twenty years, however, cities throughout the country would be filled with large retail establishments—multifloored, multiwindowed buildings of great concentrated selling power. In England, Japan, France, and Northern Europe, department stores had also gained a foothold but only in capital cities (none existed in Rome or Madrid, however).[18] The great French stores for "popular trade" that also influenced American merchandising—Galeries Lafayette, Les Printemps, and Bon Marché—appeared only in Paris (a city, in any case, known principally for its luxurious specialty shops).[19] In Japan, just one large store commanded interest—Mitsukoshi of Tokyo.[20] English retailing, although highly evolved in terms of both small and large consumer cooperatives and multiple specialized shops, had major middle-class department stores—for instance, Whiteley's, Harrod's, and Selfridges—only in London. Significantly, Selfridges, the very *first* commercial building in England built on a steel frame and from reinforced concrete, was founded by an American, H. Gordon Selfridge.[21] There were department stores in Germany but these sold largely cheap goods to a "lower class" clientele (only Berlin's Wertheim, which catered to foreigners, boasted a middle-class character).[22]

American department store merchandising was different in its scope, size, and prolific middle classness. Substantial middle-class stores were constructed in many cities and even in small towns at such a rate as to outpace anything comparable going on elsewhere in the world. "You find stores of this category not only in New York, in Chicago, and in Philadelphia," observed one startled Swiss merchant during a visit to the United States in 1915, "but also well-known stores of enormous dimension in many other cities throughout the United States."[23]

Department stores overshadowed the scene through the sheer rapidity and size of their expansion, which started in earnest, if chaotically, in the early 1890s as merchants began to tack new wings onto older stores, often creating "shreds and patches without unity or dignity," as one architect complained.[24] They, along with retailing chains and mail-order businesses of all kinds, dominated merchandising after 1895. And they did so because

they contributed to the creation of a new powerful universe of consumer enticements. The mass market merchants succeeded as well because they sold a world of new goods under one roof, concentrated ownership and controlled large capital sums (like other corporations), crushed or absorbed their competitors, and demonstrated great individual skill.

Of the few big early merchants, only the Scotch-Irish immigrant Alexander Turney Stewart, who possessed the nation's biggest stores in New York in the 1860s and 1870s, could have come close to what we think of as a modern mass retailer. Stewart was certainly a phenomenon, said to be the man who brought the one-price system to America, so successful by the late 1860s that President Ulysses S. Grant tried, to no avail, to appoint him secretary of the treasury. He made most of his money in the lucrative business expansion in New York City during and after the Civil War. His five-story cast-iron retail dry goods store, the Marble Palace, commanded the full block at Astor Place and Broadway in downtown Manhattan. Majestic on its white Corinthian columns and illuminated by gaslight and hundreds of windows, the store stood until a fire destroyed it in the 1950s. It was the largest building in New York City in the 1860s.[25] On the fourth floor, where manufacturing took place, stooping women and children labored at sewing machines in row upon row. Downstairs, ladies shopped, inspecting the high fashion and fancy dry goods on display—the Belfast laces, the silk gowns, the $1,000 camel-hair shawls.[26]

Stewart was one of the country's first great subjects of fantasy and myth about what wealth could give Americans, a man pursued and dreamed of by thousands who thought him "famed for his world renowned generosity . . . and great abundance," as one of his many doting correspondents wrote.[27] His very regal existence, strange in a land of republicans, gave birth to absurd ideas of benevolence and invited extraordinary appeals. One Brooklyn woman wrote to offer him her body: "I must have money and to get it am willing to sell myself. I come to you because you are a Gentleman and I feel safe in trusting you. I am conversant with what the world terms refined society. I am thirty years of age and good figure—will you make the purchase?" A man from Ohio begged Stewart to "send me fifty thousand dollars. I want to buy land and start a nursery. Send it at once for time is money." An eighteen-year-old boy from Florida pleaded "for a Velocipede. I have been trying to save money enough to buy one for some time but would not do so. I would not ask you sir if I thought *for one moment* you would not give it to me." "I would like to have you send me $3," wrote another boy, a fourteen-year-old from Belleville, New York, "you being the Wealthiest man I know.[28]

Stewart was condemned by some as a "social vampire" and his "whole system of business" reviled "an oppression."[29] But even after he died in 1876 and was buried in a casket of satin and gold, Stewart's hold over fantasy was lasting. Gail Hamilton, popular columnist and editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, wrote that he had freed Americans, at last, from the guilt of having wealth and desiring money. "We all want money and luxury," she said. "We only decry it when we cannot get it." Stewart told us that "we ought to enjoy wealth" and to "cease our idle carping against money."[30]

Yet, for all of this, Stewart did mostly a wholesale business (in the 1870s and 1880s, the only large merchandising was wholesale), and his retail store sold only fancy dry goods. "The only great store in existence" before 1876, John Wanamaker wrote a friend in 1908, "was the A. T. Stewart store, which was limited to dry goods."[31] By the midnineties, new unified mass retail institutions were being built, the first erected—according to many accounts—by the audacious Henry Siegel of New York City. Siegel started out as an independent merchant in Chicago, collaborated with Dutch-born Frank Cooper in 1887 to create the first Siegel-Cooper store, and then, flushed with success, marched off to New York. With help from the investment banking house of Goldman, Sachs, which issued bonds for him in the sum of $2 million, he bought up enormous chunks of Manhattan real estate. He opened the new Siegel-Cooper's in 1896 at Eighteenth Street and Sixth Avenue. It was a steel-framed stone building, six stories high, topped by a giant greenhouse, a roof-garden restaurant, and a two-hundred-foot tower—the first self-contained store "covered by a single roof in the world," according to Siegel's architects, Delemos and Cordes.[32]

By the early part of the new century, John Wanamaker wrote, "500-watt tungsten lamp" stores had overtaken the "candles" of the past, rising twelve to twenty-five stories and together covering millions of acres of selling space.[33] Many of the most famous firms began to assume their familiar shapes in these years: Marshall Field's in 1902 and 1912, and Carson, Pirie, Scott in 1903, both in Chicago; Macy's in 1902 in Manhattan; Filene's in Boston in 1912; and the white Famous-Barr department store in St. Louis in 1913, a magnificent structure that still overlooks the city's downtown retail district. In 1913, the "old conglomerate bunch of buildings" that had made up the Lazarus store in Cincinnati was torn down and replaced by a full-block integrated department store.[34]

More than other businesses, department stores revealed the totality of what the American economy was producing and importing. In the 1880s, most stores had only fifteen small departments, but by 1910, many offered upward to 125. Siegel-Cooper's sold in the late 1890s not only staples, yard goods, notions, ready-made clothing, machine-made furnishings, and hundreds of name-brand pianos but also photographic equipment in the largest photographic gallery anywhere, and monkeys, dogs, cats, birds, lion and panther cubs, and tropical fish in its huge pet department. In 1910 Macy's was conducting the largest domestic rug business in the country, at Thirty-fourth Street and Seventh Avenue in Manhattan, and Wanamaker's in Philadelphia had the "finest bookstore in the United States," soon to be surpassed by Marshall Field's of Chicago, which would exceed in volume and sales any other such business "in the world."[35]

Stores from Bloomingdale's and Siegel-Cooper's in New York to The Fair in Chicago sold huge quantities of preserved and refrigerated meats, canned foods, fresh vegetables, cheeses, breads, candies, numerous coffees and teas, and gourmet specialties.[36] Macy's, the first large retail store to merchandise kosher foods, according to the store's food buyer, William Titon, by 1914 was selling "all the rare tropical fruits and vegetables, irrespective of season."[37] Its food department had dietetic foods (granola, wheat bran, wheat flakes, peanut butter, whole wheat foods, yogurt, and so forth); 265 different kinds of wine, claret, and champagne; also an assortment of beers, gins, brandies, rums, whiskies, and liquors of "all descriptions," and, under Macy's own label, Red Star Brand cocktails (premixed manhattans and martinis).[38] The "grocery" business in department stores paid well, but some merchants refused to engage in it: "Our firm has declined the grocery business," wrote John Wanamaker to an inquiring customer in 1899, "because it could not be done profitably without wines and liquors, the use of which we are opposed to on principle."[39]

Besides selling goods in great array, the mass retailers secured the capital to enlarge their facilities continually as well as to buy and sell more and more goods. Many merchants, for instance, tried to integrate all the elements of the economic process, from raw materials and manufacturing to distribution and marketing, as well as wholesale and retail merchandising. To be sure, by 1900—and certainly by the 1920s—this kind of integration was rapidly disappearing, as mass retailers dropped their manufacturing units and wholesale divisions to concentrate exclusively on retailing, leaving the other functions to be carried out more efficiently by others. But before this time, merchants like A. T. Stewart—even in the 1870s—exercised such control (with factories abroad and even in his own store). So did Marshall Field's until the early 1930s, with its far-flung system of mills, factories, and branch wholesale offices (thirty, even in 1932); John Wanamaker to some degree (in candies, pillows, cosmetics, ice cream, and toothpaste); and Macy's, with a textile factory in Ireland, a fine china plant in France, and a glassware outlet in Bohemia.[40] Bloomingdale's was not only making its own underwear in 1909 but its own pianos as well, in a four-story building at Sixty-third Street in Manhattan, employing "hundreds of expert piano builders." Mandels on State Street in Chicago manufactured a "better class of mattresses and box springs and overstuffed furniture."[41]

Many merchants took the first steps toward the creation of national chains, part of a pattern of consolidation already under way in manufacturing. In 1906 Wall Street investment bankers financed the expansion of Sears, Roebuck and Company, the mail-order house first incorporated in 1892 and serving the still enormous farmer-country market; the banks offered millions of dollars' worth of Sears stock on the public securities market to get the company the capital needed to expand. "For the first time," a historian of the company writes, "Sears, Roebuck had a solid financial footing," with "plenty of working capital to support its rapid increase in sales volume."[42] This was a trend with notable implications for the shaping of this country's economy and culture. Historian Allan Nevins has written that "down to 1906, very little of the public money market was open to entrepreneurs in the mass-merchandising field."[43] But the investment bankers, seeing handsome financial rewards before them and their clients, helped reverse this trend. In 1912, the same cooperating banking firms that served Sears—Lehman Brothers and Goldman, Sachs—financed and reorganized F. W. Woolworth Co., increasing its stores from the eighteen of 1892 to six hundred, both in America and Europe.[44]

Other retailers expanded by absorbing their competitors. As early as 1901 John Claflin, son of Horace B. Claflin, who founded the nation's biggest wholesale business, tried to incorporate a chain of department stores into his now deceased father's business. John Claflin had restructured the firm, which had already been functioning as a holding company over an ample number of retail stores, into a corporation in 1890, and, with the financial aid and advice of investment banker J. P. Morgan, Claflin expanded farther. Between 1901 and 1909 Morgan advised him to create two new holding companies whose securities would be sold on the public market. By 1910 Claflin's business as a whole owned nearly forty retail stores, including such well-known firms as Lord & Taylor and McCreery's in New York and Hahne's in Newark.[45]

May Department Stores of St. Louis, Missouri, which would become one of America's longest-lived department store chains, was incorporated in 1910 in New York City. By 1914 the May company owned a Denver shoe and clothing company, a real estate and investment business, a Cleveland department store, Boggs and Buhl department store in Pittsburgh, the M. O'Neill and Co. store in Akron, Ohio, and, above all, the Famous-Barr department store in St. Louis, claimed by a store promoter in 1913 as the "biggest office building in the world."[46]

Henry Siegel also had dreams of creating a merchandising empire. With help from investment bankers, he formed a syndicate of stores in 1901, the Siegel-Cooper stores (of which he was by now the sole owner), the Simpson-Crawford-Simpson store in Manhattan, and the Schlesinger and Mayer store in Chicago.[47] A few years later, he bought the old Macy's store at the corner of Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue (the Straus brothers, whose family bought the Macy store in 1877, having moved uptown to Thirty-fourth Street by this time), called it the Fourteenth Street Store (designed to "cater to the masses," as he put it), and also built another Siegel store, in Boston. Siegel's stores had fifty to a hundred departments as well as such "services" as restaurants, parlor rooms, dental facilities, and banks for regular deposits and withdrawals. His customers put millions of dollars in his banks, posing a temptation that would prove to be his undoing.[48]

Now head of Henry Siegel Corporations, Siegel was capitalized at more than $10 million and backed by Manhattan lawyer and financier Henry Morgenthau, Sr., a member of Siegel's board of directors. Morgenthau, who would later serve as U.S. ambassador to Turkey at a critical historical moment, catered to the growth needs of the big merchants and helped consolidate the New York real estate business.[49] Because of his assistance in 1893, Isidor and Nathan Straus won a bidding war for possession of the Wechsler & Abraham department store in Brooklyn when that partnership decided to split up. As Wechsler's lawyer, Morgenthau persuaded Wechsler to sell out on the grounds that he "was unwise to run the business alone and should not risk securing it." The result was Abraham & Straus. In 1896, as lawyer to Judge Henry Hilton, owner at the time of A. T.

Stewart's Astor Place store whose expenses were outrunning his profits, Morgenthau "advised [Hilton] that he should sell out the business and take his loss." This, in turn, made it possible for John Wanamaker of Philadelphia to acquire and remake Stewart's into the biggest department store in the country.[50] In 1909, Lincoln and Edward Filene of Filene's in Boston, on the verge of relying on investment bankers to help finance the building of their new store, heard from Morgenthau that "there is no chance of failure, if you have plenty of capital."[51]

Success was not a foregone conclusion, however, as Morgenthau would soon learn in his dealings with Siegel. Between 1913 and 1914 both the Siegel and Claflin businesses collapsed. Claflin's self-destructed because the old wholesale firm had failed to control many of its retail stores, which had exceeded the firm's credit by millions of dollars (five-thousand banks were involved) and had refused to do business with the wholesale division, thus setting the company at odds with itself. Once again, J. P. Morgan stepped in, and this time he reorganized the business into a new firm, the Associated Dry Goods Corporation, still one of the nation's leading retail corporations. He demanded and got Claflin's resignation.[52] Siegel went down ingloriously in 1914 after making the wild blunder of accepting from major New York bankers loans he knew he probably could not pay back—all his stores but one were operating without profits and were greatly overcapitalized. To stay afloat, he took money from his own store banks (in other words, from his customers) to cover the heavy losses. He was found out, and in February 1914, twenty thousand creditors descended on him but with no prospect of repayment; within the year he was behind bars, convicted of grand larceny and serving a nine-month sentence at the Monroe County Penitentiary in Rochester, New York. The event might have stunned Morgenthau had he not been in Turkey by this time and probably too busy with the Turkish slaughter of Armenians to pay much attention to Siegel's downfall.[53]

The Retail Wars of the 1890s

The success of the mass market retailers was due to more than their capacity to summon large amounts of capital or to offer a huge assortment of goods under one roof or through a single catalog. There were other, more direct

means, which included alliances among merchants, reformers, and state governments to defeat the opposition. In the 1890s, retail wars, emblematic of the turmoil involved in what Alan Trachtenberg has called the "incorporation of America," erupted (especially in the western states) to challenge even the legality of department stores.[54] "The all-devouring monsters" were destroying the "little man," some New York City grocers said in anguish.[55] Even earlier, small merchants began to organize against bigger merchants to resist extermination, reflecting a process underway in Paris and London as well, where, as historian W. Hamish Fraser has written, it seemed as if "retailing were passing out of the hands of the small vendor into those of larger firms."[56] In America, however, the resistance of small dealers against bigger merchants unfolded on a larger canvas.

"This is a free country," said the president of a small traders' group in Kansas City in 1891, "but if this city is to have two or three big stores that are to do all the business, all the little ones must perish." "I am being victimized by three department houses, and street peddlers," complained a Kansas City dry goods dealer in that same year.[57] In the wake of the 1893 depression, small retailers blamed their miseries on the department stores. The "big store," one retailer argued, "removes much in the matter of independence for men and women in small ways, and compels a dependence which, while it may give more money to the fortunate ones, renders them subject to a central power which in time becomes a tyranny which will leave no boundless America offering homes to the oppressed."[58] Laws were introduced in state capitals from California to New York to tax "the octopus which has stretched out its tentacles in every direction, grasping in its slimy folds the specialist or one-line man"—the florist, the shoeman, the grocer, the jeweler, the furniture dealer, and the like. Butchers and liquor dealers often led the fight.[59]

The struggle was especially heated in Chicago, where, in the wake of the 1893 depression, hundreds of firms went bankrupt.[60] Stores like Marshall Field's on State Street weathered the storm and even prospered, having straddled the center of the Chicago business district, driven up real estate values to levels unaffordable to small competitors, and cut deeply into the small firms' clientele by selling the whole range of goods. Since the 1880s, Marshall Field (and his smart second-in-command, H. Gordon Selfridge, later founder of Selfridges in London) had been at pains to persuade all the leading Chicago retailers—John V. Farwell and Co., the Boston Store, Mandels, and even Field's archenemy, Carson, Pirie, Scott—to cluster closely together on State Street so they could function like an irresistible unified magnet of selling power. "He wanted to build up State Street," a Field's executive later recalled of his boss; he "went a long way to get Mandels established and then to keep them there," and also "helped set up the Boston Store."[61]

Marshall Field was accustomed to crushing his adversaries. He set his teeth against all labor unions, dismissed any employee who had any ties whatever with unions, and time and again enlisted "professional toughs" or heavily financed the National Guard out of his own pocket to break up strikes.[62] For years he symbolized for Chicago working people, as one Chicago paper put it, the "united capital" behind the war against "organized labor," or as Field himself described it, "the people of Chicago" against the "tyranny of lawless strikers."[63]

The big Chicago merchants gained perhaps surprising support from a new group of middle-class liberal reformers—"progressive" men and women who hated and feared the labor conflict of the day and who looked to the emergence of some centralizing agency to combat "local and particularistic forces."[64] These people belonged mostly to the professional class of lawyers, doctors, and ministers, or to a newer group of engineers and managers who believed department stores and such were the wave of the future, convinced that it was the duty of small retailers and workers alike to resign themselves inevitably to this change.[65] Many reformers admired the utopian novelist Edward Bellamy, whose popular 1886 novel *Looking Backward* had put the department store at the epicenter of American society and whose Nationalist movement (an indigenous Socialist movement) attacked all forms of "particularism." Nationalists, Bellamy explained, considered the "crushing of the country rivals" and the "absorption of the city rivals" into a "whole quarter concentrated under one roof" a great historical achievement.[66] They dreamed of integrating all Americans into a centralized system of mass consumption that guaranteed everybody, in exchange for acceptance of a disciplined industrial regime, instantaneous access to the same consumer goods and services. The goal was to have what Bellamy called "a homogeneous world-wide social system" along militaristic lines, free of class conflicts, local nuances, and sectarian differences.

Ranged against this formidable alliance of merchants and reformers was a coalition of small retailers, skilled and unskilled workers, small real estate men operating on the city's margins, and labor leaders who viewed the stores as exploiters of women and children. Together they launched a

movement to drive the department stores out of the city. Behind the insurgents stood the "local" political bosses; the machine; the recently elected Democratic mayor, Carter Harrison; and also, briefly, the Democratic City Council. "Real estate values," said City Council members and the mayor in February 1897, "have been unreasonably and enormously enhanced by the centralization" of the big stores "into one giant retail district." A group of local women also tried to galvanize support for the small retailers, seeking to undermine public sentiment for the big stores.[67] When The Fair, a substantial store then undergoing a major expansion, applied for a license in August to sell meats, the city refused it.[68] In November the mayor took the department store merchants to court to compel them to abide by provisions of a city ordinance forbidding them to sell meat and liquor. The City Council itself passed a resolution to enforce a graduated scale of license fees to be paid by merchants who vended more than a single line of merchandise.[69]

The rise of department stores aroused a similar discontent and even opposition in many other cities, and some store officials in those cities felt obliged publicly to defend large-scale merchandising. In New York City, for instance, the Downtown Business Men's Association on Fulton Street, organized explicitly to oppose "trusts and monopolies and the encroachments of the department stores upon all branches of business," provoked Robert Ogden, head of Wanamaker's New York store on Broadway and Astor Place, to counterattack. In a lecture he delivered in New York and elsewhere, Ogden maintained—in language close to Bellamy's—that department stores were in the vanguard of progress, that they gave jobs to thousands, and that the "ideas" of the small dealers were hopelessly "backward." "The implication of the criticism [against department stores]," he said, "is that the Department Store destroys the livelihood of the small competitors." That was "true to a degree," he conceded, but dwelling on it would miss the real point that the department store

> conserves opportunities for a livelihood and makes them more abundant. Sympathy for persons who, refusing to recognize existing conditions, have pursued a hopeless venture to a disastrous end is constantly in demand. But the judgment should recognize the fact that the result comes from ignorance or obstinacy, or both. If the suffering individual had simply adapted *himself to actual conditions*, and had sought his livelihood through some of the large

> concerns, he would have been in the enjoyment of a fair compensation, and would not appear as a sympathy-seeking mendicant.

Ogden saw little in the claim that the small dealers had as much right to exist as the department stores did. Nor did he mention the role capital played in deciding who would win. "History" shows, Ogden affirmed, that "before the advent of the Department Store," the "small storekeeper belonged to a failing class—not five per cent of the retail merchants of the former days permanently achieved success. If, therefore, failure was then the rule, the coming of the great retail store has proved a blessing to a great industrial class.[70]

By 1900 or thereabouts, the wars to vanquish department stores began to peter out, although there were still sporadic, unsuccessful attempts in New York and Massachusetts to impose special taxes on them.[71] The department stores had prevailed. State legislatures turned back the proposed laws, or state supreme courts declared them unconstitutional. The result, wrote a trade spokesman, "has dispelled the idea that the great emporium is a monster created by some mysterious agency for the destruction of the small trader."[72] The states—some uneasily, perhaps—had sided with department stores, thus legitimizing their economic existence. The Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics published a report "showing" that while "there was some danger that the department stores will establish a monopoly in the handling of some of certain kinds of goods," the large retailers had "encroached upon the business of 'single line stores' much less than the public [had been] disposed to believe."[73] Meanwhile, the federal Industrial Commission in Washington, D.C., released a report in 1901 claiming that department stores had "materially widened the field for specialty stores" and that they "*must* be located in the trade centers of our cities." It commended the big merchants for making the United States "a nation of large consumers in the way of comfortable wearing apparel, comforts and decorations for our homes as well as of luxuries of all kinds."[74] With the waning of the depression of the 1890s, moreover, many small retailers did rebound, thereby contributing to the weakening of resistance against the merchants in Illinois and elsewhere.

In Chicago, as a sign of what the merchants had achieved, thousands of Chicagoans swamped the new twelve-story Marshall Field's store when it opened in 1902 as a transformed business intended not only to serve "the swagger rich" or the "fine silk business," as heretofore, but also "masses of shoppers." "We have built this great institution for the people," announced Selfridge in his public statement at the opening, "—to be their store, their downtown home, their buying headquarters."[75] Containing more than one million square feet of selling space, the store was decked with "cut flowers on every counter, shelf, showcase, and desk," blooming plants, palms, and ferns, and banners and streamers. "It seemed as if there were a million American beauty roses," reported a young Chicago woman to a member of Wanamaker's management in Philadelphia, who inquired what was going on there. "Great bowls or bulbs of electricity," she wrote, "were strangely and remarkably made." Six string orchestras, on various floors, filled the store with music. Nothing was permitted to be sold the first day. In the new downstairs "basement," which sold "bargains" and duplicated the upstairs goods at "less expensive qualities," "the mass of Chicago"—"the Italian woman, with a basket of fish, a Pole, or Hun, and the street boy"—viewed the scene. "Now, the business is no doubt very much increased, but more cosmopolitan."[76]

Many merchants in the district even closed up shop to let their employees visit Field's. In other cities, merchants kept tabs on the progress and impact of the opening. "I have read everything that I could see in print about your opening," wrote John Wanamaker, Field's biggest national rival, to Selfridge, "and confess that I feel more interest in what you are doing than in any other business except our own. I hope to make a visit to see with my own eyes."[77] Mayor Carter Harrison of Chicago was so impressed by the outpouring of interest that he invited Field's to prolong the show for another week. "The opening was one of the grandest events that has ever been known in Chicago," concluded the above young woman, ". . . in a word, simply Wonderland."[78]

As the last shred of resistance to the big merchants seemed to vanish, American commercial business entered a critical phase. In no other time in their history, perhaps, had merchants more freedom to do what they pleased with their property or the property of others. In New York City, in the course of only ten years or so, the entire downtown retail district from Fourteenth to Twenty-third streets, between Broadway and Sixth Avenue (historically known as "the ladies' mile" because so many women shopped there), was abandoned for choicer properties uptown so merchants could be near the new transportation depots, the emerging entertainment district, and a prosperous middle class that had fled immigrant-packed lower Manhattan. Between 1900 and 1915 not only Macy's but also Altman's, Lord

& Taylor, Stern's, Arnold Constable, McCreery's, and Saks, perhaps nearly twenty-five major stores altogether, took possession of the uptown retail district, east and west, between Thirty-fourth and Fifty-second streets.

"The Greatest Merchant in America"

If merchants like Henry Siegel flared up in a brilliant flash of success, only to descend, from greed and undisciplined ambition, into the depths of imprisonment, others were more clever, perhaps more virtuous, and far more consistent and enduring. The most significant was John Wanamaker of Philadelphia, by all accounts "the greatest merchant in America." (See plate 17.) He himself boasted in 1909 that he "had revolutionized the retail business in the United States."[79]

Born in 1838 in a small rural neighborhood just twenty-five miles from downtown Philadelphia, John Wanamaker was the son of a bricklayer and builder who came, like John's mother, from a mix of German, Scotch, Dutch, and French ancestries. Both parents were devout Presbyterians who reared John to be just as devout, just as loyal to his faith and his Bible. He was to read the Bible over and over again throughout his life. By 1860, when he was twenty-one, merchandising was just beginning to offer young men promising careers. Torn between evangelical religion and the new world of commerce, he veered toward commerce. He wanted to be another Alexander Turney Stewart, but a "retailing" Stewart, a merchant prince of retail. His career began in earnest during the Civil War (due to ill health, he eluded the draft), when he exploited the opportunities presented by the enormous demand for army supplies and uniforms. He grew rich in the process, and this wealth led to the enlargement of his first business: clothing for men and boys.[80]

In 1876 three events propelled Wanamaker on the way to becoming America's leading merchant. Alexander Stewart died that year, which must have sent a shiver of anticipating excitement through Wanamaker. The Centennial Exposition opened in Philadelphia, then the principal manufacturing center in the United States. It was the country's first world's fair and probably the most influential of all the fairs because it unlocked the floodgates to what became a steady flow of goods and fantasies about goods. "It was like lifting a veil," wrote a contemporary, "in revelation of the size, the variety, and the beauty of the world." "It was the cornerstone," Wanamaker himself would later say, "upon which manufacturers everywhere rebuilt their business to new fabrics, new fashions, and more courageous undertaking by reason of the lessons taught them from the exhibits of the nations of the world."[81] The last event of 1876 (actually begun in December 1875) was the most profound for Wanamaker: It was a major religious revival, and it was held on Wanamaker's own property. At Wanamaker's invitation, the leading evangelist of the day, Dwight L. Moody, conducted the revival on Market Street, in the abandoned Pennsylvania Freight Station, a place that Wanamaker planned to transform immediately from an "Old Depot" into the "Grand Depot," or what he would call a "new kind of store." (See plate 1.)

In Wanamaker's mind, at least, the revival consecrated what he was doing. Months after it occurred, he wrote Moody, then preaching the gospel in Chicago: "Whilst I cannot come to you, we pray for you and especially in these anniversary days of the making of the Old Depot. How I lived yesterday a year ago and how my heart today yearns for the days that are past. Every corner of the building is still fragrant with the sweet spices of other days."[82] Although Dwight Moody tried to get Wanamaker to leave his business (I will have more to say about this in a later chapter), Wanamaker rebuffed him.[83] By the mid-1890s he had become the greatest bearer of Alexander Stewart's legacy, his Philadelphia store perhaps the city's central institution.[84] And, as if to prove his right to the Stewart legacy, Wanamaker bought Stewart's own "Marble Palace" on Broadway and Astor Place in New York. This was a bold move, not only because Stewart's had languished, repeatedly changing hands, but also because it was clear—even in 1896—that the movement of commercial growth in New York was uptown, not downtown. But Wanamaker, as long as he lived, beat the odds. He made Robert Ogden superintendent of the store, and breathed new life into it, remaining himself in Philadelphia. Six years later, he built a "modern" store across the street from the old Palace, and joined the two by an overhead bridge passageway. Designed by the Chicago architect Daniel Burnham, the new building quickly became one of the "sights" of New York and remained so until the 1940s.[85](See plate 3.)

Wanamaker was thrilled by the processes of acquiring the real estate and of demolishing the old structures that preceded the building of the New York store, which the store managers would later claim had more square footage and more windows than the Empire State Building. "When

I get possession of the Astor Place premises," he wrote Alexander Orr, president of the Rapid Transit Commission in 1903,

> I hope to be successful in getting the Broadway Trust Co. to accept this new location in place of where they are at the present time. This of course will enable me then to complete quickly the entire building on the block bounded by Eighth and Ninth Streets, Broadway and Fourth Ave., and when I secure all of the Snug Harbor Astor Place holdings, I will take down the Sinclair Building, and possibly the other building, thus making a handsome improvement. The development of the three blocks and the small piece at the corner of Fourth Ave. and Tenth Street, which practically embraces all of the real estate of the Sailor Snug Harbor east of Broadway and south of Tenth Street, will make a very great change in the architectural condition of the neighborhood.[86]

According to Henry Morgenthau, who negotiated the purchase of the leaseholds and the buildings for Wanamaker, it was the "greatest real-estate bargain ever made in New York."[87]

A few years later, in 1911, Wanamaker told a business group that "it is a tremendous thing to live—dying is next to nothing. Beasts and birds die—living is everything. The universe is sensitive to the merest touch and therefore it is possible to set wheels in motion that shall outrun the world."[88] In 1912 he opened a twenty-four-story department store in the heart of Philadelphia that still stands and that, according to its architect, Daniel Burnham, "[was] the most monumental commercial structure ever erected anywhere in the world."[89]

Wanamaker is all the more interesting for his personal tensions and for the way these tensions shed light on the commercial economy and culture he was helping to create. He translated the new economy into a new culture for many Americans—we might call him one of this country's domesticators of commercial culture, a man who not only "revolutionized retailing," as he said himself, but who also legitimated fashion, fostered the cult of the new, democratized desire and consumption, and helped produce a commercial environment steeped in pecuniary values. But, like many other Americans, he seemed to be of two minds about this culture. A very religious man, he went so far as to build Christian institutions—Bible schools, churches, domestic and international missions—that he hoped, on some level, would reconcile the world of consumption with traditional religious beliefs and practices. He tried to integrate Christianity into the new culture, although, as we shall see, what he did in the end was to marginalize religion and doom it to irrelevance.

Wanamaker began his life in the outskirts of a still rural Philadelphia, and he ended it at the helm of an urban commercial empire: Rural and urban, country and commerce, would always compete in him. He was the most ardent exponent of fashion, but he championed the "simple life" movement. He commanded large sums of capital but was contemptuous of brokers, real estate agents, and financial capitalists. At a time when he was amassing capital to build his new stores, he refused—as he wrote in his diary—to rely on "any financial help outside of ourselves." "I am sure," he wrote in another entry, "I shall be better for learning to depend on myself, humanly, rather than on the financial system of our country that now operates by the might and money power of a few men."[90] Asked whether he was a "capitalist," he said he wasn't. Though he owned factories and was about to transform his stores from a "partnership" into a "corporation," "I am only a merchant," he said.[91]

For a fleeting moment, during the 1907 panic, Wanamaker, one of the wealthiest men in America, was, in his eyes and those of other businessmen, one of the poorest. All his money was tied up in his investments. He survived that panic (with the help of friendly creditors), and not without, once again, taking the high ground. "We have had the iron age and the stone age and this is the business age," he told General William Booth, founder and commander of the Salvation Army, in 1907, "and all over the world men are worshipping the most helpless god of all that is in or out of heathen temples—MONEY—the dumb god without eyes to see, or ears to hear, or power to add a handbreadth to a man's life."[92]

The Crisis of Distribution

John Wanamaker, Marshall Field, Henry Siegel, Percy and Jesse Straus, and similar merchants were at the forefront of a redirection of American life. They contributed to the creation and expansion of the Land of Desire, as did the national corporations and commercial and investment banks. But they were not in themselves decisive in transforming America into a consumer society or Americans into dependable consumers. Other conditions had to come into play, including the assistance of noneconomic institutions, the accommodations of religion, and the emergence of a new group of intermediaries (all of which will be examined in due course in this book). Another propelling condition had to appear as well: the impact of fear, fear about consumer reception (or resistance), fear about the movement of goods, fear about distribution.

As the corporations and commodities multiplied, it became clear that consumption—and distribution and marketing—could not be taken for granted. After 1875, many economists, merchants, and manufacturers feared that the business economy would be so committed to more and more productivity, so money-mad, that it would cause glutting, overproduction, and economic crisis. The fear may have been unwarranted (at least in some industries, there appears to have been minimal overproduction), but whether true or false, it was widely and persistently held. "If there has not been overproduction, then why is it that the warehouses of the world are filled with goods?" a merchant asked in 1877.[93] "The country is suffering from overproduction," asserted another merchant in 1912. "The goods must be moved." "While we are but on the threshold of efficiency in production, the progress thus far made has outstripped the existing system of distribution. If our possibilities are to be fully utilized, the problems of distribution must be solved."[94] Even Theodore Dreiser tried to join the chorus in a 1902 essay, "Problem of Distribution" (never published), in which he claimed that the large cities were not moving fruits and vegetables in time enough to forestall spoilage and waste.[95]

The crisis of distribution meant different things to different people. For some, mainly defenders of workers and the poor, it meant the distribution of wealth or the equalization of income. Historian Dorothy Ross writes that the "distribution of wealth" was the "core issue" for the generation of reformers and economists after 1870.[96] For others, above all for businessmen, this crisis was one of goods or the movement of goods from producers to consumers. Both crises, of course, were related: To increase incomes meant that one would, perhaps inevitably but not necessarily, increase consumption and thus help remove the snags that blocked the flow of goods. Indeed, the relationship between these two "crises"—one of wealth, the other of commodities—was heatedly debated from the 1880s to 1910 (it is still debated today). On the left were native socialists such as Edward Bellamy, who urged that the state provide guaranteed annual incomes to every adult so that everyone would have equal access to the same things. On the right, economists such as John Bates Clark argued that labor and capital "got exactly what they deserved" and that the market, left to its own devices, would yield the most just distribution of incomes and goods.

Clark's voice, on the whole, won out, accepted by businessmen who defended the idea that the market would be—had to be—the prime medium for resolving the crisis in the distribution of wealth. But when it came to the crisis in the distribution of goods, businessmen who ran full-capacity, high-volume firms looked in another direction. Here, something beyond dependence on the "natural laws" of supply and demand was called for to ensure turnover. Businessmen would have to intervene more aggressively, not only by controlling prices, output, and labor or by establishing alliances with others (above all, as we shall see, with the state), but also by persuading and changing minds, by producing a new consumer consciousness, by transforming the imagination. The challenge was a big one, wrote Emily Fogg Mead in 1901. It required the diffusion of "desire" throughout the entire population, not just through the "elite," which was already able to "utilize the new goods at once." And money income was not the decisive factor in building desire. "We are not concerned with the ability to pay," Fogg Mead insisted in her widely quoted 1901 article defending advertising methods (even Thorstein Veblen admired and used it), "but with the ability to want and choose" and to open up the "imagination and emotion to desire." "*Without imagination, no wants*," wrote another ad expert, Katherine Fisher, in 1899. "Without wants, no demand to have them supplied."[97]

So, business pursued the imagination in a way no other group in U.S. history had ever done. It turned rapidly to new methods of marketing and to the dissemination of strategies of enticement—advertising, display and decoration, fashion, style, design, and consumer service. It reshaped the structure and character of the work force as well, introducing not only new brokers but a new class of service workers (salespeople, waiters and waitresses, bellhops and deskclerks, etc.), at the beck-and-call of consumers and growing at a rate far in excess of any other workers. It affected women as well as men, employing a minority of women at higher and higher salaries (especially in the fashion industry) and a majority in the lowest paid and most degraded occupations. The new business economy and culture affected children, too, by abstracting them as *individual* consumers out of the family, and by constructing a separate child world, independent of the adult world and competitive with it as a source of profit. And business, in collaboration with other groups and in its drive to break up the distributive logjam, flooded American culture with new symbols and images. A whole new aesthetics of color, glass, and light appeared on the American scene.

Chapter 2

FACADES OF COLOR, GLASS, AND LIGHT

"Our minds are full of windows," wrote John Wanamaker in 1916. Wanamaker's own buildings had thousands of windows, not only office windows but also almost a hundred large show windows that occupied the circumference of his New York and Philadelphia stores. "Show windows are eyes to meet eyes," he said. Today, people take show windows for granted and scarcely observe the surfeit of glass shapes and surfaces on nearly every city street. But in the early 1900s many were disoriented by the images and goods displayed behind the glass, even by the glass itself.[1]

On a return visit from England in 1904, Henry James was disturbed by the "towers of glass" that had been erected almost overnight in Manhattan. In *The American Scene*, he compared the tower windows to the stained glass windows of artist John La Farge, just installed in Ascension Church on Fifth Avenue. He saw the church windows—the "loveliest of images"—as endangered by "windows that speak loudest for the economic idea." The La Farge creations, though "new," were doomed by "those invidious presences"—the business windows—which "were going to bring in money, and was not money the only thing a self-respecting structure could be thought of as bringing in?" James, comparing the church window with the "invidious" kind, and a formal aesthetic with a pecuniary or commercial aesthetic, feared an impending tragedy of "removal," an inevitable disappearance of the older "beauty." "Window upon window, at any cost, is a condition never to be reconciled with any grace of building," he said. "The building can only afford lights, each light having a superlative value as an aid to the transaction of business and the conclusion of sharp bargains. Doesn't it take in fact acres of window-glass to help even an expert New Yorker to get the better of another expert one, or to see that the other expert doesn't get the better of *him*."[2]

When Willa Cather visited New York City in the winter of 1903, she was surprised to see fresh flowers displayed in small glass cases at corner flower stands, "seeming somehow more lovely and alluring," she said, than they would have been in a natural setting. Edna Ferber wrote angrily of a Chicago show window in the winter of 1911, "It is a work of art that window, a breeder of anarchism, a destroyer of contentment, a second feast of Tantalus." "It boasts peaches, downy and golden, when peaches have no right to be, strawberries glow therein when shortcake is a last summer's memory."[3] In the spring of 1902 Theodore Dreiser had toured Fifth Avenue in New York and peered into the newly designed and decorated show windows: "What a stinging, quivering zest they display," he said, "stirring up in onlookers a desire to secure but a part of what they see, the taste of a vibrating presence, and the picture that it makes."[4]

James, Cather, Ferber, and Dreiser were reacting to something almost wholly new in American life—the spread of an aesthetic to serve business needs. At the heart of it was the intent to show goods off day and night through all possible means. Showing off was not entirely new to American business; in some form or another, it had been going on in cities such as Philadelphia and Boston since the late colonial period. What *was* new was the volume of showing off, the quantity of selling materials, and the intermingling and application of color, glass, and light on behalf of the movement of goods.

In the late 1890s new visual media were invented, including the "cut" or the ad picture, the artistic poster, the painted billboard, the electrical sign, and most enticing of all, the show window. At the same time, specialists, skilled in promoting goods and in creating just the right images, just the right combinations of color, glass, and light, were doing business. Among them were advertising genius Elbert Hubbard; Wanamaker's partner who believed that department stores were destined to destroy small retailers, Robert Ogden; and Maxfield Parrish, America's most influential commercial artist. The author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, L. Frank Baum, was also among this group; indeed, long before he grew famous as a writer of children's books, Baum was a nationally recognized authority on window design, advising thousands of other window trimmers on what he called the "arts of decoration and display." Along with other window experts, Baum helped create a remarkable landscape of glass, perhaps the most powerful field of desire yet to appear in American cities.

By 1910 mass market businessmen, with the aid of men like Baum, Parrish, Ogden, and Hubbard, were seeking to occupy visual space through an onslaught of pictures. Together they helped change not only the way many people saw and understood goods but also how they lived in their society.

Elbert Hubbard and Eye Appeal

Elbert Hubbard, an influential advertising man and promoter, built his career around his own personal image. Hubbard was a publicity counsel for hundreds of advertisers, as well as the manager of the "Roycrofters," a well-known arts and crafts business in upstate New York that tried to blend mass-production and mass-selling styles with the handcrafted and "the Renaissance" in a "modern" American way. He made a fortune writing "publicity preachments" for retail businesses and national corporations and for "everything from toothpicks to motor trucks." His promotional one-liners—the soundbites of his generation—shaped the way a generation or more of Americans thought about business and commodities.

Before Hubbard drowned in 1915, when the *Lusitania* went down, he had been photographed "in almost every conceivable position and condition," an admirer said. Photographers captured him playing golf with John D. Rockefeller, dancing the one-step with Eva Tanguay, chatting with Elbert H. Gary, confiding in Thomas Edison, riding a favorite horse, "Garnet," around his country estate, straddling a motorbike, shaving with a new safety razor, and posing near an electric fan or in a fur coat in the middle of August. The photograph of this rather weird-looking tall man with long hair, a big Quaker hat, and a Byronic tie hung in each room of his offices and workshops. His face was engraved on his business stationery and could be seen on a huge electric sign outside his workplace, or hung as an imposing painted sign at his hometown train station in East Aurora, New York. In

The Philistine, a magazine published by Hubbard, almost every issue contained several photographs of him. Friends were said to lament that "his last advertisement [the last photograph ever taken of him] sank with him in the cabin of the ill-fated *Lusitania*."[5]

Hubbard's "life was an advertisement." "Everybody," he announced, "should advertise while they are alive." "The man who does not advertise," he said before a 1911 meeting of advertising men, "is a dead one, whether he knows it or not." He argued time and again that people should push themselves and their "services and commodities" forward into the public space, push and push, and that the best way to do that was through pictures. "Life is too short for you to hide yourself away mantled in your own modesty."[6]

One of Hubbard's friends observed that he "deified commerce" and "religionized his business." Although he had grown up in the 1870s in the Midwest with the Protestant church at "the center of all our social life," inch by inch he left the church for his new faith.[7] "There is room in business for all your religion, all your poetry, all your love. Business should be beautiful and it is fast becoming so." "When I want to hear really good sermons nowadays, we attend a weekly lunch of the ad club, and listen to a man who deals in ways and means and is intent upon bringing about paradise, here and now."[8] He rejoiced in what he called the "multiple markets" of capitalism. He was convinced that only constant publicity could break down barriers between goods and people; his business slogan was "economic salvation lies in closer relation between the producer and consumer."[9]

Before the late 1880s, visual advertising was looked down on as linked to circuses and P. T. Barnum hokum. Newspapers and magazines, in fact, offered little or no advertising, and what they did print was small-scale and with small-agate type, visually unappealing, words jammed closely together into single columns, and with scant illustration and display. The few existing advertising agents wrote no ads themselves but, as "space brokers," simply acquired space in newspapers and journals so that others might announce their own goods.[10] After 1885, as merchandise flowed out of factories, national manufacturers and large retailers began to transform advertising's character and scope. In 1880 a total of $30 million was invested in advertising; by 1910, new big businesses such as oil, food, electricity, and rubber were spending more than $600 million or 4 percent of the national income (a percentage that remained unchanged for the next sixty years). The very

existence of the first mass market newspapers and mass market magazines of the 1890s and early 1900s—*Cosmopolitan, The Saturday Evening Post, The Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Comfort Magazine*—was made possible by the advertising investments of large retailers and corporations.[11]

National corporations, from Procter & Gamble to the Colgate Company, sought for the first time to reach consumers directly through national advertising campaigns. The big retailers demonstrated the value of "continuous advertising," of advertising throughout the year, of the "everyday advertisement." "The newspaper of today," one retailer said in 1904, "is largely the creation of the department store." "The time to advertise is all the time," said John Wanamaker.[12]

The first nationally renowned advertising agents, such as Elbert Hubbard, practiced their trade, as did the national agencies employing many specialized advertising men or women (the percentage of advertising women in the agencies, small at first, would increase after 1910). In the 1880s there were only two copywriters of any consequence in the country; by the late 1890s there were hundreds, by 1915 thousands. In 1904 the Advertising Federation of America was established.[13] Advertising "experts" no longer limited themselves to selling space; they *invented* advertising words and images.

Though often at odds with one another in these early years over who should control the advertising, manufacturers and retailers had methods and style in common. Both relied on new sales promotion campaigns and on coordination through a range of instruments—magazines, direct mail advertising, newspapers, door-to-door demonstrations, free samples, and billboards.[14] They agreed on the central place of the picture, the image, the photograph in persuading consumers to buy goods and services.

By the late 1890s "eye-appeal" had begun to rival copy for prominence. "Color, form, and visualization," said one early proponent, is "indispensable" to advertising's success.[15] Another marketeer, in 1905, advised stores to "appeal to the imagination," and "induce buying" through "artistic cuts" and said that advertising should be full of "living, speaking things." "Pictures are first principles," said another. "You may forget what you read—if you read at all. But what you see, you know instantly!"[16] A billposter advertiser put it this way: "It is hard to get mental activity with cold type, YOU FEEL A PICTURE."[17]

"We recognized their value," recalled one of Wanamaker's staff in 1904 of advertisements in the 1880s, "but didn't know how to produce enough interesting pictures to supply the daily demand. Now I can suggest 300 pictures for one of those ads, but you must remember that we were entirely on new ground then." In one of his personal memorandum books for 1911, which he labeled "Things to Remember," John Wanamaker recorded: "Pictures are the lesson books of the uneducated." And two years later, he wrote one of his buyers, recommending above all the kind of advertising "picture that has motion in it, or that creates emotion in the man or woman looking at it."[18]

Perhaps the first popular images to emerge were the "advertising cards" of the 1880s and 1890s, given out free by circuses, theaters, dry goods houses, department stores, and cigar companies to customers at the door or by mail. These brightly colored cards depicted varied activities and scenes—swimming at Coney Island, Jumbo the Elephant at the opera, fluttering butterflies, clowns cartwheeling in the streets, and Alice in Wonderland topsy-turvy dreamlike renderings. The cards failed to show the actual goods or services on sale (thus not really showing off in pictures and signs), but many carried price lists on the back, and—most important—each attempted to associate its business with games, luxury, pleasure, fantasy, or faraway mystery. Adults and children everywhere collected them and filled countless albums with them, such as the album Louise Kummer of Washington kept in the 1880s of cards mostly from dry goods houses and now in a Washington, D.C., museum.[19]

At the height of this card craze, other forms of visual advertising began to portray goods clearly, especially the mail-order catalogs of Sears, Roebuck and Company, Montgomery Ward's, and the catalogs of the larger retail stores. As far back as the late 1860s a few dry goods houses had used catalogs to sell goods by mail, but few were visual. Even in the 1890s, they lacked reliable visual material, similar to the illustrations in fashion magazines that only hinted at what the goods really looked like.[20] At the turn of the century, an important representational change was under way. By this time almost 1,200 mail-order concerns were competing for the patronage of more than 6 million customers "in the most obscure and remote localities, raking the country as with a fine-tooth comb."[21] Specialized catalogs were printed, from Wanamaker's *Baby Coaches* and *Bicycles* to *Good Eating Magazine* of Simpson, Crawford, Simpson on Sixth Avenue in New York or Siegel-Cooper's *Modern Housekeeping and Food News*.[22] At the same time, catalog covers began to be imaginatively conceived (often by well-known artists) and as skillfully lithographed in a palette of colors as the advertising cards. (See plate 4.)

Inside these catalogs, some hundreds of pages long, lively, precise drawings and many attractive photographs were replacing copy and the stilted images of the past. Catalogs everywhere were full of "beautifully clear and distinct half tones and line cuts" and excellent "artwork." "We never saw a catalog so thoroughly illustrated," wrote an impressed advertiser in 1907 of the most recent addition to the catalog business, "nearly every item is pictured. A woman can buy almost as satisfactorily from one of these plates as from the counters."[23] The 1898 Christmas catalog of the Irishman Hugh O'Neill's department store on Sixth Avenue in New York had a scenic cover and, as a harbinger of things to come, four pages in color on finely coated paper, showing, among other things, golden lamps and blue smoking jackets. A year later a Wanamaker catalog advertised a rose-pink corset.[24]

One can only guess at the impact this flood of color in advertising had on customers, an impact advertisers did everything to orchestrate. Artemas Ward, pioneer advertiser and editor of *Fame* who beckoned Americans into a new "land of dreams" and who owned the most lucrative franchise for selling advertising on buses and trains in the nation, defended color in subway advertising. From the first days of the New York subways before the First World War, he exhorted business to use color because it showed "strikingly the grain, the texture, the juiciness, the savoriness" of the goods for sale. It is the "priceless ingredient," he said. "It *creates desire for the goods displayed*." "It imprints on the buying memory." It "speaks the universal picture language," reaching "foreigners, children, people in every station of life who can see or read at all."[25]

The iconographic trend marked newspapers as well. In 1894 "the advertising shift from columns into full pages" was formally announced in the trade press. Increasingly, the small, bunched, antivisual copy of the past, confined in half columns and corners of pages, was being superseded by full-page display advertising, with bolder headlines, wider margins, varied typescript, and, above all, distinct pictures of the goods for sale.[26]

Attractive packaging came into vogue as well, along with colorful circulars and trademark labels for national corporate brand goods and for locally sold retail commodities alike. Such labels, in effect, committed businesses to producing and selling standardized products. By 1905 there were ten thousand registered trademarks, for everything from fountain pens to soft drinks, each reaching out in a visually enticing way for consumer attention and loyalty. Systematically building the reputations of corporations, trademarks appeared everywhere, as historian Susan Strasser has written, "stamped onto sides of beef, crackers, and bedposts, prominent in advertisements, and emblazoned on company letterheads."[27]

Signs of the Times

Even more far-reaching was the growth of the American outdoor advertising industry. Between 1890 and 1915 countless posters, signboards, billboards, and electrical images had appeared in the United States. The first American colored posters, designed for theaters, amusement parks, and dry goods houses, were circulated after 1895, inspired in large measure by the work of French poster artists such as Jules Cheret and Eugene Grasset who injected into commodities a new *joie de vivre*. When the English poet Rupert Brooke toured Wanamaker's in Philadelphia in 1913, he was astonished to learn that "leading young 'post-impressionist' painters" from Paris had been "designing posters for this store for years," and he also "watched with awe" as a young American artist "did entirely Matisse-like illustrations to some summer suitings." At Wanamaker's, as Brooke discovered in an interview with "the very intelligent lady in charge," all the "artists were given a free hand, except, of course, for nudities . . . or people smoking."[28]

Advertisers tacked posters up in street transportation, at railroad stations, and—from the very moment the first subways were operating—in the same spots still allotted for them today. "It was a poster that sent me to Coney Island," wrote one of New York's culture critics, Joseph Huneker, of a 1914 poster of a bandmaster conducting a "succulent symphony" of crabs, fish, lobster, fruit, watermelons, cantaloupes, and clams. "I had sworn never to tread again" to Coney Island, Huneker said. "But that poster! Ah! If these advertising men only knew how their signs and symbols arouse human passions they would be more prudent in giving artists full swing with their suggestion-brushes . . . I was in haste to be off. I *mentally saw* that gustatory symphony."[29]

Across America billboards pictured national trademarks or products—

Gillette razors, Kodak cameras, Colgate toothpaste, Wrigley chewing gum, and Budweiser beer. A giant Coca-Cola sign blocked the view of Niagara Falls, while Mennen's Toilet Powder was suspended over the gorge. "From the entrance to the Capitol grounds on Pennsylvania Avenue" in Washington, D.C., wrote a tourist, "one must see a great right-angled line of signs," and "there is no way to view the nearby Garfield Monument without taking in a background of billboards."[30]

A profitable sideline of the outdoor advertising business—electrical sign advertising—evolved rapidly after 1900. New trade journals were published to meet the needs of this aggressive industry, among them *Signs of the Times: A Journal For All Interested in Better Advertising*, published initially in about 1910 in Cincinnati, Chicago, and New York. Still available today, this periodical coopted an old religious phrase, "signs of the times" as its title, a phrase used for hundreds of years by evangelical Protestants who saw in certain "signs" the impending end of the world and the "Second Coming of Jesus Christ." Indeed, in the first year this journal was delivered to customers, ferment swept through American churches, stirred up by an apparent decline of religion and by a wave of "modernism" (or by that religious perspective that accepted Darwinism, scientific advances of all kinds, and a historical approach to the Bible). In New York City, evangelical leaders like Baptist minister Isaac Haldeman compiled the "most comprehensive" volume of premillennial prophesies of decline yet to appear, *Signs of the Times*, based on what Haldeman believed were "signs" of "business corruption and greed." The advertisers' *Signs of the Times*, of course, foretold a different future and worshiped quite different gods.[31]

"Electrical advertising," a spokesman said, "is a *picture medium*. Moreover, it is a *color* medium; still again, electrical advertising is a medium of motion, of action, *of life, of light*, of compulsory attraction."[32] Whole new districts of commercial white light, which Americans and others have long associated with the consumer core of cities, now appeared. In the mid-1890s, merchants employed the first "spectacular" electrical displays, mounted on skeletal steel frames with flashing devices. Broadway in Manhattan became well known for such signs, from the forty-five-foot Heinz pickle in green bulbs at Madison Square in 1900 to the illuminated Roman chariot race (seventy-two feet high and nine hundred feet wide) atop the Hotel Normandie at Thirty-eighth Street and Broadway in 1910.[33]

One broker of commercial light, O. J. Gude, "known as the Napoleon of publicity," coined the phrase "the Great White Way." Gude saw in light a commercial niche no one else had yet seen. He invented the permament signboard for painted advertising, upgraded the traditional bill-posting business into a corporate enterprise, and created the first large electric advertising signs. His "work," he claimed, expressed the best in American aesthetics. "Outdoor advertising," Gude said, "has felt and shown the effects of the artistic spirit of the people in this country; it is beautiful, rather than brutally dominant."[34]

Gude was delighted that these signs "literally forced their announcements on the vision of the uninterested as well as the interested passerby." He echoed almost verbatim what Emily Fogg Mead had argued in 1901—that such obtrusiveness was a necessity if "new habits were to be opened." "The successful advertisement," Fogg Mead had said, "is obtrusive. It continually forces itself upon the attention. It may be on sign boards, in the street-car, or on the page of a magazine. Everyone reads it involuntarily. It is a subtle, persistent, unavoidable presence that creeps into the reader's inner consciousness."[35] "Sign boards are so placed," repeated Gude, "that everybody must read them, and absorb them, and absorb the advertiser's lesson willingly or unwillingly. The constant reading of 'Buy Blank's Biscuits' makes the name part of one's sub-conscious knowledge."[36]

The first "talking" signs operated along Broadway and elsewhere (although not yet concentrated in Times Square, which was largely a World War I and postwar creation), followed, after 1912, by panoramic and moving signs, known as "sky signs," allowing merchants to move copy swiftly along the boards from left to right and to change reading matter daily. Varied colored lacquers covered the moving lights. Electricians redesigned the marquees of theaters and hotels, stores and other businesses, putting the names of people, companies, and goods "up in lights." Thousands of tourists in sightseeing coaches visited the commercial districts to view what Gude called "the phantasmagoria of the lights and electric signs."[37]

Not everyone was pleased by these intrusions. Reform groups in many cities saw the signs as aesthetic nuisances and as threats to real estate values. "The abuses," admitted Emily Fogg Mead, "are much in evidence." "The weary traveler becomes impatient at the staring street-car 'ads,' at the gaping signs and, above all, at the desecration of rocks and cliffs and beautiful scenery."[38] One such traveler was the sociologist Edward Ross, who, on a railroad trip through the Pacific Northwest in 1912, saw a sign—"Mrs. Scruber's Tooth Powder"—displayed against a background of shaggy pines. "Had we passengers felt proper resentment, we would have avoided that

tooth powder to the end of our days," he wrote. "But, idolators of 'enterprise' that we are, we never think of boycotting those who fling their business in our faces at inopportune moments." Urban businesses, he continued, seem to have carte blanche to do what they wish with the public space: "In the city, every accessible spot where the eye may wander, frantically proclaims the merits of somebody's pickles or Scotch Whiskey." But "why," Ross asked, "should a man be allowed violently to seize and wrench my attention every time I step out of doors, to flash his wares into my brain with a sign?"[39]

The impact of these protests were mixed, to say the least, as billboard advocates took refuge in the First Amendment and argued, to the satisfaction of many, that aesthetics was a matter of taste and, therefore, could not be legislated or regulated.[40] By World War I, municipal restrictions did begin to restrict billboards to certain areas but most often as a result of business lobbying. In many cities, a movement by upscale retailers was set in motion to pass zoning laws to prevent the erection of billboards in affluent shopping districts. Wealthy neighborhoods also exercised obvious clout in zoning out signs. But in poorer districts, in the mass market commercial centers of cities, and on a growing number of highways and roads, a determined billboard industry continued to "force" its "announcements" on Americans.

The Careers of Robert Ogden and Maxfield Parrish

Several conditions hastened business's embrace of pictorial advertising. One was the creation of professional organizations to manage the quantity and placement of signs. The billboard industry, chaotic and unregulated throughout most of the nineteenth century, was marked by indiscriminate posting in cities, towns, and the countryside; nothing prevented circuses and theaters in particular from hoarding choice advertising spots or from easily shutting out other firms. By 1910 a new leasing law, instigated by the outdoor advertisers, governed the competition. Clients were now assured "listed and protected showings," which meant that no other signs would be permitted in those spaces during a contract's duration. The result was a greater variety of showings, since advertising displays from many companies were now given equal treatment. (At the same time, however, many sign advertisers, representing the most powerful corporations, began to buy up costly leases with no intention of advertising, thereby finding a new way of excluding the competition.)[41]

Another factor in the advance of pictorial advertising was the availability of new kinds of color and light. Goods could now be vividly conceived and projected. American business, after 1880, had at its fingertips an unrivaled supply of new colors—more than one thousand separate shades and hues, according to a count by colorist Louis Prang. These artificial colors (such as mauve and chrome yellow) were made from aniline coal-tar dyes, and some exceeded in brilliance anything in nature. So many colors had been invented by the turn of the century that color standards were created to make clear to everybody in business, from Berlin to Chicago, what different reds or blues actually looked like. (The most popular standard was devised by Albert Munsell in 1900 and is still in use today.)[42]

New varieties of light also had appeared by 1910—gaslight, arc light, prismatic light (efficiently targeted daylight), carbon-burning electrical light, light from tungsten filaments, floodlights, and spotlights. "The sheer abundance of light," writes historian Reyner Baynam of business architecture, "effectively reversed all established visual habits by which buildings were seen. For the first time it was possible to conceive of buildings whose true nature could only be perceived after dark, when artificial light blazed out through their structures."[43]

The introduction of phototechnology and color lithography at century's end allowed businessmen and commercial artists to reproduce all kinds of images cheaply and abundantly. The graphic arts and photography, as historians of the visual arts have demonstrated, ushered in a new era in the representation of visual information between 1880 and 1910, making it more eye-catching. Any article, any painting, any photograph could be readily converted by new technical processes into attractive halftone illustrations. The technology introduced a different way of generating images and compelled nonphotographic artists, too, to render objects and people with greater authenticity. The "fashion plate" industry, for example, was irrevocably changed: It was no longer possible to rely on the old stereotypic pictures of the earlier magazine days. "Even fashion pictures which are drawn now," wrote one retailer in 1902, "must be much truer to life than they were made formerly. Photography has, in this respect, at least done good service for beauty."[44]

The evangelical commitment of certain merchants helped energize this

new advertising pictorialism. One such merchant was Robert Ogden, Wanamaker's partner and superintendent of the New York store in the late 1890s. Ogden spoke publicly about the use of pictorial advertising long before most other businessmen (Wanamaker included) conceded the power of pictures. In the 1880s he "persistently advocated the use of illustrations" to Wanamaker's advertising staff; "he was an enthusiast," remembered Manly Gillam, a nationally known copywriter who worked for Wanamaker's at the turn of the century.[45]

Ogden was zealous about other matters as well. He was, for instance, widely known as a champion of racial justice. Born in 1836 in Philadelphia and reared in part by a "black mammy," he led the fight for black education in the South along lines set by Booker T. Washington. Ogden was president of the Board of Trustees of Hampton Institute in Virginia, one of the first industrial labor colleges for blacks.[46] Wanamaker greatly admired Ogden, whom, he said, "I loved as truly as I loved any man outside of my own family." "It is not such an easy thing for a man to love another man," but "there was a magnificence about him." When Ogden died in 1913, Wanamaker wrote his own son, Rodman, that "we shall not have his like again. He was a miracle of goodness."[47] Ogden shared Wanamaker's Presbyterianism, although he was not orthodox in his views, detested "pious Christian cant," and saw nothing basically wrong with card-playing, the theater, or billiards.[48] But as Ogden became rich, he worried about his growing inability to reconcile his "practical affairs" with "Christian ideals," especially about the self-indulgence of his two teenage daughters who were "coming out" in Philadelphia. He told a friend, too, that he "really doubted at times whether he had the right to deal in all the finery on display at Wanamaker's."[49]

To Rodman Wanamaker, his right-hand man in running the New York store in the late 1890s, Ogden wrote something rather different. "I have ideals," he wrote in 1898, "at the center of which is the fundamental principle, the power to make money which I want to push." The retail business "added to the sum of human happiness by increasing the power of money to supply the comforts of life." Money was at the heart of it all—money through goods, money through other people's dreams, money through service, money through pictures. And he lectured John Wanamaker himself in letters about the importance of advertising: "It is the centre and inspiration of this business, the vitalizing force for all else that we do. . . . It is a science that cannot be trifled with."[50]

In an 1897 speech in New York City before the Sphinx Club, the country's first advertising club, Ogden explained why "hot pictures" were superior to "cold type." They held the attention like no other advertising. Where "printing fails, the hot picture rouses the curiosity, touches the sense of humor, appeals to the refined taste, and commands unconsciously the attention of the average beholder. The advertiser must command involuntary attention." He saw a mission here, a mission to bring "beauty" to ordinary people. "I have no doubt whatever that the high priests of art would sneer at the statement that art in advertising is art for humanity's sake; but, nevertheless, such is the case, and humanity benefits by the art that is expended upon advertising, and the benefits include the artist himself and the audience to which he appeals." Get rid of the precious notion that "art is for art's sake; art belongs to commerce; it must be connected with 'practical things,' " he said.[51]

Merchants like Ogden and Wanamaker hired trained artists to prepare their ads, another reason pictorial advertising came to be so extensive and so sophisticated. By the end of the century, mass market corporations and retailers were able to choose among an ever-swelling group of commercial artists to design billboards, posters, catalogs, and display advertising in newspapers and magazines.

The most famous of the artists whose talents were enlisted to sell goods was Maxfield Parrish, regarded throughout the first half of the twentieth century as America's greatest commercial artist. Parrish designed for nearly every conceivable promotional medium. He painted murals for hotels, restaurants, and barrooms—for example, the "legendary" Old King Cole mural for New York's Knickerbocker Hotel in 1906; the mural was later transferred to the King Cole Room in the St. Regis Hotel. He designed billboards for automobile companies, advertising panels like the Rubaiyat and Cleopatra designs for Crane's Chocolates, and magazine illustrations like the Arabian Nights paintings in *Collier's Magazine*. In one such ad a courtier serves raspberry Jell-O to a Renaissance king and queen, each in purple robes on a golden throne. His work achieved a distribution that was the envy of many other artists, thanks, in part, to Rushing Wood, a Manhattan advertising agency which, on demand, converted his designs into billboards, calendars, posters, and window cards for department stores and specialty houses. People clipped his pictures out of magazines and put them in their kitchens and bedrooms.[52]

A handsome man, Parrish often posed in the nude for the male and

also for the female figures in his own posters. He was born in Philadelphia in 1870 and benefited greatly from the revolt of his agnostic Quaker father, Stephen, who, one account has it, turned against the "drab view of life" to become a part-time artist (and owner of a successful stationery store).[53] The young Parrish came to public attention in the late 1890s with his illustrations for children's books, including the color drawings for *Mother Goose in Prose* by L. Frank Baum. Parrish did the pictures in Edith Wharton's popular *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, to Wharton's own considerable satisfaction. He prepared various publicity designs for corporate businesses and consumer institutions; linen labels and catalog covers for Wanamaker's in the 1890s; menus for Philadelphia's Bartram Hotel; and posters for such national manufacturers as Royal Baking Powder, Colgate Toothpaste, Santa Claus Soap, and Improved Welsbach Light. He attempted to heighten the appeal and modernity of the goods (and of the corporations that made them) by setting old against new to accentuate the virtues of "the modern." He placed the new goods in Renaissance, medieval, or ancient settings, with flamboyantly garbed boys in doublets and tights taking snapshots with Adlake Cameras, or with fairies in Aladdin-like caves using factory-made soaps.

Parrish often connected a commodity or a company with a whimsical atmosphere. He was called, in fact, the Peter Pan of illustrators. He seemed fascinated by what one contemporary described as the "magic of surfaces"; by using repeated glazes over a single design, he often got luminous effects with color. The special blue colors that endowed his pictures with a brilliant enamel-like appearance were widely known as "Parrish blues."[54] Parrish collaborated in 1915 with another commercial colorist, Louis Tiffany, in the construction in Philadelphia of "Dream Garden," an iridescent mosaic mural fifty feet long and fifteen feet wide, commissioned by the Curtis Publishing Company. Parrish designed the mural, which Tiffany translated into glass. Recently restored and still viewable at the Curtis Center in Philadelphia, it was intended to convey a sense of "mystery" that, as its creators said, might "even find its way to the comparatively uneducated eye." Parrish conceived the picture with waterfalls, purple mountains, lush flora, golden canyons, and abundant flowers, all intermingling into a vague and polymorphous mass of color. The mural made no demands on the viewer; it was a piece of mass commercial art whose purpose was to please with pretty colors and the play of lights upon the mosaic.[55]

Parrish's calendars for the Mazda Lamps of the Edison Electric Company became famous, each calendar devoted to facets of what Parrish called the mythic history of light. Parrish found here his trademark image—a radiant natural setting, with youths and maidens garbed in blues and golds, each looking longingly into the distance. Sometimes the visual "radiance" of his pictures—the automobile billboards, for instance, which he did in the late teens—were so effective that, as one observer put it, "the public stopped and stared and delighted but forgot to notice what the pictures advertised."[56] (See plate 5.)

Parrish preferred to paint pictures that merely "suggested" the power of a corporation or the appeal of a commodity rather than those that openly showed the goods or companies themselves. "I would much rather do things like ideal gardens, spring, autumn, youth, the spirit of the sea, the joy of living (if there is such a thing)," he wrote one of his clients, the chocolate manufacturer Clarence Crane. "I kind of wish you had seen the one [Dreamlight] I did for the General Electric people, a sort of calendar they are to bring out in the fall to remind the public that they make a good lamp. I think I got a little of the *spirit of the thing*. Do you know what I mean by the spirit of the thing? I mean the spirit of the things in which we take the most joy and happiness in life. The spirit of out of doors, the spirit of light and distance . . . that is a quality not lost on the public, I feel sure."[57]

Parrish insisted that his work carried no special message or purpose beyond the one of giving pleasure to everybody and of offending nobody. "You know and I know," he told his agent, Rushing Wood, "that what people like is a beautiful setting with charming figures clothed or otherwise, and probably no one special feature. Whatever it is, it's elusive." My "paintings [are] calculated to appeal, as reproductions, to the widest possible audience." Parrish took advertising picture-making to its limits in animistic fetish, saturating landscapes in light and color, trying to link businesses and goods with life-giving warmth and renewal, with innocence and child life, and with a faraway transcendence.

Parrish and other advertisers discovered, just as other groups in the past had discovered, that pictures can attract attention, inspire a measure of loyalty, and excite desire. Striking pictures, advertisers knew, succeeded because they gave "life" and "meaning" to otherwise meaningless or lifeless objects; they imparted to goods a potency the goods lacked. "No more stiff relics from the past," said one marketeer, "only *character, life, color, action*, and *human interest in drawings*—and above all the *natural*, something to arrest the attention and concentrate it on the *merchandise* or some other feature of the goods to be sold." "Color, sparkle, contrast, atmosphere, pleasing inequalities of space and mass" are absolutely indispensable.[58]

L. Frank Baum and The Show Window

Show windows, of course, showed the goods most enticingly of all, arranging them in "pleasing inequalities of space and mass" in a way unmatched by any other pictorial medium. Today, after years of television advertising, show windows have lost their key place in the repertoire of enticements, so much so that we cannot even imagine how they could have shocked such people as Henry James or Edna Ferber or how they might have served as central, eye-level devices for capturing consumers. Nothing competed with them for selling power, not the advertising cards, not the posters or billboards, not even the early electrical signs. They belonged to a constantly expanding landscape of glass, perhaps the most graphic indication that a new economy and culture of desire of extraordinary dimensions was in the works.

Before 1885 or so, window display in the modern sense barely existed. Trimmers crowded goods together inside the windows or, weather permitting, piled them outside on the street. Many stores exhibited nothing at all in the windows; some avoided display as tasteless; and most simply did not know how to exhibit the manufactured goods that inundated their shelves. The resources and settings were shoddy. By and large, from store to store, the lighting was poor, the glass of inferior quality, and the display fixtures makeshift (often cheesecloth, boxes, piece goods, or random materials dredged up from back rooms).[59] (See plate 2.)

Modern display style can be traced specifically to 1889, when *The Dry Goods Economist*, the most influential voice in late-nineteenth-century merchandising, shifted its interest from finance to retailing. This New York-based organ, from its founding in 1858 into the 1880s, had published little for merchants on retailing methods, reporting instead on money markets, the brokerage business and real estate, and commodities trading. It featured a weekly column on Christian evangelical activities, appealing to merchants to pursue "selfless and Spartan paths." In 1889, in a climate growing markedly more secular and more commercially competitive, it decisively