TOYS, CHILDREN, AND THE TOY INDUSTRY
IN A CULTURE OF CONSUMPTION, 1890-1991

VOLUME I

A DISSERTATION

Presented in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
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By

Lawrence Frederic Greenfield, B.A., M.A.

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The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Committee:                Approved by
J.C. Burnham                                           Adviser
M.G. Blackford                              Department of History
S.M. Hartmann
Copywrite by
Lawrence Frederic Greenfield
1991
To My Parents,
Lenny and Gloria Greenfield,
Who Have Shown Me the Extraordinary
Nature of Ordinary People
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VITAE

March 11, 1957 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Born—Newark, New Jersey

1979 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . B.A., University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts

1980-81 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Teaching Assistant, Department of English, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1981-1983, 1985-1987 . . . . . . . . Teaching Assistant, Department of History, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1982 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . M.A., Department of History, The Ohio States University, Columbus, Ohio

1988-1991 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Graduate Administrative Associate, University College, The Ohio States University, Columbus, Ohio

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: History

Fields of Study: U.S. Since 1877
U.S. Before 1877
Modern Japan
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INTRODUCTION

Most cultural historians and many other writers have acknowledged the fact that sometime before the beginning of the twentieth century--precisely when remains unknown--a culture of consumption began to replace a more traditional culture of production. This work is about the way in which an industry that was built around children, the toy industry, reflected and shaped the developing culture of consumption.

Americans who were socialized into each of the two cultures differed markedly in their perceptions. Those socialized into a culture of production conceived of their world as one of scarcity. As a result, these individuals internalized an ethic based upon hard work and self-denial. As such, they esteemed "character," moral rectitude, and considerable self-denial as the measure of the individual. They were, therefore, what sociologist David Riesman has termed "inner directed," relying upon conscience for their moral compass. Conversely, proponents of the consumer culture pictured the world as one of abundance. They internalized an ethic different from their predecessors'.
one based upon leisure and immediate self-gratification. Such supporters of the consumer culture stressed the importance of "personality," the quality of being liked or disliked by others, as the measure of a man or woman. As such, the members of the consumer culture became "other directed," looking to their associates for guidance.¹

Although scholars have agreed upon the precepts of the two cultures and the fact that over time a producer culture evolved into a consumer culture, investigators have continued to disagree somewhat on the forces in the newer culture that made for change. Historians have found the question of specific agency, in particular, difficult to answer. Did the consumer culture result from the machinations or manipulations of an elite group of businesspeople, they have asked, or did the culture derive from the actions of members of the buying public? What role, in other words, did consuming Americans play in creating the consumer culture?

Contentions about who led the coming of the consumer culture have spanned several historiographic schools. David Potter and Daniel J. Boorstin, both so-called "consensus historians," attribute the consumer culture to the plotting and manipulating of entrepreneurs and advertising experts. More recently, in the wake of the "new social history," other writers have continued in a similar vein.² In the introduction to The Culture of Consumption (1983), for
example, editors and contributors Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears maintain that the origins of the consumer culture continued to lie in the history of the elites in society, not with the shoppers themselves. "[T]o discover how consumption became a cultural ideal, a hegemonic 'way of seeing' in twentieth-century America," they wrote, "requires looking at powerful individuals and institutions who conceived, formulated, and preached that ideal or way of seeing."³

In addition to the historians who have generally focused upon the agency of business elites in forming the culture, other writers have concentrated instead upon the role consumers themselves played in the process. Issues of class and gender have figured prominently in their analyses. In "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925" (1984), for example, William R. Leach has observed that "leftist historians . . . have tended to exaggerate the extent to which the mass of women (and men) are manipulated and passive."⁴

The problem of determining agency has naturally brought into question other aspects of the dissemination process. Whoever these emissaries of consumption were, implicit to all of these inquiries is the question, how did they disseminate the tenets of the new culture? How were they able so successfully to supersede a more traditional and dominant culture of production with such different values?
In citing social elites as the primary agents of the culture, most often historians have concentrated on the role of marketing experts and distributors, rather than manufacturers, and stressed merchandising and advertising as the primary means by which businessmen socialized shoppers into the culture. In his contribution to *The Culture of Consumption*, for example, Lears illuminates the role marketing experts played in the creation of a "therapeutic ethos," an important stage in the development of the culture. Lears stresses the changing moral environment that enabled the consumer culture to develop and the role advertising professionals played in fostering this new context.\(^5\)

Since the publication of the Fox and Lears work, other writers have continued to discuss the way in which marketing experts disseminated the culture. In *Advertising and the American Dream* (1985), for example, Roland Marchand stresses the importance of advertising executives to the consumer culture socialization process during the 1920's and 1930's. Advertisers, Marchand maintains, soothed the discomfort many Americans facing social change experienced, most notably the loss of both individual and community control. As they did so, professionals stressed the benefits that new and novel
fashion and technology promised and promulgated an ideal of modernity as a positive good.  

Scholars focusing upon consumers have found different ways in which shoppers changed the culture. Leach suggests, for example, that the department store encouraged individual women to think about their lives in new ways, although not in ways department store sellers ever intended. "An upsurge of longing, a diffuse desire for something better or, perhaps, a quest focused on a concrete change," he observes, "was a hallmark of the consumer culture." Over time and in aggregate, he contends, these transformations had broader ramifications. Leach links these changes in perception to the development of the women's suffrage movement.

More recently, in her labor history of the department store, *Counter Cultures* (1986), Susan Porter Benson also stresses the role saleswomen and middle-class female consumers, together with department store managers, played in disseminating and developing aspects of the consumer culture. Benson discusses the power relationships characteristic of the department store before 1940. As important participants in this struggle, customers shaped the nature of the institution. Depending on their goals, female shoppers formed periodic alliances with saleswomen or
managers and bent the department store to meet their desires.  

The current state of scholarship on the development of the consumer culture continues to leave many important questions unanswered. Despite the contributions of the writers mentioned above, the question of agency remains an urgent one. Having identified the major historical players involved in developing the culture of consumption, we are only now beginning to understand the ways in which these groups interacted. This give-and-take, as much as the involvement of any one group of individuals, shaped the development of the consumer culture. In this state of knowledge, therefore, the interplay between producers and consumer is illuminated particularly by the role children played in the customs and actions of the emerging consumer culture.

In the introduction to their collection of essays, *Growing Up in America* (1985), editors N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes observe that scholars have only relatively recently begun to study the history of childhood. Indeed, Hiner and Hawes date development of the field from the writings of French demographer and social historian Philippe Ariès, author of *Centuries of Childhood*, first published in English in 1960. Ariès identified childhood as a social construct subject to historical change. Children, he suggested, mirrored and illuminated key aspects of the
surrounding culture. During the 1960’s and 70’s, other scholars built upon these observations. By the 1960’s, Erik Erikson’s developmental understanding of the role of children in society had become popular among some historians. Influenced by Erikson’s ideas, for example, John Demos studied 17th century Plymouth. In 1970, he published *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (1970). Together Erikson and Demos have argued that children have done more than simply reflect surrounding culture; they have shaped society.9

As the consumer culture evolved, children continued both to mirror and to influence developments. Youngsters underwent socialization into the culture, but they also assumed the role of cultural intermediaries. Toy sellers and makers employed youngsters as intermediaries operating between businesspeople and parents. As children learned how to consume, they also socialized adults, typically their parents, into the culture. Using one technique, businesspeople utilized images of children in advertising copy to sell playthings to adult shoppers. In other instances, copywriters and salespeople encouraged youngsters to approach parents directly with their consumer wishes or simply to use spending money for particular toys. By employing children in their selling in each of these ways, businesspeople encouraged adults to shop in certain places, read advertising, and make specific toy purchases.
In the work that follows, I shall trace the relationship between businesspeople in a single industry, toy manufacturing and distributing, and their customers--parents and other adults, but especially children. I have selected the toy industry and toy customers as the subjects of my study for a number of reasons. Through marketing decisions, labor policies, and other means, a wide variety of industries have had a profound effect upon American society and culture, but the toy industry offers researchers special opportunities and insights in this regard. Toy makers and sellers engaged openly, as well as more surreptitiously, in socializing children to a consumer ethic and thus into the culture. Indeed, as businesspeople marketed playthings to parents and sometimes even to children, toy manufacturers and distributors have traditionally boasted of the valuable training specific playthings provided to youngsters. While acknowledging the rhetorical nature of what advertisers have contended, toys do play an important role in socializing children into the culture. Youngsters typically learn through play which roles to assume at what time, and toys are often the props through which the socialization process takes place. Playthings, therefore, frequently demonstrate the complex manner in which the technology of "things" and culture interact.

Because in most instances, youngsters ultimately consume the toys that manufacturers produce and distributors sell, a
historical analysis of children as consumers offers useful insights into the interplay between business, notably consumer industries, and society. It is because youngsters are so susceptible to the manipulations of businesspeople that children can illuminate clearly businesspeople's efforts, as well as the impact of those efforts upon society's members. In so far as businesspeople's efforts directed at children paralleled efforts aimed at older shoppers, an analysis of children as consumers illuminates further still broader social and cultural developments.

My findings reveal that while a business elite unknowingly fostered changes in the culture, children, among the most powerless and vulnerable of consumers, themselves contributed substantially to the dissemination and development of a culture of consumption. As the culture evolved and the marketing needs of businesspeople changed, the role children played in toy selling, as well as their role in the disseminating an ethos of consumption, also shifted. Children themselves, often with the encouragement of businesspeople, parents, and other adults, learned consumer cognitions and behavior. Youngsters learned that what, why, and how one consumed differed depending on gender, on class, and on community. At the same time, merchandisers also
encouraged children to draw other Americans into the culture.

Studies of the relationship of children to the culture generally fall into three categories. Most often, writers have concentrated upon the impact of the culture upon children. Proponents of consumption, observers have noted, taught youngsters the cognitions and behavior appropriate to the consumer culture. Given the susceptibility of children to advertisers’ messages, certain commentators have questioned the propriety of such training. Less often, a second group of writers have investigated the role that youngsters played in formulating and disseminating the culture of consumption. A few scholars have attempted to address both aspects of the place of children in the culture.

In writing about the consumer culture, many writers have simply ignored children. Certain of these scholars have dismissed youngsters as less important in formulating the culture than more powerful and visible adult actors. In his path-breaking study of consumption, for example, Culture as History (1973), Warren Susman avoided any mention of children, childhood, or childrearing per se.

Other historians have dealt with the impact of the culture upon children but ignored, conversely, the influence of children upon the culture. In his essay, "The Consuming Vision of Henry James," in The Culture of Consumption (1983), for example, Jean-Christophe Agnew has observed
that over time, consumption infused childhood. "Commodities . . .," he wrote, "have entered into our rites of passage and rendered them inseparable from the more or less predictable passages of style." The changing nature of childhood is beyond the scope of Agnew's study, however, and so he does not elucidate. He leaves to others to explain how this development came about.\textsuperscript{10}

In her labor history of the department store, \textit{Counter Cultures} (1986), Susan Porter Benson, like Agnew, discusses the impact of the consumer culture upon the children. Department store managers, she has noted, tried "to socialize girls and young women into more acceptable ways of shopping." In studying what happened, Benson limits her analysis to in-store socializing efforts, rather than advertising, that businesspeople directed towards middle and upper-class customers. To an extent, she observes, businesspeople succeeded in their efforts.\textsuperscript{11} For the most part, however, the impact of children upon the department store, as well as their role in the selling process, remains beyond the scope of her discussion, also.

A small number of historians have addressed the impact of the culture upon children, while also acknowledging the influence that youngsters have had on the developing culture. In \textit{Advertising the American Dream} (1985), for example, Marchand discusses recurring images of children in the print advertising of the 1920's and '30's. In
advertisements featuring "the parable of the captivated child," advertisers suggested that through specific products, parents could encourage appropriate behavior in their children. These contentions, Marchand observes, paralleled in kind, if not degree, advise disseminated by certain child-rearing experts. To this degree at least, then, Marchand suggests that advertisers may have influenced child-rearing. Marchand leaves the investigating of advertising directed at children per se, together with the influence of such copy on youngsters of the period, to other writers.

David Nasaw is one historian who has devoted considerable effort to studying both aspects of the relationship between children and the consumer culture, the impact of children on the culture and the impact of the culture on youngsters. In Children of the City (1985), Nasaw has focused upon younger working-class individuals and their role in the dissemination of the culture. Children, he indicates, pursued agendas of their own and oftentimes circumvented adult efforts at control. While Nasaw has made a substantial contribution to our understanding of working-class children and their place in the history of the culture, there are limitations to his study. Nasaw has selected a relatively short time frame for his study. Moreover, the experiences of middle-class youngsters remain beyond the scope of Nasaw’s study. Finally, Nasaw has dealt
only fleetingly with the sellers who targeted young shoppers and not at all with manufacturers of toys and other consumer goods directed to children.14

Other writers, non-historians, have also addressed the role of children in the culture, together with the impact of the culture upon youngsters, sometimes more fully than historians. In so doing, some have also attempted to place children and the culture in historical perspective. Business administration specialists have been especially helpful in this regard. In Children as Consumers: Insights and Implications (1964), for example, James U. McNeil first identifies children as consumers, explaining in the process how children are socialized to consume, and then discusses aspects of the interplay between youngsters and the market.15 In another example, "A Child’s Christmas in America: Santa as Deity, Consumption as Religion," Russel W. Belk investigates the historical development of Christmas as a celebration of material abundance and the subsequent influence of Christmas upon youngsters’ consumer cognitions and behaviors.16

Despite the intrinsic cultural significance of an industry so important to the socialization of children, scholars, including historians, have also generally neglected the toy industry. In fact, only a very few writers have attempted to analyze the evolutionary nature of the domestic toy industry, while those who have, have
generally ignored the business of producing and selling toys. In "Toys and American Culture: Objects as Hypothesis" (1981), Bernard Mergen, the most important historian of American play, utilized commercially manufactured toys as cultural artifacts to study changing attitudes towards play. But Mergen still did not investigate the process by which businesspeople manufactured and marketed playthings, specifically the impact of production, marketing, and distribution decisions had upon design and thus the socializing function of domestic toys. ¹⁷ In an evocative later volume, Play and Playthings: A Reference Guide (1982), Mergen provides an important historiographic overview and categorizes the study of toys and play topically. In so doing, he addresses the historical significance of the industry more directly. As intended, however, these essays are more suggestive than definitive. ¹⁸

Nonacademics, toy collectors, hobbyists, and antiquarians have produced most of the historical literature on the toy industry. In the most complete antiquarian accounts of the development of the industry, for example, Marshall and Inez McClintock's Toys in America (1961) and Richard O'Brien's The Story of American Toys (1990), the authors have provided useful narratives of toy manufacturing and distributing from the colonial period to the mid-twentieth century. They concentrate on the artifacts and the contributions of producers to developments within the
industry, however, and provide somewhat less information on the distribution of playthings. While often acknowledging the impact of social change upon the industry, they still leave the opportunity for others adequately to link changes in the industry to broader social developments, particularly the rise of a culture of consumption, and to place these changes in the context of modern business history. 19

My findings reveal significant aspects of the interplay between business, society, and culture, particularly the consumer culture. Children, in fact, formed an important link in the socialization and dissemination process. The toy industry provides evidence showing that this connection between marketing—in the form of merchandising, advertising, and design—and children did indeed exist.

In my study, I begin with the development of the domestic toy industry in the late nineteenth century and investigate the process by which the that industry contributed to the socialization of children into American culture. In so doing, I have included retailing institutions, manufacturers, and marketing techniques. I have focused on toys generally, and to be consistent with distinctions in the industry, I have omitted costumes, board games, and hobby items from my work.

In researching the toy industry, I have depended upon a wide variety of primary and secondary source material. I have relied most extensively upon the two oldest and most
important journals of the industry: Playthings (founded 1903) and Toys and Novelties (founded 1909). I have supplemented these publications with a third industrial journal, Toy World (founded 1927), a relatively short-lived West Coast publication that merged with Toys and Novelties in 1934. Samplings from other periodicals have provided insights into specific aspects of the industry. Writers in Printers’ Ink and Sales Management discussed different toy marketing and merchandising strategies employed by businesspeople within the industry. Iron Age, Modern Plastics, and Plastics illuminated the challenges and advantages manufactures faced as manufacturers employed different kinds of materials. More general business periodicals, especially Business Week and Fortune, disclosed portions of the basic historical narrative of the industry. Autobiographical and biographical accounts of the lives of key industry members also provided important information on the workings of specific firms, as well as the industry as a whole. Despite certain limitations, federal statistics furnish data critical to an understanding of the history of the industry.

To interpret the print and material sources, I have adopted a functionalist view of playthings, the belief that toys have both cognitive and symbolic meaning. While a number of anthropologists, psychologists, and other social scientists have maintained that toys often reflected
contemporary moods and values, other scholars, particularly psychologist Brian Sutton-Smith, have indicated that play and playthings also acted as instruments of social change.\textsuperscript{23} I am therefore using concrete developments to examine how American toys reflected the society and at the same time helped to socialize children into the culture.

Utilizing this analysis, this work proceeds roughly chronologically in eight chapters: (1) 1890 to 1913, the era of the old toy shop; (2) 1890 to 1919, the age of the department and specialty store; (3) 1915 to 1919, the ingress of mail order selling and the dime store and self-service retailing; (4) 1913 to 1918, the development of print advertising; (5) 1919-1925, the ascendancy of the toy industry; (6) 1926 to 1938, the era of fashion; (7) 1939 to 1947, the era of new materials; and (8) 1948 to the present, the toy industry in the age of television.
NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION


5T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture," in Fox and Lears, eds., The Culture of Consumption, 3-38. Lears observes: "In this essay, I shall argue that the crucial moral change was the beginning of a shift from a Protestant ethos of salvation through self-denial toward a therapeutic ethos of salvation in this world—an ethos characterized by an almost obsessive concern with psychic and physical health defined in sweeping terms." See, Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization," 4.


7Leach, "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption," 337.


1985).


11Benson, Counter Cultures, 100.

12Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 228-232.

13In her history of mass marketing in America, Susan Strasser helps somewhat to rectify Marchand's oversight. Like Marchand, Strasser does not discuss child-directed print advertising, but she does discuss other ploys used historically to market brand-name products to children. See Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 166-167.


20From 1936 to 1940, Toys and Novelties became Toys and Bicycles. In 1970, the publishers changed the name of this serial again to Toys. Throughout my present work, I have referred to this publication as Toys and Novelties to avoid confusion.

21In 1935, Toy World became Toy World and Bicycle World. Throughout my present work, I have referred to this
publication as *Toy World* to avoid confusion.


CHAPTER I: THE ERA OF THE TRADITIONAL TOY SHOP, 1890-1915

The story of the American toy industry begins in the traditional toy shop where the antecedents of modern distribution and production converged. Within the toy shop, the proprietor combined manufacturing and merchandising, for not only did the shopkeeper sell toys, particularly imported manufactured playthings, but he or she also often produced toys. In making and selling playthings, the shopkeeper relied upon relatively primitive methods. Craftspeople constructed playthings by hand. At the same time, the shopkeeper relied upon his or her character to merchandise toys and insure customer loyalty, the latter accomplishment one much admired by mass distributors.

Of the many institutions producing and selling toys at the turn of the century, none captured the imagination of businesspeople, consumers, and all Americans like the traditional toy shop.¹ A fixture in many cities and an important part of many an American childhood before and after the Civil War, small specialty toy shops followed an identifiable pattern of success and eventual decline. Once
toy factories began producing playthings for a mass market, mass retail institutions began to assume the function of selling playthings. Troubled by new competition as well as other factors, by the second decade of the twentieth century, many of the nation’s oldest toy shops had closed. But even as these stores had begun to fail, nostalgic individuals romanticized the traditional toy shop, and this mythology continued to condition events in the history of the American toy industry and its cultural impact.

The Myth of the Traditional Toymaker and Toy Shop

The myth of the traditional toymaker and his or her shop developed over time and embraced toy production, as well as selling. Businesspeople and other Americans believed the legend, and so the myth determined how businesspeople saw themselves, as well as how consumers perceived toy manufacturers and distributors. Businesspeople in addition gauged their efforts against this example. The myth eventually, therefore, in many ways shaped major aspects of the industry.

A humble shop, elderly craftsman, and magical merchandise delineated the myth of the traditional toy shop.² Often described as a simple establishment, nostalgics located toy shops in virtually every village and hamlet in America.³ The venerable toymaker, often German but always European, romantics insisted, carved toys on the
premises, providing youngsters, regardless of class, with most of their playthings. Gepetto, the Italian toymaker who carved the puppet Pinocchio, is perhaps the most recognizable of these mythical personalities. Writers have often employed anthropomorphized toys, like Pinocchio, as a literary tool. The toys themselves, so went the story, were often magical, if nowhere else, at least in the eyes of children. Plush toys (Winnie the Pooh), rag dolls (Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy), wooden puppets (Pinocchio), and other playthings came to life in stories about the traditional toy shop.4

Before 1890, a variety of retail outlets had distributed commercially manufactured playthings, both imported and domestic, in the United States. Marshall and Inez McClintock, chroniclers of the industry, found that by the 1840's, retailers of one sort or another had begun selling toys in almost every small town in America.5 But more often than not, these retailers were not the traditional toymakers of legend. Rather, proprietors of general or hardware stores often stocked some toys and supplied American youngsters with what few store-bought playthings most children played with.6

Louis Hertz, a well-known antique toy expert, has insisted that the traditional toy shop and the kindly toymaker were much less pervasive, their market more limited and more complex, than romantics have insisted. Journalists
and toymakers perpetuated the toy shop myth, however, lending even the most modern factories a storybook veneer.\textsuperscript{7} Descriptions of the early twentieth-century factory town of Winchendon, Massachusetts, located close to the New Hampshire border, typified this mythologizing.\textsuperscript{8}

If journalists are to be believed, Winchendon resembled less an industrial site than a storybook village. A twelve-foot tall hobby horse, erected in 1914 by the town’s leading businessman, toy industrialist Morton E. Converse, greeted tourists arriving at the Winchendon train station.\textsuperscript{9} "It is not only because toys are made in Winchendon that it has earned its title as the Toy Town," concluded a journalist for \textit{Scientific American}, who visited in 1916, "for the very atmosphere of the community is filled with the spirit of toyland."\textsuperscript{10}

Although Winchendon embraced three toy factories--Morton E. Converse & Sons, New England Lock and Hinge Company (another Converse firm), and Mason and Parker Manufacturing Company--at least one writer insisted that Winchendon boasted a clean, wholesome environment. As travellers made their way to the Converse factories, they passed the workers’ picturesque homes. "[T]he visitor is surprised to find gay, clean cottages that house the happy workers," wrote one observer. "Pleasing is the effect of the neat and extensive lawns that surround the little homes of glistening white walls." Winchendon’s workers, evidently, had little
reason to be anything but content. Cheerful, immaculate factories boasted working conditions rivaling those found only in Santa’s workshop. “The factories are clean and cheery and are surrounded by toy gardens,” observed a writer for Scientific American in 1916. Winchendon is America’s Toy Town, and occupies the same relative position in American industry as Nuremburg does in Germany,” concluded this same visitor. “In fact, the New Englanders often refer to it as ‘The American Nuremburg,’ which is, after all, the best proof of the similarity.”

The Realities of Toy Manufacturing

Actual toy making differed markedly from the myth reporters and other individuals disseminated, however. Some shopkeepers did see to the production of a part of their merchandise. At their Brooklyn, New York toy store, for example, Morris Michtom and his wife made plush toys. In so doing, in fact, they created the Teddy bear. But the Michtoms sought merely to supplement merchandise available from other sources. For the most part, urban merchants, like the Michtoms, gladly turned to wholesalers for their stock. These playthings, in turn, came from a variety of sources. Factories producing many of these toys little resembled the Winchendon plants journalists had described. In addition, imported playthings constituted the majority of toys sold in the United States.
Far from "Toy Town," writers discovered workers manufacturing playthings in a variety of urban establishments often under difficult conditions. Reporters found few Gepettos manufacturing toys in these factories, although urban entrepreneurs often relied upon cheap immigrant labor to mass produce playthings. In 1902, a writer for *Scientific American* found a toy factory located "in a quarter of New York's 'East Side,' imbued with the half-European, half-American atmosphere so characteristic of Bohemian, Hungarian, and Polish settlements in America" and specializing in toys manufactured from tin plate. Working conditions differed greatly from the clean, cheery environment enjoyed by workers at Winchendon. "From roof to cellar the interior of the New York factory referred to is a chaos of flaring color," noted the same reporter. "Paint—red paint, green paint, yellow paint, paint of all hues—is spread with lavish hand on the tin. The factory girls are besmeared with it; every floor reeks with it."\(^{16}\)

Some toy factories were so unclean as to be unhealthy. Until 1913, for example, toy manufacturing went on legally in the unsanitary tenement houses New York City. Within these unsavory surroundings, workers fashioned "Brownies," small dolls, from cotton-batting covered with cotton cloth.\(^{17}\) Other toy manufacturers used playthings as a front for some other less wholesome business. Betty Smith, author of the autobiographical novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*,

recalled another New York factory where manufacturers fabricated "a few rubber toys as a blind." Toymakers there made "big profits from other rubber articles which were bought in whispers." 18

If before World War I all sorts of makers operating under a wide range of conditions produced toys, most playthings sold in the United States came from overseas. The traditional toy retailer’s stock varied, but flimsy imports, often of German manufacture, were common. In 1904, foreign toymakers supplied 49% of the American toy market. 19 For many years, low cost production methods enabled German toymakers to undersell domestic manufacturers, who had hoped to produce inexpensive playthings in the United States.

"American factories, paying for material and labor by American standards couldn’t compete," noted industrial analyst and eyewitness Felix J. Koch in 1917, "and so toys were imported carload-wise." 20 During one buying trip to Sonneberg, Germany—"headquarters for dolls for the whole world"—in 1890, F.W. Woolworth described the German manufacturing process:

As we walked along the street we could look in the windows of the houses and see the women and children at work making dolls, while the men drink beer. Nearly every doll is made in private houses. . . . After they are finished they are put in long baskets and taken to the packers where they are put into boxes of one dozen each and put into large cases and shipped to all parts of the world. The poor women do most of the work even to lugging them to the packing houses."
Woolworth went on to describe the plight of German women and children forced to carry up to 75 pounds of toys on their backs 10 to 20 miles through the mud in an effort to sell their wares. By exploiting cheap labor, foreign manufacturers kept costs low and undersold most American toymakers. "The usual price they get for a good 10 cent doll is about 3 cents each here," noted Woolworth, "and they are obliged to buy the hair, shirts and other materials, to put them together, and they probably get about 1 cent each for the labor they put on them."21

The Realities of the Shopkeeper’s Market

Like toy manufacturing, the shopkeeper’s market differed substantially from the myth. In actuality, traditional sellers serviced a relatively limited and ambiguous body of customers. As a result, the toy shop was not as directly important to large segments of the juvenile population as romantics have insisted. While youngsters actually used toys, adults typically purchased most playthings. In addition, class and location also circumscribed demand for manufactured toys. Autobiographical evidence indicates, in fact, that the traditional toy shopkeeper’s market consisted primarily of non-rural middle-class children and adults.

During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the same demography that shaped the play behavior of American youngsters determined the nature of the
shopkeeper's market. Urban working class families could ill-afford to buy toys. "We were poor, our neighbors were poor, and we thought everybody in the world was poor," recalled comedian George Burns, who grew up on Rivington Street on New York's Lower East Side. "Our idea of somebody living rich was the Feingolds. They had curtains in their windows."\(^{22}\)

Unable to afford toys, working-class city children structured their play accordingly. First, youngsters developed games requiring few accoutrements. "We only played games that needed very little equipment . . . ," recalled Burns.\(^{23}\) Next, poor urban youngsters made what few toys they needed out of what they found. Children played "kick-the-can" using empty tins; girls turned discarded clothes lines into jumpropes; boys played stickball with broom handles; and youngsters transformed packing cases, scrap lumber, and discarded baby-buggy wheels into wheeled toys. Finally, if toys were in short supply, playmates were not, and so youngsters more often played games with each other than alone or in small groups with toys. Early-twentieth century urban play was very much a communal affair. "There was never any problem finding somebody to play with because the streets were loaded with kids," remembered Burns. "And it's not hard to figure out why. In our building alone there were sixteen families, and each family had between eight and ten kids."\(^{24}\)
Like their working-class urban counterparts, rural youngsters and adults seldom purchased playthings. Author William Dean Howells did mention that he and his friends played with store-bought tops and balls. And like Howells, William Allen White remembered shooting marbles. But as adherents to a culture of production, thrifty rural adults, used to sacrifice and delayed gratification, were less apt to purchase playthings, and so, more often, things found or made and the countryside served Howells, White, and their friends as the accoutrements of play.

Eventually, store-bought tops purchased earlier by Howells and his friends gave way to better toys made free by local youngsters. "At first the boys bought their tops at the stores," noted Howells, "but after a while the boy whose father had the turning-shop on the Hydraulic learned to turn their tops, which was cheaper than buying tops, especially as he furnished the wood, too, and you only had to get the metal peg yourself." Rural youngsters in fact turned the most rudimentary of items into play equipment. William Allen White wrote of a scuffle enjoyed by three boys, "Piggy and Old Abe and Jimmy Sears," over a piece of rope. Other youngsters bent horseshoe nails, found around the livery stable, into rings. Using half of a barrel hoop and other materials, recalled Howells, some boys constructed bow kites.
While most working-class and rural youngsters did not require manufactured toys to play, parents generally considered toy purchases a waste of family resources. Imported playthings were often cheaply made, and German toys in particular were generally also of poor quality. Adult toy buyers recognized the fragility of most imported playthings. As a result, parents made few purchases, and when they did buy, parents avoided costly items. "Quite naturally the public came to consider mainly the breakability of playthings," recalled a Playthings writer in 1919. "But the dear public did not relish purchasing toys that did not last, and so they purchased as few toys as possible. Because they figured that all playthings would be broken they naturally bought the cheapest merchandise they could find." A great many adults also constructed toys for their own children and other youngsters, rather than make what parents considered to be frivolous purchases.

If children and parents ignored or rejected manufactured toys, other consumers, middle-class village and city youngsters, accepted and even desired such items. Unlike urban, working-class parents, who could not afford to buy most toys, or rural parents, who, as thrifty progeny of the producer culture, refused to buy many toys, non-rural, middle-class parents were both willing and able occasionally to purchased playthings for their children. Author and doting father, Hamlin Garland, a frequent traveller to
Chicago and less so New York, recalled the joy he felt after giving his daughter a toy purchased during his travels. "[M]y mention of going to New York could not have been altogether a punishment[,] for I always brought her some toy or book," wrote Garland in his daughter's biography, A Daughter of the Middle Border, published in 1922. "Nothing afforded me keener joy than the moment when I showed her the presents I had bought."32

Toy Shop Merchandising

Although contrary to certain historic actualities, the legend of the traditional toy shop did contain a kernel of truth, and these aspects of the myth help to explain how the shopkeeper survived despite a limited and largely uncooperative toy market. The myth reflected real merchandising techniques. As the purveyors of the legend maintained, the shopkeeper sold toys successfully by using character-based personal selling.

The confines of the shop largely delineated the traditional toy seller’s merchandising efforts. Despite the role traditional toy shops played in the lives of certain middle-class Americans, few physical descriptions of these retail establishments have survived in the trade press. Novelists have been more forgiving than other writers, however. In 1908, for example, Margarita Spalding Gerry described one such toy shop--"a modest place"--typical in
many respects, in her fictionalized account of Lincoln’s frequent visits to Stutz’s toy store in Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{33} Gerry’s description verifies the fact that while some toy retailers did try to control the local toy market, their efforts were generally of the most rudimentary sort.

At Stutz’s, for example, in-store displays were often quite crude. The owners did, however, employ display cases and other fixtures. “On one side was a counter where, safe under glass, were home-made candies and cakes, with a rosy-cheeked apple or two,” Gerry wrote. But the proprietors carelessly arranged their stock, as if hoping to impress customers with the variety, rather than the style or price, of their merchandise. “[L]ining the walls, tumbling over shelves, crowded into old-fashioned presses, were the toys …,” she continued. “There was a fascinating confusion of supplejacks, house furniture, houses of oriental magnificence, little imported German toys--horses, trees, dogs.” Adding to the hub-bub, a game machine occupied floor space along side the toys. “There were wheels of fortune where one could see a steeple-chase if he spun hard enough to make the horse vault the hurdles,” wrote Gerry of Stutz’s shop.\textsuperscript{34} Having recognized the physical limitations of imported goods, many toy retailers capped displays with warning signs in an effort to insulate sales from customer returns. Signs bearing the inscriptions: "No Toys Replaced" or "No Toys Can Be Returned" were common
where turn-of-the-century retailers distributed playthings.  

In general, out-of-store merchandising efforts were only slightly less primitive than in-store endeavors. If some shopkeepers advertised, most businesspeople did little to create demand. Instead, retailers used advertisements simply to announce store location, stock, and price to an already existing market.

The character of neighborhood and village life in part explains businesspeople's perception of their markets and their subsequent lackluster merchandising efforts. If at the turn of the century shopkeepers were often personally inconvenienced by a market they reacted to rather than controlled, most shopkeepers perceived little incentive, financial or otherwise, to exert greater authority, since the very nature of neighborhood and village life often made for a loyal clientele. While most merchants at the turn of the century could not claim a local monopoly on business, Robert H. Wiebe has commented on the fact that "island communities" remained relatively isolated from one another. Moreover, because merchants sold most goods in bulk, brand names, style, and competitive pricing meant little to shoppers, and thus often did little to differentiate one seller from the next. Instead, customer loyalty stemmed less from some sophisticated marketing strategy or tactic than from familiarity and
neighborliness—a sense of "belonging" identified by Louis Atherton—characteristic of small town and neighborhood life.37 "In a small town," wrote villager William Allen White, "every man who has been in the community long enough to become thoroughly known to the townsmen has a place in the human mosaic; that place seldom changes."38 This sense that each villager played a unique role and held a special place in village life made merchandising less necessary. If one sought to purchase a pair of shoes, one called upon the Shoemaker, and if one sought to buy toys, one visited the Toymaker. For this reason, as photographic evidence indicates, businesspeople commonly announced their places in the community by labeling their stores with their names and trades.39

If traditional toy sellers seldom used advertising or display effectively, changes in the nature of the market, together with successful selling techniques, contributed to relative success. In this regard, character-based selling in particular enabled shopkeepers to overcome buyer resistance.

While many parents purchased toys only with great reluctance, toy sales remained high enough to keep many traditional toy shops in business on into the second decade of the twentieth century. Most parents conceded that children required some playthings, if only to keep youngsters amused, and so adults purchased toys. "The
public bought them [toys] because children had to have playthings of one kind or another," noted one less-than-nostalgic writer for the industrial journal, Playthings, in April, 1919. "The little girl was given her dolls and the boy his mechanical contrivance of soft metal, which did some ingenious and spasmodic tricks, and generally lasting until the middle of Christmas afternoon."\textsuperscript{40}

By the turn of the century, many adults also conceded that certain special occasions, particularly Christmas, necessitated the purchase of toys. Russell W. Belk credits illustrator Thomas Nast, whose work appeared in Harper's Weekly from 1863 and 1886, with creating "the first consensus visual image" of Santa Claus as a consumer icon before 1900. Nast first depicted Santa Claus, in Belk's words, "as obese, Caucasian, white-bearded, jolly, dressed in rich furs, and as the bearer of abundant gifts of toys."\textsuperscript{41} By the time Harper's Weekly had finished publishing Nast's work, Christmas had grown substantially in popularity. "Twenty-five years ago, New Years was the holiday of the holiday season," noted one reporter for the Daily Review of Towanda, Pennsylvania, in the 1880's. "Now it is a poor second to Thanksgiving and is nowhere in comparison with Christmas."\textsuperscript{42} As businesspeople and others transformed Christmas, in Daniel Boorstin's words, from an "ancient festival into an American Festival of Consumption," retail sales of toys and other items jumped accordingly.
"This is our harvest time," noted Woolworth in December, 1891, while urging his managers to increase seasonal sales. "Make it pay." By 1899, Woolworth's Christmas trade reached nearly a half-million dollars.43

Thus by the turn of the century, adult toy purchases had become increasingly concentrated during a few weeks prior to Christmas. The seasonal nature of the toy market virtually guaranteed the shopkeeper a profitable period once during the year, but with sales concentrated just before Christmas, retailers had trouble selling playthings at other times. To maintain satisfactory sales throughout the year, shopkeepers relied upon personal selling to stimulate toy purchasing.

Instead of trying to control their clients, retailers reacted to their customers. Given the market limitations of small town and neighborhood life, businessmen and others believed that the shopkeeper's personal relationship with the children and adults of his community, his or her character, explained the longevity of the traditional toy store. A "spirit of intimacy . . . made for better business in the old days," noted one industrial analyst for Toys and Novelties in 1913. "It preserved the life of many a store long beyond the limit that would naturally be set by the service rendered by the store." The local merchant came to know his young customers by name, spoke with them, and eventually earned their awe and respect.44 In Washington, D.C., at the Stuntz toy shop, long-time customers routinely
referred to the proprietor as "Mother" Stuntz. And when F.A.O. Schwarz---"the most successful retailer of toys in the United States"---passed away in 1911, journalists acknowledged his effective salesmanship, but also his fine character: "He knew toys, and he knew children and their parents. And everyone [sic] who knew him knew him as a friend." The "personal touch" ensured decades of customer loyalty, for the shopkeeper of old could expect his customers once grown to return with their children and even their grandchildren. Strong intergenerational customer loyalties meant that the traditional toy shop often existed in the same location for years, sometimes even decades.

Indeed, many toy shops grew to be exceedingly well-known throughout their neighborhoods or communities. By 1913, one Savannah, Georgia, businesswoman had been in operation in that city for over fifty years, while the Bell family retailed playthings in their shop in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for almost a century. Eulogizing the late toy retailer F.A.O. Schwarz in 1911, a reporter for New York Sun concluded that ever since first opening for business in 1870, Schwarz's shop had become "as distinct an institution in New York as Trinity Church or the swanboats in Central Park, as the city hall or toptime, or any other fixed phenomenon of the town . . . . As the town moved, Schwarz's moved with it, and nobody--nobody--ever forgot for a second where it was."
A few toy shops even gained national prominence, and thus exemplified the strong attachment certain Americans held for these tiny stores and their owners. Located at 1207 New York Avenue, Washington, D.C., Stuntz's toyshop gained such renown, becoming one of the most beloved toy shops in the nation. "Once a child grew accustomed to getting toys at Stuntz," noted Marshall and Inez McClintock, "he did not like to transfer his trade elsewhere." Because public officials and their children, who spent only a short time in the nation's capital before moving on frequented their shop, the proprietors conducted considerable business by mail and shipped playthings as far as Hawaii and California.50

Abraham Lincoln and his sons, Willie and Tad, also favored the Stuntz toy shop, and this fact contributed still further to the establishment's fame.51 Lincoln's visits gained additional notoriety when in 1908, as related above, novelist Margarita Spalding Gerry fictionalized and thus publicized the President's attraction for the Stuntz toy shop in her novel, The Toy Shop: A Romantic Story of Lincoln the Man. Writing in 1913, an industrial analyst for the journal, Toys and Novelties, described the nostalgia and romance many Americans held for this particular Washington, D.C., shop in light of the President's death: "It is the store in which the American people have thought of the martyred president seeking rest from the distractions and
turmoil of life and bloodshed which surrounded him on every side."\(^{52}\) The supposed discovery of a roomful of playthings soon after the President's assassination by those packing the Lincoln family belongings added yet greater pathos to this tale.\(^{53}\)

Well into the second decade of the twentieth century, then, traditional toy shops, like Stuntz's, enjoyed varying degrees of success. If few stores ever made their proprietors rich, many shops enjoyed a notoriety and longevity that made solvency possible. Yet by 1890, the demographics of the toy industry had already begun to change, and these developments threatened the economic niche shopkeepers had long exploited. Progressive manufacturing and design techniques better enabled domestic toymakers to produce large quantities of durable, low-cost toys. In fact, between 1890 and 1915, the value of domestically manufactured playthings jumped from $23.3 million to $73.5 million.\(^{54}\) As production increased, domestic toymakers were better able to compete with German competitors. But higher productivity would also make mass distribution of playthings both possible and necessary. In this way, the manufacturer's gain would also became the importer and shopkeeper's loss.
The Factory System and Toy Mass Production

The growing success of turn-of-the-century domestic toymakers over their foreign rivals followed an identifiable pattern. Domestic toymakers first organized factories, where economies of scale increased production and cut costs. Alfred D. Chandler and other scholars have already described the spread of "the American system" from textile mills and federal armories to other industries, and modernization in the toy industry paralleled these developments. In the first part of the nineteenth century, technological constraints, particularly the lack of a cheap, plentiful source of power, prevented the factory system from spreading beyond the few industries mentioned above. Relatively low production levels made the integration of several production processes within a single business establishment, as well as a division of labor, unnecessary. Starting in the 1840's, however, miners opened the anthracite coal fields of eastern Pennsylvania and this situation changed.\textsuperscript{55}

Anthracite first revolutionized metal-making and then metal-working. Beginning in the 1840's, entrepreneurs began using cheap Pennsylvania coal to heat their blast furnaces. In so doing, for the first time, metal-makers guaranteed metal-workers an inexpensive, abundant supply of domestic pig iron. Using this iron, metal-workers, including toymakers, increased production, and these production increases made toy factories possible.\textsuperscript{56}
As production levels of iron toys and other cast metal goods increased, manufacturers involved in toymaking and other metal-working industries found modern factory development cost effective and thus increasingly desirable.\(^\text{57}\) Toy production at J. & E. Stevens Co. of Cromwell, Connecticut, the first Connecticut firm to mass produce metal toys, epitomized these changes. In 1843, when John and Elisha Stevens first founded their company, the firm employed only two or three craftsmen, and the Stevens's catalog consisted of only a half-dozen different playthings. By 1870, however, the Stevenses employed 80 to 100 men and women, while the Stevens production catalog now included nearly 1,000 different items, many of them toys.\(^\text{58}\) At some point prior to 1870, the manufacturing process had grown so complex and productivity levels had become so high that Stevens' management restructured production within their plant by instituting modern factory procedures.

First, manufacturers like Stevens integrated several production processes within their firms, a change identified by Chandler as characteristic of modern factory development.\(^\text{59}\) Sometime before 1870, plant managers separated production into a number of divisions according to different stages in the manufacturing process. The casting process itself consisted of three divisions: pattern making, molding, and casting. Polishing, finishing, and packaging formed others.\(^\text{60}\)
Second, manufacturers at Stevens’ employed labor specialization, another characteristic of the modern factory system. The manufacturing process at Stevens’ demanded varying degrees, but often a high degree, of training, experience, skill, and even folk knowledge on the part of individual employees. The most highly specialized work at the Stevens plant was that of pattern maker, a position requiring a joiner’s and carpenter’s expertise, as well as an extensive knowledge of metal craft. During the 1870’s, Russell Frisbie, a mechanic, toy designer, and stockholder held this position at the Stevens plant. Using patterns constructed by Frisbie, molders built casting molds from damp sand. Molders customarily tested the water content of the sand by hurling handfuls of the mixture against the wall of the foundry. If the sand stuck, the molders knew that they had found the right consistency. With the molds completed, founders next filled clay-lined ladles with molten metal and poured the actual castings. Outside of the casting division, in areas requiring less training, managers placed less skilled workers under the supervision of an expert, who acted as foreman. After utilizing a steam-driven tumbling barrel to polish castings made elsewhere in the plant, for example, workers brought the toys to a finishing room, where twenty-five young women applied paint, bronze powder, or transfer engravings to castings under the
supervision of Simon Wershing, "a practical painter of experience."\textsuperscript{61}

Mechanization and Domestic Toy Production

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the modern factory system continued to spread from metal casting to other metal working industries both inside and outside of the toy industry. Inexpensive iron and coal-fueled steam power contributed further to the widespread fabrication and use of interchangeable parts in first the manufacture of guns, pocket watches, safes, and locks, and later in the production of sewing machines, reapers, and other new inventions. The need for specialized machinery in these metal working industries led, in turn, to the development of the domestic machine tool industry.\textsuperscript{62}

The growth of the machine tool industry made technology readily available to a much wider variety of manufacturers, not only in the metal working industries, but elsewhere, too, such as wood shaping. In this way, machinery enabled mass production to spread from metal casting to other branches of the toy industry. As other manufacturers adopted machinery and increased production, they also instituted the modern factory system.\textsuperscript{63}

Mechanization made American toymakers competitive with their foreign rivals, and so by the turn of the century, the factory system predominated in toy production, and whenever
practical, domestic manufacturers relied upon machinery to counter low German production costs. At his Winchendon factory in 1911, for example, toymaker Morton Cosgrove claimed to use technological innovations to increase production while cutting expenses. "Whenever possible machinery is introduced, and quantity production, consistent with the best of workmanship and materials, has been systematically developed," noted one observer at Winchendon for *Scientific American* in 1916. Similarly, farther south, at the Bridgeport, Connecticut, factory of Charles K. Braitling, workers utilized machinery to manufacture more than one million pairs of doll shoes and 1,250,000 doll stockings a year. Later improvements enabled workers manning four machines to produce six hundred shoes an hour.

In particular, machinery allowed toy manufacturers to produce playthings economically impossible without mechanical precision. At an auto lathe, a worker might turn out 5,000 ornamental sticks a day. One writer at *Toys and Novelties* noted that by 1911, a worker might rough-cut a hundred hobby horse bodies on an auto lathe in the time it had previously taken an employee to cut-out one by hand. At the 1902 tin plate factory described above, workers utilized machinery to shape metal sheets into usable forms, while elsewhere machinists manipulated other materials with their equipment. Treadle-operated shearing machines with
reciprocating-knives cut sheets of tin into strips of different shapes and sizes.\textsuperscript{68} Technological innovations also enabled toymakers to produce toys more perfect in detail than had been possible by hand.\textsuperscript{69} Workers directed certain tin sheets to various metal forming equipment. "By dextrously manipulating a long strip of tin, an operator causes the die to force the strip into the groove, in order to form a perfect cylindrical tube," noted a journalist observer from \textit{Scientific American} in 1902. Since other tin sheets featured embossed surfaces, they could be painted as they passed between the rollers of painting machines, while the intaglio remained bright metal. Workers then stamped this tin into toy cups, saucers, plates, dishes and other articles.\textsuperscript{70}

There were, however, limits to what machines could do at the beginning of the twentieth century, and these constraints restricted production. Technological constraints and cost considerations dictated the use of skilled and semi-skilled labor alongside technology. "The factory, industrially considered, is a picturesque combination of modern labor-saving and old-fashioned labor employing methods; for the most ingenious machinery and the simplest form of hand labor work side by side," observed one journalist for \textit{Scientific American} in 1902, after visiting a manufacturer of tin plate toys. "There are some things machinery can never do; and for that reason the factory girl
cannot be dispensed with—in a toy-factory at least."\textsuperscript{71}

Even at the Braitling factory, dubbed "a model . . . in its efficiency" by a \textit{Playthings} reporter in 1914, entrepreneurs relied upon one hundred and fifty women doing hand work at home to complete certain toys.\textsuperscript{72}

Manufacturers most often used hand labor to finish their toys. Formed and shaped by machine presses, playthings very often next passed into the hands of skilled painters and other workers who by necessity detailed the playthings by hand. "No machine could possibly perform this work; for the girl must know exactly where the color is to be applied and how to apply it," noted the aforementioned \textit{Scientific American} reporter about tin plate manufacture. "Almost every toy that is made must eventually pass through the hands of painters." Workers added stripes to toy railroad cars, ornamented play kitchen items, painted coats and harnesses on miniature horses, and detailed toy horns. Other employees hand riveted these playthings together, either before or after painting, while solderers leaded reeds into toy horns.\textsuperscript{73}

Reorganizing the Manufacturing Process

If by the turn the century some toymakers were unwilling or unable to mechanize production fully, by 1900, the modern factory system had, nonetheless, spread throughout the toy industry. With the factory system securely in place,
certain toy manufacturers, notably Converse, now reorganized the manufacturing process for maximum efficiency. In fact, at least one writer has dubbed Converse the Henry Ford of toy manufacturing. Actually, Converse employed organizational techniques more closely resembling those of Andrew Carnegie. Like Carnegie, Converse stressed efficiency of operation. By initiating cost-saving organizational changes and then selling low-price toys in large quantities to a mass market, Converse became one of the most successful manufacturers in the industry. Moreover, Converse accomplished these ends without sacrificing quality.

If the factories of Converse epitomized the success that organizational developments brought certain innovative toy manufacturers, in some ways, the Converse facilities differed little from those of other progressive toymakers. Like other innovative manufacturers, Converse instituted division of labor, as well as labor specialization within his plant. "Each worker is assigned one particular task," concluded a reporter at Winchendon for Scientific American in 1916, "with the result that he or she soon becomes highly proficient in the assigned task."

But Converse's success lay not in his adoption of the factory system, but rather effective production and operations management. Having organized a modern factory, Converse went on to improve the flow of materials inside. He instituted these changes not by inventing some new toy,
but by reinventing the toy manufacturing process. By making efficiency his watchword, Converse saved time and labor, and cut costs.

Converse first reorganized the manufacture of Fifteen puzzles, a toy resembling alphabet blocks. Other manufacturers first stamped, and then sorted and packaged these then-popular toys. By first packaging blank wood squares and only then stamping his blocks, Converse cut out an entire time-consuming and expensive stage in the manufacturing process: sorting. This foresight enabled Converse to sell his blocks at 5 cents a set, 20 cents less than his competitors and more affordable in a mass market. In the toy’s first year of production, sales totaled thirty thousand dollars, and Converse turned a ten-thousand-dollar profit.76

Having so successfully manufactured Fifteen puzzles, Converse applied his manufacturing methods to other toys, all the while cutting waste even further. Consumers once considered Noah’s arks popular "Sunday toys," but by the time Converse decided to manufacture them, both consumers and manufacturers considered them passe’.77 Yet by again employing efficient manufacturing methods and cutting costs, Converse undersold his competitors, and arks became popular again. Workers turned wood scraps left over from arks and other toys into other playthings. Traditionally, businesspeople engaged in wood working used wood scraps to
heat their factories, but not in the Converse plant. By 1888, management ran the Converse factory so efficiently that not enough scrap remained for heat. Converse instead utilized his scrap lumber to manufacture doll furniture.78

Converse finally turned his high-efficiency manufacturing methods to the fabrication of hobby and rocking horses, the type of playthings Morton E. Converse & Sons became best known for. Soon, the Converse facilities were manufacturing fifteen thousand quality rocking horses annually.79 Prior to World War I, Winchendon factory workers, most employed by Converse, manufactured two-thirds of the drums and over half of the musical chimes, rocking horses, blackboards, and dolls' trunks produced in the United States.80

In an effort to increase efficiency and cut costs even further, Converse integrated vertically. "Every part of the work was done here," boasted a Converse representative of the firm sometime prior to World War I, "from the arrival of the wood in planks to the finished product." In the plant machine shop, skilled workers designed and fabricated the technology necessary to speed production.81 In the lithography room, workers printed special designs on paper used to decorate toy drums and trunks made elsewhere in the plant. Employees even constructed crates on the premises for shipping. Each year, workers not only turned three million feet of lumber into toys, but also another two
hundred car loads of wood into packing cases. In 1890, Converse integrated still further by buying into Bickford and Royce, a Winchendon foundry, and began manufacturing steel playthings and toy trimmings, thus ensuring himself a steady supply of steel parts and details.\textsuperscript{82}

Converse’s methods proved to be exceedingly successful both in terms of quantity and quality. By 1890, just twelve years after beginning production of his first toy, analysts were already referring to Converse as the largest maker of wooden toys in the world.\textsuperscript{83} By the early 1900’s, the firm employed 1,000 workers, production reached its zenith, and Converse had become the nation’s largest manufacturer of playthings.\textsuperscript{84}

**Designing Toys For a Mass Market**

By the turn of the century, with modern factories operating throughout the toy industry, and with progressive toymakers, like Converse, perfecting the factory system for maximum efficiency and output, toy producers began not only manufacturing toys, but also designing toys for a mass market. By emphasizing durability, toymakers sought to counter the greatest consumer objections to toy purchases, the fragility of many store-bought playthings. Manufacturers’ efforts met with at least some success. In fact, contemporary analysts noted that a growing reputation for durability helped domestic toy manufacturers to counter
foreign competition and make inroads into the domestic toy market. "Reflect a moment!" demanded an industrial analyst and booster in 1919, recalling toys popular before World War I. "Each and every one of the above playthings were American Made--made well and made to last; made so attractive and made so durable that purchasers bought other playthings, not because toys formerly purchased had broken, but because toys formerly purchased had lasted and made good."85

Particularly, numerous domestic doll producers undertook the manufacture of relatively inexpensive toys better able to withstand daily use than had imported bisque and porcelain dolls. In 1895, Sol D. Hoffman, a Russian immigrant, manufactured and distributed the first "Can't Break 'Em" dolls, figures crowned with extremely durable heads molded from a special wood pulp mixture. Production at the Hoffman factory reached five thousand dolls a day, and Hoffman composition dolls remained popular items well into the first decade of the twentieth century.86

Soon other dollmakers were manufacturing "unbreakable" dolls. Hoffman sold his "secret formula"--which contained flour, wood pulp, and glue--to E. I. Horsman, a New York toy importer, jobber, and manufacturer, and Horsman began producing composition doll heads in quantity. Anxious to prove their new product indestructable, salespeople dropped the new Horsman dolls on hard floors or gaily hurled them
out of windows. One salesman even drove nails into a plank using a Horsman doll head as a hammer.\textsuperscript{87} Meanwhile, other manufacturers devised their own composition formulas with varying degrees of success. At the Ideal toy company, for example, founder and Teddy bear inventor Morris Michtom also began producing composition dolls. But if Michtom’s dolls withstood hard use, they could not endure moisture. Ideal composition crumbled during damp weather and disintegrated all together when wet.\textsuperscript{88}

Michtom’s problems aside, by 1915, demand for domestically produced "unbreakable doll heads" reached such heights that several hundred toymakers began producing these popular items. That same year, while commenting upon doll production, an analyst for \textit{Toys and Novelties} reported that ". . . no industry in the country has shown a more rapid growth, or made greater strides than have the domestic [doll] manufacturers in the past six or eight years."\textsuperscript{89} Despite high demand, not all toymakers saw the new doll heads as a blessing. While the marketing concept of planned obsolescence was still an embryo, some doll industry analysts feared that "unbreakable" toys might wreck the doll market by completely eliminating replacement sales.\textsuperscript{90}

As dollmakers debated the industrial benefits of composition dolls, other manufacturers of playthings were also producing durable toys for the mass market. In the late 1870’s, toymakers began manufacturing the first
extensive lines of cast iron toys: trackless clockwork railroad engines. Not until the 1880’s, however, as domestic toymakers marketed the first extensive lines of horse-drawn vehicles and trains, did cast iron toys come to make up an increasingly important part of domestic toy production. During the late 1880’s and 1890’s, toymakers designed and released yet more elaborate cast iron playthings. Just as industrialization influenced the manufacture of toys, so industrialization and urbanization shaped toy design. Manufacturers produced miniature firewagons, coaches, and delivery wagons characteristic of city life. At the same time, playthings modeled after more traditional, rural and village, vehicles also existed, and toymakers manufactured covered wagons, farm vehicles, and circus wagons.91

By the 1880’s and 1890’s, roughly a half-dozen firms were manufacturing extensive lines of what are now considered to be traditional cast iron pull-toys. Among the finest cast iron toys produced during this period were those manufactured by the E. R. Ives Toy Company, in the words of antique toy expert Louis Hertz, "unquestionably the outstanding American toy manufacturer" of this period. Noted for their high quality and imaginative design, certain Ives vehicles included teams of draft horses that actually seemed to gallop. Ingenious construction enabled the horses’ legs to move up and down as the child pushed his or
her toy across the floor. Soon after the turn of the century, many basic cast iron toy patents expired. Partly as a result, more firms began producing such toys. Cast iron playthings grew less detailed, but also less expensive and more readily available to a larger market. Hertz notes that during this period, manufacturers produced iron toys in "vast quantities."

Even when domestic toy manufacturers could not undersell foreign competitors or produce more durable playthings, other design innovations, the unique fashion of certain domestically designed playthings, contributed greatly to the appeal certain toys had for the mass market. By infusing a traditional stuffed animal with a unique personality, toymakers devised one of the most popular playthings ever produced: the Teddy bear. This example shows that by the first decade of the twentieth century, certain toy manufacturers and retailers had discovered the concept of fashion.

Stuffed animals, including toy bears, were not new items in 1906, the year the Teddy bear fad began in the United States, but the bear’s association with well-known and popular President Theodore Roosevelt, as well as a healthy economic climate and even foreign competition, triggered wide-spread interest in the Teddy bear. Partly for this reason, exactly who invented the Teddy bear remains a point of contention. As mentioned above, some investigators
have credited Morris Michtom, then the proprietor of a small toy shop and later founder of the Ideal Toy Corporation, with the toy’s development.95

A political cartoon, "Drawing the Line in Mississippi," supposedly inspired Michtom to devise the toy. While in that state to settle a boundary dispute, President Roosevelt went hunting. One day, a bear cub wandered into camp, but the President refused to harm the animal. Clifford Berryman, a Washington cartoonist satirized the episode. After seeing Berryman’s cartoon, claim executives at Ideal, Michtom wrote Roosevelt requesting the use of the President’s name for the toy. "I doubt if my name will mean much in the bear business," Roosevelt wrote back, "but you may use it if you wish."96

The Teddy bear’s success proved the President wrong. "As the Reporter has stated in a previous issue," noted a writer for the Dry Goods Reporter in 1907, "the fad is associated with the personality of President Roosevelt, and in fact the fad would never have been the Teddy Bear fad had it not been for the popularity of the President and the interest of the public in his hunting expeditions and his life as a Western sportsman."97 Whoever actually invented the toy, factory facilities, both foreign and domestic, made the Teddy bear available to a mass market.98 An aura of luxury well suited to department store selling also surrounded the popular stuffed animal. "As it is," observed
the aforementioned journalist for the *Dry Goods Reporter*, "there is a certain aristocratic halo enveloping the heads of the plush bears because of the high price they command . . . ."99

Makers of other toys also built up successful sales records by relying on personality and fashion. In 1915, a *Toys and Novelties* analyst noted that "originality of design" had helped certain doll manufacturers compete successfully against foreign competitors: "A certain style and character has been created by our leading manufacturers, and the demand for American dolls is increasing each year."100

Through the factory system, mechanization, and design, prior to World War I, domestic toymakers captured a large segment of their market from foreign competitors; nonetheless, foreign manufacturers continued to control a sizeable portion of the domestic toy market, 41% in 1914. From 1904 to 1914, the value of toy imports almost doubled, increasing from $4,977,389 to $9,084,019. During the same period, however, the value of domestic toy production more than doubled, increasing from $5,578,000 to $13,757,000, and U.S. toymakers captured an additional 8% of the domestic toy market from their foreign competitors. These were, however, limited gains.101

More importantly, as far as the traditional shopkeeper was concerned, between 1904 and 1915, domestic output and
foreign imports both increased. These production increases made mass retail institutions necessary and profitable. And as a new source of competition, mass retail institutions, in turn, played a significant role in the demise of the traditional toy shop.

The Demise of the Traditional Toy Shop

Although often long lived, by the second decade of the twentieth century, many of the oldest toy shops in America had begun to close their doors forever. "The future of the old toy shop, wherever it may be located, it [sic] not bright," concluded an industrial analyst writing in *Toys and Novelties* in 1913.\(^{102}\) Often the demise of the traditional toy shop followed a predictable pattern.

Many times as the shopkeeper aged, his or her shop became his or her hobby, offering a subsistence living but little more. Unwilling to update his or her business methods or grow with his or her community, the shopkeeper’s business stagnated. Younger entrepreneurs perceived few business opportunities in such stores. Generally the traditional toy shop closed permanently upon the proprietor’s death.\(^{103}\) "For nearly half a century the old toy store conducted by Mrs. Doe in Richmond, Virgina, was the mecca of the city’s carefree children," recalled one *Toys and Novelties* writer in July, 1913. "But Mrs. Doe died a few months ago and her store died with her." He also
sadly noted the passing of a number of other of the nation’s best known toy shops.\textsuperscript{104}

Other factors accelerated the demise of the traditional toy store. Increasingly, traditional toy retailers found their small shops situated upon extremely valuable urban property. His or her shop demolished to make way for new construction, the toy seller often found rent in the new building too high for his meager budget.\textsuperscript{105} The Washington toy store frequented by Lincoln and his sons, for example, closed to make way for new construction. In Springfield, Massachusetts, workmen leveled Tony Miller’s toy shop and constructed a modern office building instead. Although Miller moved his business to a nearby location, he soon took to selling postcards and other items to adults.\textsuperscript{106}

More important, even before the Civil War, but especially by the second decade of the twentieth century, traditional toy retailers encountered strong competition department stores. Between the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century, businesspeople opened such establishments in many of the largest cities in the United States: A. T. Stewarts, Lord and Taylor, R. H. Macy’s in New York City; Jordan Marsh in Boston; Field, Leiter & Co. (later Marshall Field & Co.) and The Fair in Chicago. Other department store entrepreneurs also began operating in smaller American cities: Lazarus in Columbus, Ohio, and Hudson’s in Detroit.\textsuperscript{107} As early as 1860, buyers at Macy’s
began to stock playthings year round. And by 1900, most department stores included at least seasonal toy departments. Like department stores, by 1890, mail-order houses had also begun selling toys. Founded in 1872, Montgomery Ward’s catalogue first contained toys in 1877. Sears Roebuck first began listing toys in their catalogue in 1894, six years after starting business.

Soon dime store entrepreneurs also became important retailers of inexpensive playthings. When F. W. Woolworth opened the first successful five-and-ten-cent store in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1879, he found toys to be some of his best selling items. Woolworth "was among the first merchants, perhaps even the first, to cater systematically to children," noted John P. Nichols, a chronicler of the chain store and the Woolworth Company. By 1900, Woolworth controlled 59 dime stores. By the early 1900's, Woolworth also had his imitators and competitors: McCrory, S. S. Kresge, S. H. Kress, and others.

Department stores, catalogue houses, and dime stores ensured profits less often through some intimate personal relationship between buyer and seller and more often by offering convenience, a wide variety of merchandise, goods priced for mass appeal, and other advantages. For many American toy buyers, these features outweighed the "personal
touch" and neighborliness that had made the traditional toy shop successful. As a culture of production gave way to a culture of consumption, the traditional toy shop became increasingly anachronistic. By World War I, many of the nation's best known toy shops existed only as memories and legends.

Significance of the Traditional Toy Shop

The traditional toymaker's social and business influence did not end with the demise of the toy shop. Even after the rise of big business and on into the twentieth century, small businesses in general, but particularly toy retailers, preserved many of the major social and business traditions characteristic of village and neighborhood life. Shopkeepers, therefore, played a conservative role in the culture. They did so in two ways. First, as businesses people continued to ply their trade as they had for years or even decades, these institutions reinforced local customs among owners, employees, and customers. Second, through myth and legend, even defunct small businesses continued to teach Americans important social and cultural lessons.

Harold Livesay has already described how many small manufacturers and retailers survived the initial onslaught of big business. Even as big business gained control of the nation's railroads and began to dominate manufacturing and
the banking system, innovative small businesspeople discovered fresh economic opportunities. Not every small business adapted to this new economic climate, but by the turn of the century, a close, mutually advantageous relationship had developed between many small and large manufacturers. Smaller producers not only supplied much larger firms with parts, but also pioneered important new managerial and manufacturing techniques that were later adopted by their larger counterparts.\textsuperscript{115}

Toy manufacturers also survived the growth of big business, but for reasons which differed somewhat from those Livesay describes. By the turn of the century, big business still controlled few consumer industries and seldom threatened the manufacturers of playthings. Instead, as we have seen, domestic toy manufacturers struggled against foreign, particularly German, competitors, and big business even helped toy manufacturers in this struggle.

By 1900, certain large and small producers had developed a symbiotic relationship. The metal-making firms, railroads, and other large concerns supplied toymakers with materials and services which enabled them to grow. Big business also brought about changes in distribution. By the 1880’s, regional markets and even a national market dependent on railroads developed and reliable integrated wholesale houses, able to offer retailers a wider variety of goods at lower prices than had their predecessors, replaced
itinerant jobbers as the storekeeper's major supplier of groceries and dry goods. At the same time, big business, particularly Sears, Roebuck & Co. and other catalogue stores, had begun to rob traditional retailers of a relatively small percentage of sales. But on another level, big business swelled the ranks of small retailers. As larger manufacturing concerns made their craftsmanship obsolete, some artisans, including toymakers, became retailers of factory manufactured consumer goods. For the most part, well into the second and third decades of the twentieth century, however, the same small retailers who had distributed consumer goods to most urban and rural Americans before the advent of big business continued to do so as goods became more abundant and continued to ply their trades much as they and their forefathers had before 1900. In fact, Thomas Clark has noted in particular that as late as 1930, the sociability characteristic of small business daily operation survived outside pressures to modernize.

Small business at the turn of the century was still as much a social and recreational activity as an economic one. Daily discussion and commiserating played an important part in the way businesspeople conducted business. As he or she exchanged views with customers, the shopkeeper tended to endorse contemporary standards of morality and behavior. Whether consciously or unconsciously, as village
businesspeople sold their goods, they strengthened traditional small town producer values.

As merchants and craftspeople conducted business, then, more by example than through some sophisticated marketing strategy the village shopkeeper initiated youngsters into the community of which both merchant and child were a part. For the most part, places of business belonged to the world of adults, particularly men, but especially as boys helped out at the livery stable or youngsters ran errands to the general store or accompanied adults there, youngsters received a broad education in small town values and attitudes.\textsuperscript{121} Such impromptu lessons were not always wholesome. Recalling his Kansas youth, William Allen White noted that his father "probably . . . knew in his heart that traveling men had very little to teach a boy who grew up in a pioneer town around the slaughterhouse and in the livery stable."\textsuperscript{122} From men who spat tobacco as they congregated around a pot-bellied stove in the center or towards the rear of the general store, boys learned about horses, agriculture, drinking, politics, religion, women, and sex. Less often, shopkeepers provided a bench, furnished by some shoe company and positioned towards the front of the store, so as to segregate women from men, where girls might receive a similar education.\textsuperscript{123}

More specifically, as youngsters visited or even worked at local businesses, children learned about how a world of
scarcity shaped the behavior and assumptions of customer and shopkeeper alike. Shopkeepers, children learned, reacted to customer wants and needs. For the most part, customers dictated store hours. Youngsters learned how to appraise merchandise and how to get and use credit. Despite credit, they were told, one carefully weighed the wisdom of each purchase and used credit with care. Delayed gratification remained a natural part of the turn of the century consumer experience. "He was teaching me thrift, economy, and the rules of business, though I did not know it," recalled William Allen White, who at age ten in 1880 ran a cigar stand in the Kansas hotel his father owned.124

Toy shops intensified this socialization in stores. If the livery stable and general store were for the most part establishments where adults shopped, other shops existed where a youngster could more easily feel that he or she belonged. There youngsters applied and practiced rules of commerce learned in adult shops. In his study of turn of the century urban working class youngsters, David Nasaw found that youngsters congregated at neighborhood candy stores, much as older workers gathered at saloons, to meet with friends, talk, and even play.125 Because toy stores often sold candy, small town and neighborhood youngsters likely felt a similar affinity for the traditional toy shop.

By the second and third decades of the twentieth century, traditional shops and stores, including the
neighborhood toy shop, had begun to fade from the American commercial and social scenes. This process, noted historian Thomas Clark, took decades. The socializing common to southern country stores survived as late as 1930.126 General stores and other traditional small town and neighborhood shops continued therefore to have a direct conservative impact upon society and business well into the twentieth century.

The Legend of the Traditional Toy Shop

The legendary impact of small establishments upon business and society has lasted even longer than the actual financial influence of those concerns—indeed to the present day. Robert Wiebe has noted that even as big business, immigration, and urbanization threatened the underpinnings of small town American life, including small business, politicians, writers, and pundits had already begun to romanticize an America supposedly made strong by "big enterprise" and small town life.127 America’s village businessmen played a key role in this mythology, for the butcher, baker, shoemaker, barber, toymaker, and other service and craftspeople came to represent village life. But if the toymaker was just one of many legendary small businessmen romantics deemed an integral part of the American small town community, he or she also held a special place in the myth. Through the toy shop legend, the
nostalgic might first revel in a feeling of community, of "belonging," deemed characteristic of small town life. According to legend, in hamlets across America, a kindly shopkeeper, either a man or a woman, but sometimes a husband and wife, distributed playthings to the nation's youngsters.

But the toy shop also reminded daydreamers of the joy and simplicity of childhood. "How one's affection lingers about these places where childhood's first glimpse into the world of wants when gratified became needs," recalled one analyst for the industrial journal, Toys and Novelties, who "enjoyed his first stick of candy" at Bell's toy shop in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Nostalgic individuals transferred warm feelings of past Christmases in particular to the shops where they purchased Christmas gifts. "Sentimentality for Christmas," concluded Thomas Clark, who wrote about the Southern country store, where toys were often sold during the holiday season, "historically spilled over into affection for the stores themselves." How much stronger these feelings must have been for those stores specializing in playthings, where memories Christmas cheer might have mixed with tender feeling for children and childhood.

Conclusion

The history and legend of the traditional toy shop shaped the perceptions of entrepreneurs who created mass
retail establishments, as well as the expectations of the customers who shopped there. Their perceptions colored by nostalgia, members of the modern toy industry perceived both their industrial and personal roots in the history of the traditional toy shop. Against the toy shop of old, progressive retailers measured their progress. Their customers reacted similarly. Shoppers anticipated the romance and personal attention characteristic of the old toy shop.

But while the proprietor of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century toy shop maintained a loyal clientele through a personal relationship with his customers, the impersonal bureaucratic nature of newer toy retail establishments left businesspeople searching for some other way to ensure customer allegiance. Thus despite the steady increase in toy sales before World War I, members of the toy industry viewed their market with trepidation. Mass marketing toy entrepreneurs asked themselves how they might secure the loyal patronage of seemingly fickle consumers, and how they might eradicate the seasonal nature of their business. "The children of tomorrow will be better served with toys the year 'round," lamented one wistful writer in Toys and Novelties in 1913, "But will the modern toy department, all a-glitter with white lights hold, the place in the hearts of the youngsters which the dusty corner shop of long ago held? It will not."130
Anxious to prove this and other analysts wrong, businesspeople sought to guarantee customer allegiance through some substitute for the lost intimacy of the traditional toy shop. Carrying their marketing improvements still further, retailers and manufacturers would also try to increase toy sales not just during the Christmas selling season but year round. In so doing, businesspeople turned to "personality" as a substitute for intimacy and enlisted children as their allies.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1 Louis H. Hertz, an important analyst of the industry, demythologizes "the 'old toy maker' and the little village toy shop." "There was a number of both of these, of course," he wrote, "but they were far from the standard equipment of every village and hamlet in the land, as some would have us believe." See Louis Hertz, *The Handbook of Old American Toys* (Wethersfield, Connecticut: Mark Haber and Company, 1947), 2.


8Numerous contemporary writers described Winchendon and the Converse toy factories. In addition to sources cited elsewhere, see, for example, James S. Tippet, *Toys and Toymakers* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1931), 91-102.


11"America's Toy Town," 552.

12"America's Toy Town," 552.

14 Dan Foley indicates that the origin and success of the Teddy bear were more convoluted than Michtom's descendants or officials at the Ideal Toy Company have maintained. See, Toys Through the Ages (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1966), 111-114.


20 Felix J. Koch, "Uncle Sam's Break with Germany and the 5-Cent Store Toy Trade," Toys and Novelties, March 1917, 77-78.


23 Burns, The Third Time Around, 9, 11.

24 Burns, The Third Time Around, 11.


27 Chubb, Boy Life, 96.

28 White, The Court of Boyville, 7.

29 Louis Atherton, Main Street on the Middle Border (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), 41.

30 Chubbs, Boy Life, 98.


33Margarita Spaulding Gerry, *The Toy Shop: A Romantic Story of Lincoln the Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1908), 11. Atherton has noted that the general store merchants commonly perceived variety to be the purpose of display. See *Main Street on the Middle Border*, 44.

34Gerry, *The Toy Shop*, 11-12. Atherton has noted that the general store merchants commonly perceived variety to be the purpose of display. See *Main Street on the Middle Border*, 44.


36Atherton qualified the extent to which small town merchants were indeed isolated from their competitors. See *Main Street on the Middle Border*, 50-53. Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, xlii.

37On this sense of togetherness characteristic of village life, see Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border*, 181-182.

38White, *The Court of Boyville*, 47.

39See, for example, "Hoosier Livery Stable," facing p. 13, and "Main Street, Cheboygan, Mich. (1875)," facing p. 45, in Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border*.


42Quoted in McClintock and McClintock, *Toys in America*, 266.


Chandler, *The Visible Hand*, 76.

Chandler, *The Visible Hand*, 76.


America’s Toy Town," 560.


"The Manufacture of Toys and Dolls," 376.

"The Manufacture of Toys and Dolls," 376.

"The Manufacture of Toys and Dolls," 376.


"The Manufacture of Toys and Dolls," 376.

Jean Simoneau noted that Converse employed the assembly line roughly twenty years before Ford did the same. See Diane M. La Falam, "Morton A. Converse--Toymakers," The State Line News and Winchendon Courier, 13 November 1974, 5.

"America's Toy Town," 560.

McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 336-337.

On the history of this traditional Sunday plaything, see Foley, Toys Through the Ages, 106-109.

McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 336-337.

McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 337.

"America's Toy Town," 552.

Quoted in La Falam, "Morton A. Converse--Toymaker," 5.

Greenwood, Winchendon Years, 374-378.

McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 337.


McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 341, 365.


McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 432.


McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 366.

Hertz, The Handbook of Old American Toys, 16.


94 On the controversy over who invented the Teddy bear, see Foley, Toys Through the Ages, 111-112. In 1941, a New York Times journalist described another explanation for the development of the Teddy bear not covered in Foley's work, that a Chicago toymaker named Theodore Bear actually devised the toy. See "Who Invented Teddy Bear?" The New York Times, reprinted in Hobbies, November 1941, 12.

95 Quoted in Ideal 75th Anniversary (New York: Ideal Toy Corporation, n.d.), 2.

96 Quoted in Ideal 75th Anniversary, 2.

97 "A Short Teddy Bear Review," 78.

98 Foley, Toys Through the Ages, 112.


100 "How Dolls Are Made," 36.

101 Calvin, International Trade in Toys, 3.


104 "The Passing of the Old-Time Toyshop," 23.


109 McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 349.

Winkler, *Five and Ten*, 51, 53.


Winkler, *Five and Ten*, 162-164.


Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border*, 60-61.

Livesay, "Lilliputians in Brobdignag," 341. Lewis Atherton concluded that as late as the 1870's, shopkeepers were unwilling to abandon business methods taught to them in their youth by older merchants before the Civil War. See *Main Street on the Middle Border*, 54.


Some scholars, notably Thorsten Veblen, have questioned the extent to which the merchant's views were heartfelt or merely salesmanship. Louis Atherton questions Veblen's contention that village businesspeople engaged merely in "salesmanlike pusillanimity." See *Main Street on the Middle Border*, 55-56.

Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border*, 40.


Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border*, 44.


129 Clark, Pills, Petticoats, and Plows, 113.
130 "The Passing of the Old-Time Toyshop," 23.
CHAPTER II: BUILDING STORE LOYALTY AND SALES THROUGH PERSONALITY, 1890-1919

In the department store, one can see how children played two different cultural roles. First, they themselves were socialized into the culture of consumption. But second, they acted as agents of the department store entrepreneurs in manipulating adults to buy. These experiences for children constituted new ways in which business and culture interacted.

At the department store, personality played a key role in this manipulation. Warren Susman concluded that personality became an important aspect of the culture during the 1920’s, but these cognitive changes developed earlier, prior to World War I in fact.¹ To an extent, retailers pioneered new merchandising methods as they reacted to the problems and character of department store selling. Seeking to raise sales year-round and solidify store loyalty despite the impersonal nature of the institution, department store entrepreneurs trained clerks in new progressive selling techniques.

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Turn-of-the-century socioeconomic developments caused department store entrepreneurs problems but also presented businesspeople with new marketing possibilities. Historian Robert W. Wiebe characterized American society between 1877 and 1920 as initially "without a core." "An age never lent itself more readily to sweeping, uniform description: nationalization, industrialization, mechanization, urbanization," concluded Wiebe. "Yet to almost all of the people who created them, these themes meant only dislocation and bewilderment." Many Americans embarked upon a "search for order," a search that helped shape even the way people made and bought and used toys. Fearful parents attempted to influence the behavior and development of their children in a world filled with new uncertainties. Business managers of new mass retail institutions also sought order and control. Hoping to increase year-round toy sales, to instill a new consumer imperative, and to ensure intergenerational and intragenerational customer loyalty, the managers of America's new mass retail outlets sought to direct the behavior of adult shoppers and their children.

Like their predecessors, the shopkeepers, businesspeople faced a dual, often ambiguous toy market, and this fact further shaped the marketing strategies of toy retailers. "It is essential that in considering every detail of the toy department [sic]," noted a Toys and Novelties analyst in 1913, "the merchant look from a triple view-point, namely,
that of the child, that of the adult, and that of himself..." Businesspeople realized that more often than not, adults actually purchased toys. But ultimately many store managers perceived children to be their customers. Managers also realized that while parents sought to control the behavior of their children, these same youngsters sought freedom from parental dictates. Through both direct and indirect selling, businesspeople played off parents' struggles to control child behavior against the efforts of children to be free from adult restraints.

The department store remains central to understanding industrial developments within the toy industry after 1890. To a large extent, department store successes and failures shaped future developments in merchandising, notably self-service retailing and marketing, especially advertising. What department store entrepreneurs tried to do and how they worked explains the nature of department store successes and failures and thus how the marketing of toys evolved in American culture.

Department Stores Begin Selling Toys

As noted above, well before the turn of the century, entrepreneurs opened department stores in a number of major American cities, often to the detriment of shopkeepers. Department store retailers stocked a wide array of consumer goods, including, eventually, toys. Indeed, as early as
1860, buyers at Macy’s had begun to stock playthings year-round. By 1900, most department stores included at least a seasonal toy department.

The traditional toy shop and the late-nineteenth-century department store differed markedly in size, stock, style, location, clientele, and organization. Historian Daniel J. Boorstin described these large, spacious, centrally located urban retail institutions as "grand and impressive edifices--Palaces of Consumption." The department store retailers ensured profits less through some intimate personal relationship between buyer and seller, as had the traditional shopkeeper, and more often by offering glamour, a convenient urban location, a wide variety of merchandise priced for mass appeal, free delivery, the option to return or exchange merchandise, and charge accounts. A grandiose and spacious interior characterized the department store of the 1890’s.

Macy’s in New York epitomized the sort of spaciousness that set the institution off from the traditional toy shop. Along with shoppers bound for other departments, customers entered Macy’s toy department through not one, but four entry ways. According to one Macy’s booster writing in 1890, there were "two grand entrances on 14th street, three on 6th Avenue, and one on 13th Street, and the immense number of ladies passing in and out indicates the life that is abounding through the store." To reach the toy
department, customers first had to pass through the Main Floor. The Main Floor offered toy shoppers and other customers an impressive panorama indeed. A customer entering Macy’s must have first been struck by the sheer size of the department store, next by the throngs within, and finally by the bewildering variety of merchandise on display. "THE MAIN FLOOR with its spacious aisles is always thronged with active buyers," noted the Macy’s advertising executive. "It is a busy, bustling, place, its counters and shelves are laden with everything that is new and seasonable in the many departments, and certainly no other house in the city can boast of such perfect light and ventilation."

Inside, Macy’s devoted 200 feet of counters and shelves to the Dress Goods department alone. "We have now reached that part of our main floor fronting on 6th Avenue," the Macy’s booster continued," and this magnificent space of 100 x 200 feet—unexcelled by any store in the city—is divided up in numerous sections with spacious aisles." Shoppers reached other departments, including toys, by "new and handsome passenger elevators or by two grand stairways, [presenting] a most beautiful aspect." In fact, the third floor housed "the largest Toy and Doll department in the city."7

Customers enjoyed similar, if different, surroundings and experiences at major department stores in other cities. While Macy’s epitomized the department store’s spaciousness, Marshall Field of Chicago exemplified the grandeur of the
department store at the turn of the century. As the Marshall Field building stood in 1902, giant stone columns flanked the store’s State Street entrance. Planners evidently expected this particular doorway to form the department store’s main entrance, since they located the portal in the middle of a city block. "[B]ehind its doors was placed a sumptuous vestibule with mahogany-paneled walls, red marble floors, and specially designed chandeliers weighing over twelve hundred pounds apiece," noted historian Robert W. Twyman. "It was as large in itself as many a store." An equally palatial panorama greeted shoppers entering Marshall Field’s from the Randolph Street entrance. Parallel rows of white Grecian columns ran from one end of the building to the other, forming a spacious central arcade. Consumers strolled down wide aisles past polished mahogany fixtures or peered through French glass counters at merchandise carefully arranged by employees. Above the first floor, shoppers tread upon luxurious carpeting or Oriental rugs. "Most striking then, as today, in this building," noted Twyman in 1954, "was the atmosphere of spaciousness and grandeur given by the great open light well reaching through twelve floors to the huge skylight in the roof, and on which the intervening floors opened like galeries."
Old and New Barriers to Toy Selling

If department store elegance, convenience, and service promised high sales, however, old but also new barriers to toy selling offset businesspeople's merchandising efforts. On one level, the department store entrepreneur continued to experience many of the same problems that the shopkeeper had confronted earlier. Despite the growing importance of the toy department, for example, toy selling remained seasonal. "Toys naturally have their biggest sale during the holiday, because they typify the Christmas spirit and are personified in Santa Claus," noted a journalist in *Toys and Novelties* in 1912. "From this end-of-the-year importance, they have developed into a profitable year round feature in the business life of leading department stores everywhere." At the same time, throughout the year, children continued to dictate demand without pattern, much to the consternation of many toy retailers.

Even as customary difficulties persisted, many of the same aspects of the department store responsible for high sales created unprecedented problems, chiefly a less personal shopping environment where customer allegiance proved elusive. As toy retailing grew less specialized, the public nature of the department store, the sheer volume of customers and personnel, and the truncated bureaucratic organization of the department store meant that a less intimate relationship existed between shoppers and toy
retailers than had earlier been the case. As a result, department store retailers found the sort of customer loyalty the shopkeeper enjoyed difficult to secure.

Selling Toys Directly to Adults

Hoping to overcome old and new retail merchandising problems, department store entrepreneurs devised new selling techniques. As a result, eventually the department store became the institution in which one can see personality replacing character in selling. Businesspeople first targeted adult toy buyers with their merchandising. They did so for two reasons. First, from the inception of the department store, businesspeople designed the institution with adult shoppers, not youngsters, in mind; therefore, businesspeople naturally aimed their first toy selling efforts at parents and other adult toy buyers. Second, in most instances, traditionally adults constituted the actual purchasers of playthings.

Retailers came to understand male and female toy buyers differently, but entrepreneurs acknowledged important similarities among customers in general. Journalists commented on the contradictory nature of department store shoppers. On one level, under some circumstances, analysts found that customers were highly vulnerable to retail merchandising efforts. On another level, however, department store analysts also commented on the prudent
stance many customers took when confronting claims made by salespeople. Together, these observations colored the strategies and tactics department store retailers eventually employed.

Department store merchandisers, including those who sold toys, understood that women were their best customers. "Women are the great buyers of the family," noted Thomas K. Black, Playthings industrial critic, in 1919, and "therefore merchants have quite naturally concentrated selling efforts upon them."10 Another observer, writing for Playthings in 1917, concluded that "... most of our stores are built and operated with the knowledge that women form the far greater number of purchasers."11

Even as they appreciated the importance of female shoppers to high sales, however, retailers viewed their female customers with a certain degree of contempt. Historians William Leach, Susan Porter Benson, and other scholars have noted that department store managers shared with much of American society a prejudicial view of their female patrons. "As recent historical study of women has so consistently shown," noted Leach, "nineteenth-century middle-class Americans viewed women as dependent, emotional, deeply religious, and sexually pure beings who were supposed to tend the domestic fires and to bear and rear children."12 Susan Porter Benson concluded that between 1890 and 1940 department store managers "characterized women as capricious
and unpredictable, too caught up in their role as consumers." In the literature of the period, retail analysts portrayed "the woman customer as a spoiled overgrown child."\(^{13}\)

While merchandisers thought somewhat better of male shoppers than female customers, men shopped less frequently in department stores, and retailers did relatively little to change this situation. Benson has noted that store managers "portrayed men . . . as more instrumental and businesslike in their consumption." Managers "found a male style of making discrete purchases personally more appealing and less disruptive of store operations."\(^{14}\) "He buys quickly and he buys the most expensive of playthings," observed Black in *Playthings* in 1919.\(^{15}\) But in 1917, another writer for *Playthings* reported that ". . . most men shy from the average store because they can’t pick out an article, pay for it and get out. They shy of waiting for package wrapping and change."\(^{16}\) Despite the supposed advantages male customers offered retailers, Black concluded, retailers seldom used merchandising to target male shoppers specifically. "Without attempting to compute the proportion of playthings purchased by mothers as compared to fathers," concluded critic Black in early in 1919, "it remains that
fathers has [sic] been greatly neglected in all selling campaigns."\(^{17}\)

But while toy retailers perceived male customers as better directed and thus more desirable consumers than women, at least one merchandising analyst described male visitors to the toy department in terms similar to those used to portray female customer. Surrounded by toys, Black observed, fathers could be just as child-like as their wives. "Real men are only boys grown up," he noted, "and if he knows that he can have a heap of fun himself with some ingenious or intricate plaything he will be doubly sure to make a purchase."\(^{18}\)

Despite the supposedly child-like nature of most department store customers, industrial analysts observed that the adult toy buying public remained wary of department store salesmanship. In 1913, a writer for *Playthings* noted that department store salespeople would have to overcome "certain barriers" before hoping to make a sale. "The law of self-preservation is strong," observed this reporter. "It is this law that makes a person a careful buyer, and arouses in the prospective customer's mind the thought that the salesman is trying to make a sale for selfish reasons." Bombarded by one sales pitch after another in store after store, and fearful that his or her resistance might be flagging, the time could come, this writer hypothesized, when the customer would purposely avoid stores where
salespeople practiced "scientific salesmanship," or the hard sell.¹⁹

If industry analysts discovered shoppers generally suspicious of salespeople, observers found adult consumers particularly reticent to purchase playthings. Even among department store patrons, many adult toy buyers still believed playthings to be unnecessary. As late as 1915, the editors of *Toys and Novelties* concluded that most adult customers deemed playthings a luxury.²⁰ But earlier, in 1913, a writer at *Playthings* spoke to the consumer society and noted the importance of luxury sales. "The health of business demands that consumers buy more than the necessities of life," concluded this writer at *Playthings*. "It's sale of the so-called luxuries that makes business boom."²¹

Recognizing the importance of luxuries to acceptable sales levels, the writer concluded that toy buyers would have to be trained to view playthings in some new way, if retailers were to succeed. "If actual need is the only impulse felt by your trade sales will be slow and few," continued the *Playthings* writer. "The ordinary man or woman actually requires very little, and if you wait for real wants to send patrons around, you're going to have a long lonely vigil." Yet toy retailers believed that they might alter these customer perceptions. "The line between necessities and luxuries is so slight that the luxury of
today becomes the necessity of tomorrow," noted the 1913
Playthings commentator. "Remember that many lines are sold
only after the demand for them has been created." 22

Anxious to circumvent customer suspicions and to
increase toy sales, department store entrepreneurs created a
new, more manipulative sales strategy together with fresh
tactics. Distributers first adopted a new rationale for
buying and selling playthings, functionalism. Then, to
deliver their message of consumption, retailers devised
innovative personality-based merchandising techniques.

As adult male and female toy buyers confronted a
frightening world of new uncertainties, toy retailers took
advantage of this situation to turn toy wants into needs.
Faced with unprecedented situations or physically separated
from family members and other customary sources of wisdom,
urban parents in particular found traditional advice
inadequate, if not absent altogether. "As men ranged
further and further from their communities," noted historian
Robert Wiebe, "they tried desperately to understand the
larger world in terms of their small familiar environment."
But they failed. 23 This dearth of traditional guidance left
adult toy buyers susceptible to the advice of experts and
pundits of all sorts. Toy retailers readily accepted the
role of expert, adopting the functionalist approach to play
and playthings as one strategy of toy selling.
As functionalists, toy retailers maintained that playthings embodied both cognitive and symbolic meaning. "From toys the child gets his early education," claimed one believer, in a circular distributed in 1912. Playthings, he or she continued, "appeal directly to his emotions and through these to thought and then to the child’s will and character."\(^24\) "Play is, in fact, the child’s first school, the first apprenticeship," noted another writer in *Toys and Novelties* in 1913.\(^25\) As late as 1920, analysts continued to advise toysellers to stress functionalism as a rationale to buy toys. "A new thought is touched upon," wrote A. A. Mann in *Advertising and Selling* in 1920, "when parents are told that the proper choice of toys is really as important for the best development of their children as the choice of playmates."\(^26\)

The very nature of functionalism, toy sellers knew, necessitated the purchase of larger quantities of playthings than had previously been the case. In 1918, child development authority Mary L. Read, author of *The Toy Age*, warned parents that proper toys varied by age. "Are they adapted to the child’s stage of development— that is, to its motor ability, its interest, its mental development?" she asked.\(^27\) Thus functionalism required youngsters to own more high quality toys over the course of their childhoods than had previously been the case. While elevating toys and play to a new level of importance, businesspeople increased year-
round toy sales and fostered an imperative of consumption. Confronted by the unprecedented importance experts now placed upon proper toy selection and purchase, one might easily imagine the adult shopper, already lacking guidance, additionally fearful and confused.

Armed with the new rationale for buying playthings, merchandisers adopted new sales technique to deliver their message. Hoping to circumvent customer aversion to toy salespeople while taking advantage of customers' fears and bewilderment, toy dealers substituted the personality of salespeople for the character of the family advisors of old. Managers created personalities for their stores. Meanwhile, salespeople themselves adopted a new persona. As friends or acquaintances, servants, and experts, they offered the confused toy buyer informed advice. In this way, toy retailers hoped to bypass customer suspicions, employ a functionalist sales strategy, and successfully sell playthings directly to adults.

Analysts had begun stressing the importance of a workable store personality by the second decade of the twentieth century. "Business may be a machine to a certain extent, but the human interest side of it is absolutely essential to its success," urged a writer in Playthings in 1913. "Develop personality, as it is the most valuable part of your whole organization."28 "It is the personality of the store that colors and defines the character of the goods
from the customer's viewpoint and wins or repels approval," noted another analyst two years later. "And the peculiar thing . . .," he added, "is that the goods or the prices have little to do with the store's temperament." This particular writer defined the "temperament" of a department store as "the composite personality of its management and staff."^29

Writers recommending personality as an antidote to low sales prescribed a flexible, multifaceted persona for the successful salesperson. He or she was to be at once friend, expert, and servant. Susman described the underlying paradox which so well suited personality to retail selling. "One is to be unique, be distinctive, follow one's own feelings, make oneself stand out from the crowd," noted Susman, "and at the same time appeal--by fascination, magnetism, attractiveness--to it."^30 The ability to manage this new sense of self marked one as a masterful salesperson. "Once a man has made himself an authority on desirable toys and once he develops a pleasing manner of imparting his knowledge, then he has moved from the clerk class--he is a salesman," concluded Sidney J. Rockwell, the editor of Playthings, in a 1913 edition. Rockwell dubbed this manner of retailing playthings "unconscious salesmanship."^31

Admitting "that to separate a man from his money not only painlessly but joyfully, demands down-right genius,"
Rockwell noted in 1913 that "unconscious salesmanship" could overcome customer apprehension. "By this art he makes the actual selling incidental to a very pleasing chat between the customer and himself," wrote Rockwell. "He removes the friction and the awkward silences from the transaction and he does not build up a barrier of suspicion which must be battered down."32

"Unconscious salesmanship" entailed quickly sizing up a prospective customer and accepting the character of that shopper, before tailoring salesmanship to the customer in question in an effort to gain his or her acceptance and trust. "Be the man your customer would like to meet," suggested a sales expert in the pages of Playthings in 1913. "This is personality; and this is what constitutes a good salesman--personality."33 "[I]n dealing with the various intermidiate classes of minds," noted Rockwell in a 1913 issue of Playthings, "the salesman should be a sort of chameleon, able to change his personality on a second's notice, sympathetic always and the ideal salesman of each man he sells."34 Two years later, in 1915, analyst Thomas K. Black concurred with Rockwell, concluding that "... the popular man is basically an optimist." "He sees the best side of every man or issue and emphasizes that side," summarized Black. "He is broadly tolerant of another fellow's short-comings, helping him to overcome them if it can be done tactfully, but never playing arbiter of
another's codes of right living." The customer's interests became the salesman's interests, he noted.\textsuperscript{35} If done correctly, the unknowing shopper found him or herself drawn to the salesclerk as he or she might be to a new acquaintance. "Never should the customer see any wheels go round," Rockwell elaborated in 1917. "All should run along in a manner really comparable to a visit between good friends.\textsuperscript{36}

While gaining the customer's confidence, the salesclerk might next assume the role of expert, taking care all the while to cloak his or her expertise in "unconscious salesmanship." "Find out your customer's need to know," suggested one sales authority in \textit{Playthings} in 1913, "and then fill up this void with reliable information on what you have to sell."\textsuperscript{37} "He should not \underline{inflict} this knowledge upon the customer," warned Rockwell in 1913, "but he should have it 'on tap' when needed."\textsuperscript{38} Writing in \textit{Playthings} in 1913, Charles L. Hafford, general manager of People's Store in Tacoma, Washinton, noted the emphasis some department store managers soon placed upon expertise. "The heads of these institutions bend every effort to secure the men who 'know how,' viewing a man's worth from the knowledge he has of the business and the stocks he sells and the treatment accorded the general purchasing public."\textsuperscript{39}

Armed now with functionalist theory, as well as a new and progressive form of salesmanship, businesspeople renewed
their efforts to sell playthings to adults. When skillfully utilized, businesspeople discovered, this combination sold toys well. Functionalist arguments trade journalists and other individuals made suggest the sort of persuasive rhetoric some department store salespeople employed.

By exposing children to quality toys, insisted toy salesmen and saleswomen, youngsters could acquire the skills, character, and values required of respectable and successful members of an urban-industrial society. As early as 1903, one advocate of functionalism writing in Playthings maintained that boys might imbibe valuable mechanical and electrical training through certain turn-of-the-century toys. Noting that "... the principles on which the modern toys operate are practically the same as those used in complicated machinery," he insisted that potentially the ten-year-old boy of the twentieth century could learn more about the possible uses of electricity than had a natural philosophy professor fifty years earlier. Mock military engagements fought with toy soldiers taught boys "a valuable understanding of justice," maintained other functionalists, while by playing with dolls, girls nurtured the maternalism later necessary to rear real children. A toy might evoke in a child, noted another analyst in 1920, "the qualities of inventiveness, of ingenuity and love of beautiful things."

But if correctly selected playthings aided the child in his or her proper development, noted functionalist toy
dealers and other concerned individuals, then the wrong toy
might physically injure a child or corrupt his or her
artistic or psychological maturation. Playthings with
"sharp edges, corners, or points" might cut or otherwise
injure a youngster, while "unhygienic" toys might poison or
bring on illness. Exposed to "inartistic" playthings—
"those giving harsh, metallic, jingling sounds; ugly, ill-
proportioned shapes; harsh or inharmonious colors; ugly,
simpering or unwholesome expressions in dolls or animals"—
the child might never develop an appropriate esthetic
sense. In a 1912 issue of Toys and Novelties, one writer,
undoubtedly referring to inexpensive imports, maintained
that adults who provided youngsters with too many cheap,
easily broken toys could invoke life-long psychological
problems. A youngster so indulged might quickly acquired a
taste for extravagance. Convinced that toymakers made
playthings to be broken and discarded, only to be replaced,
the child "will be on constant lookout for novelty, change,
and the excitement of new toys." "Such children make
restless, unhappy men and women," this observer warned,
"blase almost before they have grown out of babyhood; never
satisfied with what they have; always craving change." Other critics of the toy industry insisted that certain
playthings might prove socially destructive or morally
dangerous. Some lambsted the Teddy bear, fearing that the
popularity of this new plaything might prove detrimental to
doll sales and thus hinder instinctive female maternalism. One Michigan priest prophesied that the national obsession with toy bears would lead to race suicide. Other critics of the toy industry maintained that toy soldiers fostered militarism. In 1912, a writer for *Toys and Novelties* recalled an American rabbi who "some years ago" became convinced that war toys bred militarism, travelled to Nuremberg, and unsuccessfully attempted to persuade toymakers to stop manufacturing toy soldiers. In 1918, Mary L. Reed concluded that war toys demoralized youngsters in a number of ways: "[T]hey cultivate the spirit of destructiveness instead of constructiveness; they foster callousness toward the value of human life; they give a wholly wrong impression of the meaning of war, omitting its destructive social and industrial effects, over-emphasizing the joy of its enthusiasm and rhythm." By the first decade of the twentieth century, then, the proper selection of playthings had begun to take on a new complexity and importance, and by the second, retailers had begun to make use of strong parental needs and emotions to market their products. Close eyewitnesses provided consistent testimony. Adult toy shoppers bore the weighty knowledge that a proper choice might do a child great good, while an improper selection might cause a youngster great harm. But numerous variables separated potentially beneficial playthings from possibly dangerous toys, and
different age groups required different playthings. Fearful for their child's future, unnerved by the importance that child care experts and others now placed upon the proper selection of toys, trusting parents turned to retailers for help and advice. Toy retailers played upon these needs, and adults bought toys in unprecedented quantities. Parental love motivated many of the purchases, but parents also purchased playthings hoping to keep up with their neighbors and because the very act of selecting, buying, and giving toys made parents feel successful and caring, despite the ambiguous role parents played during the first two decades of the twentieth century.48

Nostalgia also motivated adults to purchase playthings. "It does not take much effort to take mother and father back to days when they too were just kids--they can remember when a train at the end of a string or a dolly seated in a dolls high chair was the realization of their hearts' desire--;" concluded columnist, W. Barrett Hankins in Toys and Novelties in 1917, "it requires but little efforts to bring the pictures before them of the time when they clasped their arms about a woolly thing some one said was a bear while something inside them told them they were supremely happy."49

But if retail methods aimed directly at adult toy buyers brought increased toy sales, these tactics dealt less than fully with the problem of customer loyalty. The individual
department store manager noted that while a customer might patronize a particular store more frequently, the same shopper continued to buy elsewhere. Store and staff personality might certainly bring parents into a department store again and again. "Personality is a force that continues to attract long after the first meeting," noted a writer in Playthings in 1915, "and, other things being equal, customers return to the store where the man with the pleasant smile and winning manner is waiting to serve them." But retailers realized that personality alone would never capture the kind of intergenerational store loyalty that the old, character-based shopkeeper had enjoyed.

Selling Toys Directly to Children

Hoping to nurture customer allegiance while raising toy sales still further, department store retailers turned next to youngsters themselves as potential customers. As late as 1912, some toy retailers still neglected the trade of their youngest customers. On the salesfloor, store managers and salespeople intentionally disregarded the child’s interest in merchandise, while employees shelved toys out of the reach of children. Over time, however, retailers’ perceptions changed, reflecting a general shift in the economic role of the middle-class urban family, especially from a unit of production to one of
consumption. Increasingly during the second decade of the twentieth century, however, more progressive merchandisers began to recognize the importance of children as customers. Through merchandising, businesspeople hoped to expose children to the enticements and pleasures of consumption and train children to consume in their specific stores. In this way, entrepreneurs hoped to ensure the sort of customer loyalty the shopkeeper had enjoyed earlier.

Because they were children, youngsters possessed many of the characteristics retailers sought in consumers, characteristics adult shoppers often lacked. Toy retailers perceived children as creatures easily influenced by others and ruled almost exclusively by their emotions. Analysts characterized the youngest department store customers as first and foremost free spirits. "The average child is not a 'business body,' but likes things careless and free and easy," concluded one reporter for *Toys and Novelties* in 1913. Propriety did little to restrain a child's desire to acquire a wide array of playthings. "In other words," noted a writer for *Toys and Novelties* in 1913, "an advertisement to children has no barriers to climb, no scruples to overcome." Nor did the limits of finance slow a child's demand to own, concluded a journalist for the *Public Ledger*:

He has but the vaguest idea of the cost of things; he would like to own as far as the eye can see, and he is liable to feel hurt and wronged that he cannot annex
these exciting aisles and counters to his nursery
domain. . . . He cannot in his infantile wisdom
conceive why it is not good for him to have all these
things sent home or carried off at once; why all
birthdays and all Christmases cannot be gloriously
rolled into one; why he must wait and get a box of
blocks now, a rocking horse at another time, a
pushmobile months hence, a platoon of pewter soldiers
when he is old enough to vote, a bicycle not until
married, and that miniature airship only when he is a
very old man, bowed over a cane.55

Even if he or she could, insisted "a prominent importer of
toys" in *Playthings* in 1913, "the nervous temperament of the
average American child and the rapidity with which it tires
of things" promised "a continual outlet for toys in this
country."56

Bearing the above factors in mind, toy retailers
concluded that children were uniquely vulnerable to modern
merchandising techniques. "[T]he little folks are the
easiest of all customers to influence," noted one writer in
*Toys and Novelties* in 1913. "Window trims and miscellaneous
displays automatically arouse their desires. Color, motion
and all the elements that enter into advertising influence
them much more powerfully than adults."57

Child patronage brought store managers immediate
benefits. Sometimes youngsters themselves made toy
purchases. More importantly, the toy department drew adults
into a store with greater frequency. Adults brought
children there; children brought their parents and other
adults. Once inside the store for whatever reason, the
presence of youngsters fueled an atmosphere conducive to
shopping in general and impulse buying in particular among adult purchasers. The presence of children contributed to the personality of a successful department store. A store frequented by children meant "a human store," noted industrial analyst Rockwell for Playthings in 1912, a relaxed, comfortable, and happy place where each family member felt free to shop. "You will operate a popular store--one where the laughter of children puts good red blood into the business." For the retailer, then, a year-round toy department meant, in Rockwell’s words, gaining the business "of the entire family, the acme of success in present day merchandising."

Entrepreneurs considered the long term benefits of children as customers were even more important than immediate advantages, since businesspeople firmly believed that a consumer recruited as a child often remained faithful to one store his or her entire adult life, just as customers had in the days of the neighborhood toy shop. "They form the habit in their early life which remains afterwards," concluded Robert H. McCready, Playthings general manager, in 1918.59 "One of the greatest assets of any department store is its list of regular customers, and any means which will tend to increase this list is worthy of the most careful consideration." "[J]ust remember this: Little girls grow up very rapidly," admonished another Playthings analyst in 1915, who described a girl’s first solo visit to the
department store as nothing short of an "event:" "It will be only a few years before she is mistress of her own spending money and very likely a liberal buyer. A few years more and she will be selecting a trousseau."60 No less a department store entrepreneur than Marshall Field held firmly to this same viewpoint. At his store in Chicago, a youngster became "an important individual the moment he enters the store," reported Charles B. Cory, Jr. in the Dry Goods Guide in 1917.61

For each of the reasons discussed above, then, retailers adopted direct selling to children as a second sales strategy. By instituting consumer training for children, department store managers planned to solidify intergenerational and intragenerational store loyalty. "The child appeal builds from the past to the present and from the present to the future," noted one enthusiast of youngsters' business in 1917. "It is the all-eternal and the now—the greatest asset we have in merchandising—and toys are its foundation."62 As they trained youngsters to consume, managers and salespeople modified tactics used to sell to adults as they merchandised to children.

While store managers relied upon store personality to attract adult customers, toy retailers hoping to attract youngsters instituted a special personality in their toy departments. Ideally, managers sought to create a thoroughly nonthreatening toy department where the child
felt completely in charge. Inside Macy's, Filene's, Marshall Field's, and other such retail establishments, women experienced power generally denied their gender outside of the department store. Children wielded similar clout within the toy department, and retailers based their appeal to children on a promise of power and autonomy. "The child enjoys the toy department where the 'lid' is off, where he can sit on a buck-board and own the whole world, with no one to tell him 'keep off the grass' or 'don't feed the animals,'" maintained a writer in *Toys and Novelties* in 1913.63 Toy buyer Kitty Walker, first employed by the Grand Leader department store in 1896 and dubbed "one of the very few really great women toy buyers in the country" by *Toys and Novelties* in 1913, insisted that an "indescribable spirit of freedom and joy," a "spirit of play," had to permeate the toy department, if a manager expected his or her department to succeed. "Without it the child feels restrained and stricken with awe," she insisted. "[I]f the toy department is a stiff dry place, where everything is to be looked at but not touched, . . . the child knows only the pain of Tantalus."64

Displays and fixtures played a major role in creating an attractive, carefree departmental personality. As early as 1903, experts in *Playthings* began urging retailers to display toys in such a manner as to draw the department store's youngest shoppers and shape the child's consumer
behavior. "The toy display must be so arranged as to attract the children placing before them those toys least likely to be sought out by the child of his own accord," insisted this writer, "and those which for various reasons it is most desirable to sell."65 Store managers generally displayed more expensive and delicate items--fine dolls, for example--behind the glass of wall or show cases in an effort to reduce breakage by young shoppers, while allowing children and others a clear view of the items in question. Managers also kept trained salespeople on hand to demonstrate these less accessible playthings. "Just as a puppy wants to chew everything, so a child wants to handle it, and so the toy display which does its work well shows the toy amid bright surroundings and at the same time places many of them out of reach of the younger children," noted a toy department booster in Toys and Novelties in 1913.66

As retailers redesigned department fixtures to protect and merchandise fragile playthings, progressive businesspeople also lowered the height of fixtures so as to be more convenient and enticing to the child. Managers at the Chicago Marshall Field store in particular adopted these new displays. "The shelves of a show case, for instance, which are below the natural range of vision of an adult," noted one Chicago correspondent, "place toys directly where they belong before small children."67 Standing before a child-size store fixture, a youngster also experienced a
child-size store fixture, a youngster also experienced a feeling of greater maturity, importance, and power.

The department store toy department, like other departments, could be a sensual, as well as a seductive place. Whenever practical, progressive businesspeople displayed toys so as to allow youngsters to handle the merchandise. This practice contributed still further to the department's playful and relaxed atmosphere, and retailers discovered that toys sold more easily once actually in the customer's hands. "[I]n every department store there are immense quantities of toys which need only the most meager assistance in the way of store fixtures," noted Kitty Walker in 1913: "A slightly-raised platform will suffice for children's vehicles, plain shelving for toy furniture and many animals, and island counters or tables for thousands of items which make for profits in the selling of toys the year 'round." Open displays eliminated the need for "Don't Handle the Toys" signs and for chicken wire fencing, both of which disrupted the spirit of the progressive department. In some stores, an entire playroom located right in the toy department contributed still further to the playful departmental persona by again encouraging children to handle and examine toys on sale there. As they played, youngsters grew increasingly enamored with departmental stock. In Chicago, the Marshall Field toy department boasted a playground complete with seesaws, rocking-horses, blocks, a
merry-go-round, and a sand pile complete with buckets and spades.

Salespeople selling directly to children adopted a personality that complemented that of the department. "In the toy salesman lies the merchant's greatest opportunity for creating the spirit of success in the department," noted a Toys and Novelties writer in 1913. The retailer assumed the role of chameleon when selling to children just as he or she had when selling to adult customers. "If the merchant contemplating the addition of a line of year 'round toys conducts a store so small that the duties of salesmanship must devolve upon himself," noted a writer for Toys and Novelties in 1913, "he must learn to be all things to all children." 69

In most instances, the salesperson assumed the persona of a child him or herself. To do so, the salesperson had to think like a youngster. "They must know how to play themselves, because few men and women who cannot play and enjoy it have honest sympathy with the children to whom play is everything," noted Kitty Walker in 1913. "The employees must know children as well as the essentials of salesmanship and the stock." 70 Just as he or she did when selling to adults, the salesperson assumed the role of a friend or acquaintance. "It is important that everyone connected with the toy department be in sympathy with children, that they understand children and that they have that honest frankness
which draws children to them," noted a writer for *Toys and Novelties* during 1913. Analysts noted that children were extremely sensitive to slights. For this reason, analysts warned salespeople to carefully conceal their own cares and woes. Similarly, observers suggested that even "a quick glance of recognition" or "a happy word" could help to solidify a child’s friendship. In so doing, the child not only felt as if he or she were among friends, but once again mature, important, and powerful.

Many retailers understood that children craved power and control in a world in which youngsters generally had little of either. In an effort to win over a child’s life-long loyalty, managers and other retailers constructed within their department stores a world where the child ruled. In the toy department, children were not only free from parental dictates, but adults actually deferred to them. Salespeople recognized their maturity and treated them with a unique respect. "Poring over the selections, choosing what to buy and where and how much, children transcended their minute size and inferior status to assume quasi-adult dimensions," concluded historian David Nasaw. "Pennies, nickels, and dimes transformed them from kids to respected customers to be courted and cared for by adult businessmen." In dime stores, candy stores, and other establishments frequented by working class youngsters who were themselves employed, this was often the case, and I
will discuss dime stores below. But in more progressive toy
departments, a penniless child, particularly a middle or
upper class youngster, might still enjoy the freedom and
independance of the toy department. These children traded
on their future as loyal customers or on the purchasing
power of their parents.

As children frequented department stores, they learned a
number of important consumer lessons. Retailers taught
youngsters how to shop. Children learned, for example, how
to browse. At the same time, however, youngsters gained new
consumer cognitions. Consumption, children discovered,
could satisfy certain needs and gratify in a number of
different ways.

On one level, children learned that the product itself
could satisfy. As department store toy sales increased,
ownership of mass produced playthings became more universal
and so an important part of more and more youngsters’ play.
One reporter concluded that even a poor child no longer had
to limit his or her selection of playthings to a sled, a
ball of yarn, and a home-made cart or sawdust-stuffed doll.
As mass produced playthings became more readily available,
toys changed how children conceived of play. "[I]t is now
difficult," he or she wrote, "for the little chaps to
understand how children of yesterday were able to amuse
themselves."73 Similarly, through a cartoon entitled
"Yesterday and To-Day" in the New York Evening Mail, one
cartoonist captured the high expectations many young consumers now had at Christmas. In the second frame, "The Present Day Willie’s Christmas," a scowling Willie held a model airplane in each hand while lamenting, "Ah! And I wanted a big one I could fly in!" 74

On another level, however, children discovered that the very act of shopping could itself gratify. With the role of consumer, they learned, came power, respect, and a feeling of maturity. At the same time, however, youngsters ascertained that shopping could also be fun. For Francie Nolan, Betty Smith’s autobiographical heroine in A Tree Grows in Brooklyn (1943), window shopping became a part of her play. As she stood before a department store window display, she would invent stories about the toys therein. 75 Other youngsters learned similarly that consumption could be entertaining. In 1912, a female shopper noticed the joy three young boys radiated while watching a massive department store display consisting of a small engine running miniature machinery in conjunction with over fifty sawmills, grindstones, railroad cars, and other electric playthings. "Some of the children get as much enjoyment out of looking at a display like this," she observed, "as other children get out of possessing some of the most wonderful toys in it." A manager at the same store agreed. "The motor engine of that factory yard costs $8 and I don’t believe any one of those boys will get it for a Christmas
present," he noted. "But whoever does get it won't enjoy the thing more than they are enjoying it now."76

Selling Toys to Adults Through Children

If youngsters responded to merchandisers' efforts, and this fact promised future sales, entrepreneurs recognized that the patronage of children brought only slight financial gain. In most instances, youngsters were powerless to act directly upon their wants. Most children at that time, after all, had little money of their own to spend. Managers and analysts realized that parents controlled the family budget. "In his parents' hands is the godlike power to gratify his will if they so incline," noted a writer in Playthings in 1917.77

Many businesspeople concluded that they could both encourage store loyalty and obtain high sales best by utilizing youngsters to sell adults the playthings. "Imagine what a terrific force for advertising your business is contained in the school boys and girls," insisted Walter A. Olsen, advertising and sales manager at Kohen-Furchgott Co., in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1915. "Think of the thousands of little advertisements walking around on two legs that you can employ to boom trade in your store."78

Toy retailers soon began employing children as agents of the consumer ethic, both in the store and at home, in an effort to motivate adult toy buyers, the actual purchasers of
playthings. "The old axiom about reaching a man’s heart through his stomach may be paraphrased by declaring that you can easiest reach his pocketbook through his children . . . ," noted an industry writer in Chicago during the 1913 Christmas season.79

Retailers utilized youngsters to sell playthings to parents when both children and adults came to the store together. Retailers began their sales efforts by exposing youngsters to the merchandise itself in as direct a manner as possible. Adults were often unwitting accomplices in their own manipulation. Indeed, by the second decade of the twentieth century, parents themselves had been so well trained in the functionalist nature of play and playthings that they had begun to bring their children to the department store toy department, in the words of one Toys and Novelties writer, "as to an instructive exhibition," but one retailers had prepared with store windows, fixtures, demonstrations and other forms of display to attract the attention of both youngsters and adults.80

Window displays could be an especially useful way to catch a youngster’s eye and thus bring both parent and child actually into a store. Chicago toy retailers, according to one journalist, excelled in window design. "In their rivalry for business," noted one Toys and Novelties observer in Chicago in 1913, "the Chicago dealers have spared no expense in arousing the desire of the children for the toys
they are offering." Managers devoted entire city blocks of store windows to the display of playthings. "These big store windows with their labyrinth of toys are to the boys and girls veritable paradise," concluded this same writer, "and only a man with a calloused heart could deny his children the pleasure of a visit to the district."^\textsuperscript{81}

The style and content of window displays varied from store to store. While some window dressers filled display windows with as large a variety of merchandise as possible, other designers contrived carefully planned, artistic settings within which toys might be exhibited. Regardless, experts on window dressing maintained that by targeting youngsters, toy retailers might best loosen parental purse strings. "Remember that through the child you will reach the heart of the parent," insisted E. Dudley Pierce in his 1915 article, "Wonderful Christmas Windows." "So appeal to a child’s vision of things."^\textsuperscript{82}

Other window-dressers, recalling those factors deemed most appealing to a store’s youngest customers, incorporated motion into their window displays. In 1915, B. H. Miller, an analyst employed by Toys and Novelties, witnessed the effect a simple mechanical toy demonstration could have on one "wide-eyed, chubby little boy of three, or thereabouts" accompanied by his "extremely well dressed" mother. Miller noted that even before the actual demonstration had begun, the youngster "had fastened his face so close to the glass
as to endanger his breathing, while his soul went out to the wonders before him." A saleswoman then wound and released a tin cat. "The small boy let out one of the most terrific shrieks of glee I have heard, and at once began dancing up and down and waving his arms in the utmost throes of pure joy," noted Miller. "His face was simply alive with emotion and his eyes sparkled, while he gurgled and danced at the funny antics of the cat."83

Hoping to increase sales, some store managers employed youngsters themselves in store windows to sell toys. In 1917, a Michigan retailer shifted his store’s playroom to the front window. After filling this display area with carefully chosen mechanical toys and other playthings to be operated by youngsters, "he let the children loose in his window." They of course demonstrated the toys in question. This innovative and successful display drew large crowds to the merchant’s storefront and, undoubtedly, the toy department.84 In 1919, a Cincinnati department store toy retailer held a popularity contest in his store window, where he displayed photographs of the young contestants. Patrons of the store received one vote with each dollar’s worth of toys purchased. "The firm remained absolutely neutral in the contest, favoring no particular child and refusing any information as to the identity of the different faces," noted an observer from Toys and Novelties. "Of course if some of the parents recognized their offspring and
quietly tipped off their friends and relatives, that was no concern of the advertisers." The contest window drew large crowds, as did the counting of the ballots, also held in the store’s window. "It is needless to say, however, that all children in the contest were on hand, together with a host of friends, relatives and curious ones in general," noted the *Toys and Novelties* reporter.85

Once halted and enticed by a well-designed store window, retailers hoped that parent and child might then enter the store itself. Inside the store, managers and other salespeople continued to utilize young people to shape adult buyer behavior. Here again, toy displays catered to children’s weaknesses. "[T]he moving things, the working things, the things that reproduce ‘the strenuous life’ of the older people, these should be displayed where the boy and his parents can see them," noted a *Playthings* analyst in a 1903 issue. "The trains should be moving, the shops working, the boats moving in the water and the electric lights glowing."86 A writer for the New York *Sun* described just such a display in a city department store. There salespeople constructed an entire factory facility in miniature complete with "half a dozen shoots, dumps, cutters and other things operated by a single engine and sandwiched between sawmills, grindstones, railroad cars and fifty or more articles besides operated by electricity." "In all the leading stores salespeople wind up animals, motors and dolls
over and over again, and show off the finest of the stock without a murmur whether visitors show an intention of buying or not," he noted. "In some stores one might imagine that to provide a tiptop show free of cost for the public was the supreme aim of the managers." Of course such was not their goal. Rather, retailers expected the reaction of children to such displays might motive parents to purchase toys for their children. "The eyes of the boy will light up as he sees them, and the parents will make mental notes of this fascinated look and his exclamations of delight," noted the aforementioned writer at Playthings, "The toys will sell themselves." 87

Once interested enough in the toys being demonstrated to make a possible purchase, a salesperson might approach both parent and child in an effort to close the sale. In this context, the child played an increasingly important role in convincing adults to buy. By showing interest in the child, noted analysts in Toys and Novelties, a salesclerk might subtly appeal to the adult toy buyer. "Every mother believes that her child is more interesting and more everything else than any other existing infant, and an apparent personal interest on the part of the clerk is a sort of acknowledgment of this fact," concluded a writer for Toys and Novelties in 1915. "It brings you at once into a closer relation with her, it puts you right, so to speak, and the chances for sales are immediately increased."
Convinced that youngsters had little idea of value and could be easily sold on an item regardless of price, analysts also noted that a salesclerk might utilize a child as an ally to force the purchase of more expensive toys. "In the second place," continued the Toys and Novelties writer, interest shown in the youngster "swings the child over to your side of the game, and after that it is but a question of how deep mother’s purse is."88

Retailers concluded that they might more easily secure a sale if the child actually handled a toy. "There is one phase of the selling problem that must not be overlooked," insisted critic Rockwell in Playthings in 1917, "and that is that the salesmen be thoroughly trained in the psychology of salesmanship that makes for the policy of placing the merchandise in the prospective customer’s hands—thus creating at once the desire for ownership and going most of the way towards clinching the sale." Thus departmental boosters suggested that while salespeople attempted to convince parents to buy, that clerks hand girls dolls to cradle, or allow boys to play with the electric trains.89

By employing youngsters to sell toys to adults, salespeople often successfully deflected criticism away from both the salesclerk and store. In 1915 in one toy department, a reporter for Toys and Novelties watched a successful saleswoman lift a youngster into the saddle of a rocking horse even as another clerk began wrapping an
earlier purchase. "The more he rocked the better he liked that animal, and the firmer his friendship towards it became, until there was no parting them," noted the industrial observer. "At the merest suggestion that it was time to be going home, many baby tears came at once into evidence, and the end of it all was a blue purchase slip with directions for shipping." Throughout this "more or less forced sale," the saleswoman successfully assumed the role of helpful friend or expert. The toy buyer, concluded this supporter of follow-up selling at Toys and Novelites, "did not leave the store with the feeling that she had been led into purchasing something she did not want, she laid not the slightest blame on the sales girl or the store, it was all on the head of her most stubborn son, who cared not a whit what she thought of him."\textsuperscript{90}

As related above, other toy retailers redesigned toy displays to foster the handling of playthings by youngsters. During the 1913 Christmas selling season, employees at the Tampa Photo and Art Supply Co., in Tampa, Florida, converted a women’s restroom into a playroom for children. "The children enter this house, remaining as long as they like," boasted W. C. Burgert, the toy department manager. "They cry when they have to leave and the only consolation that mother or father can give is to purchase some playthings to take home."\textsuperscript{91}
The Limits of Department Store Merchandising

While progressive selling methods never worked as well as some entrepreneurs had hoped, retailers employing the new merchandising techniques succeeded on two levels. As mentioned above, retailers did attract and train children as consumers. At the same time, distributors also increased toy profits.

As department store entrepreneurs employed new merchandising methods, they sold more toys. "It is doubtful if any other department in the store can show such a steady persistent growth as that shown in the toy department," concluded Robert H. McCready, Playthings general manager, in 1918. "Year after year the total sales of toys have increased."92 In the May, 1912, issue of Playthings, analysts linked increases in industry-wide sales to a number of factors, including the creation of a large number of Christmas toy departments. But that same year, another journalist at Playthings also related industry-wide prosperity to significant increases in the number of year-round toy departments.93 "Toys are coming into their own, not through the return of the old-fashioned toy store," concluded Toys and Novelties columnist, W. Barrett Hankins, in 1917, "but through the coming-in of the new-fashioned toy department in stores where the higher order of merchandising
prevails, and by which the child-life of our country will be made happier and enriched in knowledge."94

But if retailers had some success using progressive sales techniques to train customers in consumption, foster customer loyalty, and increase sales, the realities of the department store limited the effectiveness of progressive selling. First, sophisticated sales efforts worked only after the customer entered the store. While managers utilized window displays and other enticements to lure shoppers into the department store, shoppers too easily avoided department store marketing efforts. In addition, successful sales efforts required skilled and experienced sales help, and analysts complained that such salespeople seldom staffed department store toy departments.

As early as 1915, even as analysts praised the new selling techniques, eyewitnesses had begun to complain about inept department store sales help. "It has often been remarked in these columns," noted an editorialist in 1915 in an issue of *Toys and Novelties*, "that the standard of salesmanship in the retail toy trade is not a high standard."95 "[E]ven the most primary essentials of salesmanship are so lacking in the majority of persons who are selected to sell toys in this country," noted Miller, "that it is hard for any reasoning person to understand how a useful year-'round trade is really to be expected just yet."96 Writers complained that salespeople hesitated even
to approach prospective customers. "As a matter of fact," noted Miller, recalling a department store shopping trip to buy a toy for his three-year-old niece, "I could have walked around the department [sic] for an hour or more without a question of any sign of activity from the few clerks in attendance, and I was forced to actually asked one of them to kindly wait on me."97

Even if clerks approached shoppers, salespeople often had few constructive things to say, for they generally knew little about the merchandise management employed them to sell. "It is quite an unordinary experience," concluded Miller, "when a man can walk into a toy store and get a real good intelligent answer to some question about a toy . . . ."98 "The clerk has no knowledge of dolls and is unable to say anything which would suggest the sale of one doll in preference to another," concluded a Toys and Novelties editorialist in 1915, while describing a hypothetical department store encounter. "That is the usual case."99 Even when clerks gave advice, their suggestions were sometimes erroneous, for they had little understanding of children's abilities at different stages of development. "At a counter containing many small toys, I picked up a small typewriter, and asked the clerk if it would make an appropriate gift to my three-year-old niece," reported
Miller. "To my astonishment she replied that it should do very nicely . . . ." 100

Writers complained that department store salespeople lacked even the most basic selling techniques. The customer "generally has to do most of the selling himself, if it isn't a case where the toy does the selling," noted Miller in Toys and Novelties in 1915, "for the majority of clerks are scarcely able to quote prices without looking at a toy and often enough they don't even do that, but just stand around and talk or fiddle with something else, while the customer finds out whether he wants to buy or not." 101 Miller's clerk even tried to talk him out of a more expensive purchase. "[H]er attempt to sell a 98-cent article in preference to one worth $5.00 stamped her as utterly incompetent to sell anything," insisted Miller. 102

If analysts deemed department store sales help ineffective, however, critics fixed ultimate blame for inept selling upon retailers themselves. In fact, poor selling drove a wedge between manufacturers and distributors. "We are in very close touch with the toy dealers ourselves, and with the manufacturers of toys, who are in close touch with the trade and who study the selling of their products far closer than most dealers imagine," reported the Toys and Novelties editorialist mentioned above. "We have,
therefore, a reason for believing that the dealers in
general are not all they might be . . . "103

Management, critics noted, undervalued salesmanship.
"The selling end of any business is granted by most to be
nearly the most important branch of that particular
business," concluded one editorialist in Toys and Novelties
in 1915, "yet throughout this great, broad and prosperous
country of ours there is scarcely a toy retailer, be his
speciality shop, department store or any other kind of
store, who takes more than a passing interest in
salesmanship."104 In an effort to cut costs, Miller
concluded, retailers hired unskilled, inexperienced, "four-
dollar a week clerks." "[A] terrible lot of cheap labor is
employed in this country to sell toys," Miller noted in
1915, "and that is one of the reasons why a lot of ledger
balances aren't bigger on the credit side."105

Having hired inexperienced clerks, department store
managers themselves exacerbated selling problems. Managers
frequently shifted clerks from one department to another,
rather than allowing new employees to acclimate themselves
to selling toys. "It wouldn't be so bad, even if they did
employ four-dollar a week clerks, if the clerks had a chance
to stay on the floor, or in the employ of the company for
that matter, and learn something about the stock carried and
the toys themselves," concluded analyst Miller. "But no,
that wouldn't do at all, for they are needed at some sales
counter one day and in another department the next, and they have but a small chance to get acquainted with the things they are selling.\textsuperscript{106}

Like their clerks, insisted disgruntled manufacturers and other critics, toy retailers knew too little about their merchandise. "Now it has always been our belief, and we might state here that we are far from being alone in this belief, that the retailer of toys, that is, the average retailer, is quite deficient in his knowledge concerning the actual toys he is buying and selling," concluded the editorialist for Toys and Novelties. "We mean, of course, his knowledge of the materials and workmanship in toy construction."\textsuperscript{107} As a result, many distributors were unable to sell toys effectively or train a salesforce properly.

If sales increased, analysts and manufacturers insisted, toys themselves, not salesmanship, made sales happen. "Window demonstrations of mechanical or other motion toys have become very popular of late," concluded B. H. Miller, a regular contributor to Toys and Novelties, in a 1915 issue of that trade journal, "and many dealers and manufacturers have fooled themselves into believing that they are employing good salesmen, though an analysis of the sales resulting from such demonstrations would show that in most instances it was the toy itself rather than the demonstrator that did the selling."\textsuperscript{108}
Industry analysts determined that if manufacturers and distributors were to increase sales, retailers could no longer rely upon inexperienced saleshelp. "Why any store will place cheap, uninstructed labor of this sort behind their counters is an unexplained mystery," concluded Miller, "and it only goes to show that there is a great deal to be accomplished before a real year-'round business will exists." 109

Conclusion

Under the tutelage of department store entrepreneurs, children grew increasingly enthralled with a new consumer imperative, as well as the institutions of the consumer culture. Using personality, businesspeople taught youngsters how to consume, but also exposed children to the rewards consumption offered. In this way, lessons learned in the toy department proved useful in a wide variety of consumer situations.

As businesspeople socialized children into the culture, these same youngsters contributed to adult consumer training. On one level, youngsters shaped the consumer behavior of their parents. Young people also brought their parents into department stores. There, adults inevitably pressed either a child or salesclerk for information on the merchandise in question, all the while comparing one item to another. Later, adults purchased toys. On another level,
youngsters also shaped adult consumer cognitions. Through their children, parents gained store and product knowledge. As they purchased playthings, they experienced the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of consumption. A well-chosen toy might bring gratitude, parental fulfillment, or simply peace and quiet.

Despite the success department store retailers had socializing customers to consume, businessmen sought more effective means by which they might manipulate shoppers. As Miller argued that both managers and clerks needed to pay closer attention to salesmanship, some entrepreneurs were preparing to abandon or greatly modify more traditional selling methods. Still hoping to increase year-round toy sales, as well as solidify customer loyalty, these businessmen would instead institutionalize a form of selling that many critics believed existed unofficially anyway. To a large extent, entrepreneurs planned to eliminate the need for sales help by instituting self-service retailing so that toys could sell themselves. While previously department store selling had had little influence on toy design, these marketing innovations, as we shall see, influenced the nature of manufactured playthings.
NOTES TO CHAPTER II


3 "Essentials in the Toy Department Interior," Toys and Novelties, June 1913, 45.


7 Hower, History of Macy's of New York, 462-464fn.


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11 "The Christmas Toy Campaign, Part I," Playthings, September 1917, 64.


13 Susan Porter Benson, Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 80, 94.

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15 Black, "Cashing In On Father," 222.

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60"Look After the Children," Playthings, July 1915, 84.


63"Essentials in the Toy Department Interior," 45.

64"From a Successful Note Book," Toys and Novelties, June 1913, 62-63.


68"From a Successful Note Book," 63.

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73"Stuffed Toy Animals in Demand; Dolls and Meccano also Have Call," Toys and Novelties, November 1913, 28.


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78Ole Olsen, "Here's a Real Idea," Playthings, February 1915, 111.


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84"Ideas Worth While," Playthings, March 1917, 105.

85"Who is the Most Popular Boy and Girl?" Toys and Novelties, August 1919, 63-64.

86"Displaying Toys," 29.

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88"Hints for Toy Salespeople," Toys and Novelties, December 1915, 34.


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93"Progress," Playthings, June 1912, 71.


95"Intelligent Salesmanship Will Increase Toy Sales," Toys and Novelties, September 1915, 31.

96B. H. Miller, "Something About the Selling of Toys," Toys and Novelties, June 1915, 56.

97Miller, "Something About the Selling of Toys," 57.


100Miller, "Something About the Selling of Toys," 57.


102Miller, "Something About the Selling of Toys," 57.

103"Intelligent Salesmanship Will Increase Toy Sales," 31.


108Miller, "Something About the Selling of Toys," 56.

109Miller, "Something About the Selling of Toys," 57.
CHAPTER III: EXPANDING THE MARKET THROUGH CATALOGUE MERCHANDISING AND DIME STORES, 1912-1918

As department store managers sold children toys, and thus socialized middle-class youngsters and their parents into the culture of consumption, other toy retail pioneers also expanded the market for mass-produced playthings and further trained Americans to consume. First, catalogue entrepreneurs Aaron Montgomery Ward, Richard Warren Sears, and Alvin Curtis Roebuck began distributing playthings to rural Americans. At almost the same time, dime store pioneer F. W. Woolworth and his imitators used different marketing methods to sell toys to working-class urban customers. By using a wide variety of merchandising techniques, then, businesspeople gained greater control over a larger portion of the toy market.

But if catalogue and dime store entrepreneurs exposed more youngsters and adults to consumption than had earlier been the case, the merchandising they experienced was not monolithic. To a large extent, class and location dictated where one shopped, and marketing techniques varied from one retail institution to the next. In particular, rural and
working-class children and their parents initially learned different cognitions and behavior than did nonrural, middle-class toy buyers.

Development of Catalogue Retailing

Catalogue store pioneers were among the first businesspeople to expand the modern consumer experience beyond the doors of the department store, and this change had important ramifications for the consumer culture and especially the toy industry. As they sold toys, entrepreneurs socialized rural Americans into "consumption communities," Daniel J. Boorstin's term for communities defined by consumption of a brand item as opposed to the store loyalty of department store emporiums.¹ In so doing, businesspeople opened the rural market for playthings to domestic toy producers and distributors.

In 1890 there existed a potential rural market for consumer goods, including playthings, greater than that available in the cities. As Boris Emmet and John E. Jeuck have explained, several factors made this so. First, in that year, more Americans lived in rural areas than in cities. Rural and small town Americans constituted a potential market of 40,841,449 individuals (as opposed to 22,106,265 urban dwellers). At the same time, during the second half of the nineteenth century, much national wealth remained concentrated in rural areas, particularly since
farmers turned increasingly towards the production of cash crops. As farmers did so, however, increasingly they also abandoned an earlier degree of self-sufficiency. In this way, rural demand for manufactured goods paralleled an increase in rural wealth, since farmer families had less time to produce clothes, tools, and other necessities.²

Even as demand for toys and other consumer goods increased, isolation limited supply. The Homestead Act of 1862 required homesteaders to live on their claims for five years in order to secure full title to their land, and this requirement kept farmers from merchants. On average, a half mile separated one farmhouse from the next, and homesteaders commonly lived even farther apart. When they did come into contact with retailers, farmers generally found facilities and services wanting. Limited selection and high prices characterized general stores and peddlers, the farmers’ chief suppliers of consumer goods and other manufactured items.³ Given the opportunity, then, farmers and villagers turned readily to mail order establishments for supplies.

In 1872, Aaron Montgomery Ward founded the first mail-order house, "Montgomery Ward," a story told many times before. Ward worked first in a general store and then for Marshall Field’s in Chicago. But his most important experience with rural customers came beginning in 1865. Hired as an itinerant salesman for a St. Louis dry-goods firm, Ward travelled throughout the rural West. In this
way, he learned of farmers' trying experiences with local
general stores. At the same time, Ward realized that he
might cut prices if he used cash to buy goods in large
quantities direct from manufacturers and then sold these
items directly to rural customers for cash. These
observations formed the basis of Ward's mail-order
strategy.4

At first, a price list, not really a catalogue,
advertised Ward's goods to prospective customers, but over
the next two years, his stock grew considerably, and Ward
expanded his advertising accordingly. Between 1872 and
1874, Ward increased his listings first to 8 pages and then
to 72 pages. By 1884, the catalogue contained ten thousand
items and ran 240 pages in length. As Ward continued to add
additional stock to his listings, he also added
illustrations. By the 1880's, the catalogue featured wood
cuts of virtually every item of merchandise Ward offered.5

By the 1880's, Ward also had a competitor: Sears,
Roebuck and Company. Like Montgomery Ward, Sears, Roebuck
and Company grew from obscure beginnings to prominence.
While a railroad station agent, Richard Warren Sears had
begun selling watches to his fellow agents. Business proved
so successful that in 1886, Sears left the railroad, moved
to Minneapolis, and established the R.W. Sears Watch
Company. There the young entrepreneur continued to meet
with success. Soon, however, Sears required a larger
market, and in 1887, he moved again, this time to Chicago. At first, sales fell off, but new business opportunities presented themselves. Because Sears sold watches, Chicagoans approached the mail-order entrepreneur in search of repairs. At the same time, Sears also concluded that he might cut costs by hiring someone to assemble his own watches from parts. With these opportunities in mind, Sears advertised for a watchmaker. Alvah Curtis Roebuck answered the advertisement, and Sears hired him. Eventually, Sears and Roebuck entered into partnership. In 1893, they reorganized their firm as Sears, Roebuck and Company.⁶

At first the partners stocked nothing but watches, but by 1883, they carried a much wider array of merchandise. In 1893, the Sears, Roebuck Catalogue contained 196 pages of goods and encompassed all sorts of merchandise from clothing to furniture. But management rapidly expanded the variety of merchandise carried. Sears again expanded his catalogue by 304 pages to accommodate the increase. Indeed, the booklength of the catalogue testifies to the degree of expansion. In 1894, the catalogue encompassed more than 500 pages of goods.⁷

By the turn of the century, as just one part of their catalogues, both Montgomery Ward and Sears and Roebuck had begun to stock playthings. Indeed, before 1900, catalogue store entrepreneurs had begun providing rural youngsters
with as wide a selection of playthings as department store managers had earlier offered middle-class city children. 8

Ward first stocked playthings in 1877, although initially only a limited variety of toys. In his 1877 catalogue, Ward listed only three playthings: a rubber ball, a croquet set, and dominoes. The very next year, as part of a general catalogue expansion, however, Ward increased his stock of toys. The well-illustrated 1878 catalogue contained two full pages of American-made playthings and included a three-wheel doll perambulator, sleighs, velocipedes, and rocking horses. 9

After 1878, buyers attached greater importance to expanding Ward’s stock of playthings. While Ward buyers had earlier increased toy variety steadily, between 1878 and 1885, the company expanded toy offerings exponentially. Indeed, before the turn of the century, as a matter of policy, buyers for Montgomery Ward had begun to stock almost every newly issued and desirable plaything available. As a result, Montgomery Ward now offered shoppers a more than ample selection of toys. In his 1885 catalogue, for example, Ward listed tin boats, marbles, tin horses and wagons, steamboats, iron stoves with utensils, roller skates, toy chests, bell ringers, and many other playthings. 10

As Ward buyers increased stocks of newer playthings, they now also added to the catalogue superior playthings
that purchasers previously ignored. In 1886, for example, Ward sold dolls for the first time, and by 1887, the catalogue also contained doll accessories, including a range of cloth dolls, French bisque dolls, and paper dolls, in profusion.11

While offering far fewer playthings than businesspeople at Montgomery Ward, before the turn of the century, managers at Sears, Roebuck also listed toys, both imported and domestic, in their catalogue. While Sears' stock of playthings never really rivaled Ward's, Sears did eventually offer shoppers substantial listings. Although buyers steadily increased the variety of toys in stock, like Ward, Sears initially listed few toys. In 1894, the first year Sears, Roebuck offered toys, the catalogue contained only one type of plaything: toy drums. Sears buyers increased selection steadily, however. In 1895, they added two dolls to the catalogue, and in 1896, wagons, rocking horses, Schoenhut pianos, drums, trunks, and carpet sweepers.12 The 1897 Sears & Roebuck catalogue encompassed still more playthings for both girls and boys, including toy sad irons, velocipedes, rocking horses, and boys' wagons.13

By 1907, the logistical demands of mail-order selling delineated which toys merchants stocked, and this fact also shaped the shopping experience. Experience taught management which toys to carry and which to purge from the catalogue. "The toy department handles quite an extensive
line of toys both foreign and domestic," concluded a reporter for *Playthings*, after a visit to the Chicago headquarters of Sears, Roebuck & Co. in 1907, "but there are a number of the best selling toys that cannot be handled satisfactorily by such a house as has been proven by past experience, and as a consequence they have been cut out."\(^{14}\) Popularity alone did not determine which toys buyers did or did not stock. Instead, managers also took the dependability of certain playthings into consideration.\(^{15}\) "Perhaps the toys most conspicuous by their absence are the mechanical lines, than which there are no more popular goods on the market," noted the *Playthings* reporter. "It will be understood that a house doing all business by mail and guaranteeing delivery would find the handling of mechanical numbers expensive to put it mildly."\(^{16}\)

Moreso than the stock, the physical aspects of the institution--as had those of the department store--differed greatly from the traditional toy shop, and these differences shaped the consumer experience. While many mail order entrepreneurs did eventually open actual chain stores, initially no such institutions existed. Consequently, mail order establishments lacked fixtures, windows, or traditional saleshelp through which distributors might merchandise consumer goods. These restrictions forced mail order entrepreneurs to find some other way to sell toys and other stock.
Lacking actual store facilities, mail order pioneers turned to advertising and self-service to sell playthings and other consumer goods, but their methods differed from those employed by other mass distributors. Instead of newspaper and magazine advertisements, mail order entrepreneurs relied primarily upon another form of print advertising, the catalogue. Sears did advertise merchandise leaders in magazines and newspapers, and certain campaigns proved exceedingly profitable. But when Sears advertised in this manner, he did so principally to draw attention to his catalogues, not to sell the advertised item. Indeed, Sears marketed most consumer goods, toys among them, using catalogues exclusively. "No special advertising is done to stimulate the toy business at any season," a Playthings analyst observed in 1907. "The goods are listed in the regular catalog and twice a year a special catalog of Millinery, Fancy Goods, Notions and Toys is gotten out. No magazine or paper is used by this department."\(^{18}\)

Within each catalogue, mail order entrepreneurs, like department store managers, created a fantasy of ownership to encourage shoppers to buy. Because shoppers were so far removed from actual merchandise, however, copywriters employed illustrations and captions to stimulate the imagination of consumers. In this way, merchandisers enabled toys and other goods to sell themselves. The
advertising techniques Sears copywriters employed between 1903 and 1912 exemplified these efforts.

Woodcuts, halftones, and eventually photographs played a major role in helping shoppers to imagine the virtues of merchandise ownership, and so copywriters illustrated many of the playthings Sears listed. In fact, Sears copywriters deemed illustrations so basic to catalogue selling that they used pictures to merchandise both expensive and inexpensive playthings. In the Spring, 1903, edition of his catalogue, for example, Sears used illustrations to sell both a $3.50 Weeden steam locomotive and train set, the most expensive toy in the catalogue, and a 10-cent toy sad iron, one of Sear's least costly offerings.\(^{19}\)

If copywriters recognized the importance of pictures to selling, however, they employed illustrations less effectively than later advertisers would. Sears copywriters seldom used emotive illustrations to sell playthings. Indeed, most pictures showed the toy and nothing more. Only a very few illustrations featured youngsters or other individuals using the plaything in question. Of the more than 50 toy illustrations in the 1903 catalogue, for example, just three showed children playing.\(^{20}\) If somewhat less manipulative than pictures used in later advertisements, however, catalogue illustrations better enabled shoppers to visualize available merchandise and so
imagine the potential advantages of possession. To this extent, at least, they sold playthings effectively.

The nature of Sears' illustrations changed little over time, but Sears altered other aspects of the catalogue noticeably. Before World War I, Sears began targeting different audiences. As he did so, Sears devised an increasingly manipulative style of selling. In this way, Sears' strategy and tactics paralleled those employed by department store merchandisers and later newspaper and magazine advertisers.

At first, Sears sold toys directly to adults. As he did so, for the most part, Sears employed arguments apt to persuade adherents to an ethos of production to buy: pragmatic utility and low cost. "TOY DEPARTMENT," ran the Spring 1907 catalogue, "USEFUL AND PRACTICAL TOYS PRICED VERY LOW." Below, Sears often stressed durability of construction. "A strongly built and well finished, strongly geared vehicle with metal body and seat," ran Sears' advertisement for the "American Clipper Automobile." "Extra Large Size Dolls at very low price," wrote a copywriter in another advertisement. "This line of dolls is not the finest quality, but are well made . . . ."21

By 1907, if for the most part copywriters used a pragmatic appeal to attract adult toy buyers, other advertising in the same catalogue reflected a new emphasis on the emerging values of the consumer culture. In these
advertisements, Sears' other-directed appeal promised notoriety and respect through ownership, rather than through character development. 22 "[The] Flying Dutchman," wrote Sears in a children's handcar advertisement, "attracts more attention than any other vehicle for children." 23 Three year later, in the Fall, 1910, catalogue, Sears used a similar appeal to advertise a malleable iron toy hook and ladder. "If you want something exceptionally fine, a toy that will be admired wherever seen," the copywriter insisted, "select this item." 24

As Sears copywriters changed the nature of their appeal to adults, they also began to address children directly. While copywriters still devised most advertisements for adult shoppers, publicists designed at least two for the Fall, 1910, catalogue with youngsters in mind. "BOYS! Be a Real Fireman," ran the first of these advertisements, for a firefighter play set. "Do you want to be a real fireman? If so, here is your outfit." More often than in adult advertising, copywriters stressed self-fulfillment and personal enjoyment, attributes celebrated by adherents of a developing culture of consumption, in their copy geared to children. "Boys! Attention!" ran an advertisement for a disguise kit. "Here is where you can have some fun." 25

As early as Fall, 1912, Sears again tried new tactics. Now publicists employed youngsters to sell playthings to adults. While, again, most advertisements still targeted
grown-ups directly, a message carried across the bottom of the page urged youngsters to encourage adults to buy: "Have Mother Tell Santa Claus About Doll Go-Carts, Wagons and Sleds."26

There were broad similarities between catalogue and store shopping. Like department and dime stores, mail-order houses offered consumers shopping convenience. Again, as we have seen, like their other mass marketing competitors, mail order merchants tempted their customers with a wide variety of goods. But unlike other mass distributors, as numerous commentators have observed, catalogues brought the modern consumer experience directly into the home, and this key difference profoundly affected both the toy industry and the consumer culture.

The ubiquitous nature of the mail order catalogue made the consumer culture more difficult to avoid. In many instances, as Daniel Boorstin has noted, the mail order catalogue assumed a place in rural homes virtually akin to the Bible. At the same time, rural parents and professionals encouraged children to use the catalogues and thus unwittingly fostered socialization. At some schools, for example, teachers employed mail order catalogues as textbooks. Students practiced arithmetic using order forms, and instructors devised reading and spelling drills from the catalogue. At home, parents continued this sort of consumer training by using the catalogue. In this way, consumption
blended with play. Adults used catalogues like children’s picture books to entertain youngsters. In other instances, farm girls made paper dolls from photographs cut from catalogues.27

If mail order attracted adult shoppers, the catalogue appealed especially to children. In many instances, mail order enabled rural youngsters to experience the fantasy of consumption as readily as adult shoppers. In fact, pictures, so important a part of mail order merchandising, allowed even children too young to read to participate in the culture. Many youngsters might not have had enough money to make actual purchases, but the catalogue enabled children to develop important consumer cognitions and engage in other aspects of consumer behavior. While urban youngsters often encountered salespeople anxious to shoo them from the store, for example, young catalogue shoppers encountered no such animosity. Instead, the catalogue permitted rural children, like their parents, to shop at their leisure. Indeed, mail order encouraged rural youngsters of all ages to make independent "shopping trips" to the catalogue, where they might browse, compare products, and imagine various ownership possibilities, just as adults did.
Ingress of the Dime Store

As mail order pioneers opened the modern consumer experience to rural youngsters, other businesspeople provided urban working-class children with similar opportunities of another kind. Before the turn of the century, dime store retailers also became important distributors of toys, particularly inexpensive playthings, with profound consequences for the consumer culture in general and the toy industry in particular. On one level, dime store toy sales had an important impact upon the toy industry. The dime store opened up the urban market to toymakers. In so doing, the economic success of the dime store contributed particularly to the economic demise of the traditional toy shop. Later, as we shall see, dime store self-service merchandising also influenced department store selling. In the dime store, self-service increased sales while cutting costs.

On another level, dime store retailing also had profound consequences for the consumer culture. Woolworth and other dime store entrepreneurs opened up the modern retail experience to a broader clientele than had department store pioneers. Dime store merchants targeted urban working-class consumers primarily. At the same time, dime store selling techniques offered unprecedented control over both clerks and customers. As we shall see, Woolworth employed an illusion of freedom to encourage shoppers to buy. At the
same time, Woolworth took most selling out of the hands of clerks.

Young Woolworth first discovered the marketing advantage of fixed prices, as well as the inherent ability of goods to sell themselves, while working for another businessman, the proprietor of a dry-goods store. A failure as a salesman, Woolworth was, however, successful at display. In so doing, he discovered merchandising through display combined with fixed pricing. In 1879 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Woolworth opened the first store designed entirely to foster merchandising through fixed prices: the "Five and Ten Cent Store."

In key ways, many of Woolworth's selling techniques differed greatly from those employed by most department store and small shop entrepreneurs. Woolworth first abandoned certain traditional sales techniques altogether. Believing salesmanship unnecessary, even a distraction, as well as too costly, Woolworth eliminated skilled sales help from his stores. At the same time, Woolworth also considered print advertising superfluous and expensive, and so he chose to forego this sort of merchandising.

Instead of print advertising or sophisticated salesmanship, Woolworth relied primarily upon the intrinsic power of merchandise to sell itself. He did so by first offering a wide array of goods at five or ten cents per item. Initially, however, Woolworth had trouble finding
appropriately-priced goods. Eventually, Woolworth turned to "price-lining," to fill his shelves. Under this system, retailers encouraged producers to manufacture goods designed to sell for specific, predetermined prices. In this way, dime store selling affected the design of consumer goods.⁵⁰

Playthings, in particular, provided Woolworth with one answer to his needs. In 1879, the Conway Brothers, proprietors of a successful Philadelphia importing firm, befriended Woolworth and made inexpensive playthings readily available to him. Because the Conways sold toys and dolls directly to Woolworth, and not through a jobber, Woolworth could afford to sell toys at dime-store prices.⁵¹

Eventually, however, Woolworth required other sources of low-cost consumer goods, toys among them, and so in February, 1890, he made his first European buying trip. As just one part of the journey, Woolworth stopped in Sonneberg, Germany, a major toy manufacturing center, with important results. "Sonneberg is headquarters for dolls for the whole world, as nearly every doll of every description is made here or within as few miles from here, and this is the market . . . ." wrote Woolworth. "It seems as though the whole toy trade of America is represented here."⁵²

In Sonneberg, Woolworth found that he could cut costs by purchasing playthings directly from German manufacturers. "I have found out where those Sailor Dolls that we sold so
many of are made here," wrote Woolworth in a series of "General Letters" to his New York Office, "and we can save considerable by buying them direct. We have also struck a firm where a certain house in Philadelphia gets a big line of toys that we have bought for several years." German manufacturers also divulged key purchasing information which enabled Woolworth to undersell his competitors. "We can find out more about the toy and china business of America here than at home," Woolworth continued to his New York colleagues. "Here we find out what the other firms are buying and what they pay for the goods."33

Like department store entrepreneurs, Woolworth used store personality to merchandise consumer goods, but the personality of Woolworth’s dime store differed dramatically from that of the department store. Department stores, Daniel J. Boorstin has indicated, were like "consumers’ palaces," while dime stores were more like "consumers’ bazaars."34 Just as department store entrepreneurs created an illusion of luxury, Woolworth created an illusion of freedom.

Inside his store, Woolworth used open fixtures to an unprecedented degree. While department store managers also employed open displays, Woolworth relied upon them almost exclusively. He did so for a number of reasons. First, open fixtures cut costs by eliminating the need for sales clerks, since customers could now more easily serve
themselves. More importantly, open fixtures contributed to the market-place atmosphere Woolworth sought to foster. Indeed, open dime-store fixtures bore a greater resemblance to the stalls one might find at open-air market than they did many contemporary department store fixtures. Finally, open fixtures placed few barriers between customers and goods, and this encouraged Woolworth's customers to handle store merchandise. If shoppers could touch merchandise, Woolworth believed, like other progressive retailers, they would more likely buy.

Shoppers at the five-and-dime encountered a more sensual shopping experience than did middle-class department store customers. Indeed, consumers found the unique tactile nature of dime store shopping particularly alluring. Betty Smith's autobiographical heroine, Francie Nolan, for example, judged touching store merchandise and imagining ownership more thrilling than making an actual purchase. For this reason, Francie made handling store stock a central part of her ritualized shopping experience. "Arriving at the store," wrote Smith, Francie "walked up and down the aisles handling any object her fancy favored. What a wonderful feeling to pick something up, hold it for a moment, feel its contour, run her hand over its surface and then replace it carefully. Her nickel gave her this privilege." As Woolworth hoped and expected, Francie marked the end of her shopping ritual with a purchase. "After an
orgy of touching things," wrote Smith, "she made her planned purchase--five cents worth of pink-and-white peppermint wafers." 35

Like department store entrepreneurs, Woolworth used the physical attributes of the dime store exterior to advertise a unique consumer experience. But while the department store exterior advertised grandeur and spaciousness, Woolworth used his storefront to publicize other attributes, notably convenience, order, and attractiveness, and made his storefront his trademark. In 1900, Woolworth settled on carmine red with gold-leaf lettering and molding--a more garish exterior than any found on a department store--as the standard storefront for his chain of dime stores. Like his fixtures, Woolworth’s color scheme conjured up a carnival image. Woolworth also made extensive use of plate glass store display windows, and this architectural feature enabled merchandise to sell itself to passers-by still on the street.

As he revolutionized retailing, Woolworth targeted markets left virtually untapped by other late-nineteenth century mass market retail pioneers. As historian Susan Porter Benson has indicated, department store entrepreneurs perceived middle and upper-class women, not working-class women, to be their most lucrative market and targeted their appeals accordingly. In so doing, however, they made working-class customers feel unwelcome.
Middle-class women, store managers noted, had family incomes making discretionary and impulse buying possible, and department store entrepreneurs were convinced that larger transactions coupled with multiple sales led to greater profit.\textsuperscript{36} Controlling more limited family incomes, working-class women, department store managers believed, were much less likely to make similar expenditures. "There were many of the poorer people who used to avoid my store," recalled one department store manager in July, 1910. "It was so big and shiny that it looked expensive."\textsuperscript{37} Unlike their poorer sisters, middle and upper-class women also had the time to shop and browse. Employed in mills and factories or engaged in in-home wage-earning and shouldered with household chores, working-class women had little time to stroll departments stores, stopping here and there to admire consumables or to be treated to a clerk’s sales pitch. Finally, by appealing to middle-class manners, styles, and pretensions, department store entrepreneurs created an atmosphere at once inviting to middle and upper-class clients and threatening to members of the working class. When department store managers did invite the business of working-class customers, they typically did so through bargain basements less sumptuously decorated than the rest of the department store and stocked with goods of lower quality.\textsuperscript{38}
If store managers employed relatively subtle techniques to exclude older working-class shoppers from most of the department store, managers were more overt in their disapproval of working-class youngsters. Fearful that the behavior and appearance of working-class children might offend middle-class sensibilities and so reduce sales, managers took steps to segregate poorer youngsters from middle-class adult patrons. At Seigel-Cooper in New York City, for example, managers banished loud, disheveled East Side youngsters from the store lounge.39

Given the inhospitable nature of the department store, more often than not, working-class consumers who were potential toy buyers shopped elsewhere. Susan Porter Benson has already noted that adult wage-earning customers frequented smaller neighborhood merchants, while David Nasaw has shown that working-class youngsters did likewise.40 The observations of a contemporary Playthings analyst, who visited the Lower East Side of New York in 1908, supported these findings. "The buying public in this section of New York," the Playthings writer concluded in 1908, "embraces people who seldom, if ever, do their shopping away from their particular district."41

Working-class patrons frequented local distributors for a host of reasons, some pragmatic, others less so. On one level, local shops were often more conveniently located than department stores, and this constituted an important
advantage for busy working-class shoppers, particularly women. "Their homes are there; their stores are there . . .," the Playthings writer concluded. "Why should they wander abroad into the 'wilds' of Fourteenth Street and the big stores on Sixth Avenue?" Familiarity also bred store loyalty. "All that is of interest in life," the industry analyst continued, "is centered in this crowded, clanging section of Grand Street and the Bowery, and they love it as a little city set apart especially for them." At the same time, working-class consumers saw little reason to shop at New York's department stores, since local merchants saw to most of their wants and needs. For the most part, neighborhood merchants also sold goods at prices wage-earning customers could afford. "[T]hey can get what they want," concluded the analyst for Playthings, "as cheap as they want." Despite low prices, at times certain individuals found that they could not immediately pay for the goods they needed. In such instances, often times neighborhood merchants extended credit—when department store managers would not.

If practicality led working-class shoppers to patronize smaller neighborhood distributors, the same consumers also bought from local merchants for other less pragmatic, although no less important, reasons. Working-class consumers, neighborhood shoppers realized, could expect the sort of hospitality, courtesy, and attention from local
merchants that department store employees refused to provide. Oftentimes the shopkeeper was a friend or even a family member from whom the working-class customer could expect a level of respect unavailable elsewhere. Here, too, immigrant shoppers often found proprietors able to converse in a familiar tongue. Familiarity, custom, and respect made for intense customer loyalty. "To buy elsewhere would be treason," observed the Playthings analyst, "The quaint old building is an heritage handed down to them from their fathers." If some small-scale local merchants welcomed the business of working-class immigrants in general, others catered to working-class children in particular. Certain merchants managing modest businesses--candy store owners, store vendors, penny arcade and nickelodean operators, and other small-scale entrepreneurs--welcomed the patronage of working-class youngsters and built a sizeable portion of their business around children. "Unchanged, the old toy shop has stood through-out the days of war and peace; of panic and plenty; of storm, snow and cyclone; and, battle-scarred, but still standing just as it did then," observed the Playthings writer, "the oldest toy shop looms up amid the bustle and hustle of many new workers--a haven for little East Side boys and girls and East Side boys and girls of an older growth."
But now other retailers geared to mass distribution appeared on the retail scene ready to court the business of the working-class consumers, including children, if not through familiarity, respect, and credit, then through price and convenience. If department stores began as middle and upper-class institutions, the nation’s dime stores catered first and foremost to working-class patrons. Initially, dime store entrepreneur F. W. Woolworth targeted urban immigrants as his customers. "I have been looking over a census of the United States," noted Woolworth in 1890, "and I am convinced that there are one hundred cities and towns where we can locate five-and-ten-cent stores and we can sell a million dollars’ worth of goods a year!" "As the curve of immigration rose," observed John K. Winkler, Woolworth’s biographer, "so did the curve of his ambition."49

The five-and-ten fit comfortably into the working-class lifestyle of both children and adults. One needed little discretionary income to shop at Woolworth’s. As in the case of Smith’s Francie, a mere nickel or dime made one a potential customer. Nor did shopping at the five-and-dime require a great deal of time.50 Open bins conveniently displayed a vast array of items and facilitated quick transactions. Popular pricing also sped up dime-store shopping. One had, after all, little reason to shop for price at the five-and-dime. Shoppers also found few bourgeois pretensions at the five-and-dime. Cost
considerations prohibited expensive decorations and services, and determined quality. There was little pressure to make a purchase. Woolworth once bragged that his managers "make their stores Fairs and a person can go entirely through them without once being pressed to buy everything."51

Woolworth was not only one of the first modern merchants to target working-class Americans, but he was also one of the first to cater systematically to children.52 Indeed, high levels of toy sales testify to the important role children played as primary and secondary dime store customers. By the 1880's, Woolworth found playthings to be among his best selling merchandise.53

Woolworth's five-and-dime stores held a special allure for youngsters, and this attraction contributed to toy and other sales. "And what was on Broadway in Williamsburg, Brooklyn?" wrote Betty Smith, capturing the excitement a trip to Woolworth's engendered in children: "Nothing--only the finest nickel and dime store in all the world!" The carnival atmosphere especially appealed to children, since the dime store, like a carnival, seemingly offered young shoppers an endless array of possible experiences. "It was big and glittering," Smith continued, "and had everything in the world in it . . . or so it seemed to an eleven-year-old girl." Unlike the department store, dime store popular pricing enabled even relatively poor children to consume
directly. "[Francie] could buy practically anything in that store!" wrote Smith. "It was the only place in the world where that could be."54

If a mere nickel or dime made a youngster a customer, meager funds also entitled children to enjoy a host of ambiguous consumer freedoms. The ability to consume, youngsters learned, gave one power. "Francie had a nickel," wrote Smith. "Francie had power."55 On one level, dime store consumer experience, like department store toy department shopping, offered youngsters parity with adults. As consumers, noted historian David Nasaw, even youngsters of modest means assumed "quasi-adult dimensions," and so within the dime store, a child might experience a degree of independence and autonomy rare elsewhere.56 On another level, again as in department store shopping, the dime store retail experience offered children power over adults, particularly grown-up sales help. If consumption meant power, Francie also learned that power lent one a semblance of middle-class respectability. "If a floorwalker asked [Francie] whether she intended buying anything, she could say yes, buy it and show him a thing or two," wrote Smith of her heroine, Francie Nolan. "Money was a wonderful thing, she decided."57

Before the turn of the century, the number of five-and-ten-cent stores increased dramatically, giving more and more working-class youngsters like Francie the opportunity to
experience dime store shopping. By 1900, Woolworth controlled 59 dime stores. By the early 1900’s, Woolworth also had imitators and competitors, who joined him in socializing working-class shoppers, particularly children, into the culture of shopping and buying: McCrory, S. S. Kresge, S. H. Kress, and others. As more and more children frequented the five-and-dime, the dime store shopping experience socialized an increasing number of children into the consumer culture.

After the turn of the century, the influence of the dime store continued to increase as Woolworth now targeted middle-class, as well as working-class patrons, with some success. Before the turn of the century, class-conscious middle and upper-class shoppers for the most part avoided the five-and-dime, fearing that a dime store purchase might stigmatize them as working-class. On occasion, however, middle and upper-class consumers, curious or in search of bargains, shopped Woolworth’s dime stores. "We were pretty much looked down on," recalled Alvin Edgar Ivie, who managed Woolworth’s first Manhattan store, which opened in 1896. "When upper-crusters who knew each other would meet, each would pretend to the other that it was her first visit to the store--even though I’d seen both at our counters repeatedly." 

Building upon this meager middle-class clientele, Woolworth eventually cultivated a substantial bourgeois
following. He understood middle-class fears and merchandised accordingly. Woolworth instructed his managers to shower middle-class patrons with additional consideration and courtesy. "Be especially attentive to customers who come to your store in carriages," he wrote. "This class of people likes to be petted and waited upon."61 Years later, still catering to middle-class sensitivities, Woolworth admonished one manager never to mark merchandise with the store name: "We don’t want Mrs. Brown to know that Mrs. Jones has been shopping in the five and ten and Mrs. Jones doesn’t want to advertise to Mrs. Brown that she has to go to a five and ten cent store to buy her goods. It might look like she is hard up."62

Woolworth himself observed that by the first decade of the twentieth century, middle class customers had begun to shop his stores frequently. In 1905, he boasted of wealthier customers, while at the same time noting that the true basis for his firm’s financial well-being remained solidly working-class. "The five and ten cent business is no longer a Cheap John Affair," he remarked. "We cater to the masses but we have gained the respect and the trade of the medium and wealthy classes."63

To a degree, however, Woolworth’s dime stores retained their working-class reputation even after World War I. In 1918, Woolworth opened his one-thousandth store in a fashionable retail district across from the New York Public
Library. Journalists, critical of the working-class character of his establishments, lambasted the dime store magnate for his decision. But Woolworth brushed their complaints aside. "They imagine that only the poorer classes patronize the five-and-ten-cent stores," he insisted. "That is no longer true."64

As Woolworth sought to expand the dime store market, during the second decade of the twentieth century, dime-store selling techniques influenced merchandising in other retail establishments, particularly the department store. Relatively poor people, analysts now realized, offered a lucrative trade. "People are just awakening to the fact," wrote industry analyst Anderson Pace in 1913, "that 65,000,000 people in America have incomes so small as to compel them to confine their buying to the limits of popular prices." The business of children, they noted (as had Woolworth earlier), could be especially profitable. "Children are the buyers and users of toys," Pace insisted, "Playthings are their staples, and it’s safe to say that 1,000 children have nickels, dimes and quarters to spend to one who can spend a larger coin."65 Indeed, that year, Woolworth sold 10,000 gross of tin toys alone.66

By 1911, trade journalists reported, dime-store selling techniques had spread from the five-and-dime to other retail establishments. "'Knox's,' or 'Woolworth's,' or 'Kresge's' has become a household word in millions of homes," concluded
the editors of *Toys and Novelties* that year. "But these leaders and thousands of smaller exclusive small wares stores must now share with the bargain counters of thousands of department and general stores the honor of raising the dime and half-dime to its true position in the world of merchandising." Analysts noted that toy stores, candy stores, hardware stores, and corner notion stores had also begun to sell five-and-ten-cent playthings. The increasing pervasiveness and success of dime store selling techniques sparked expert awareness. Before 1911, the editors of the industrial journal, *Toys and Novelties*, had virtually ignored dime-store retailing. Beginning with the October, 1911, issue, however, the editors of *Toys and Novelties* inaugurated a new column devoted entirely to the dime store style of selling.

**Conclusion**

Mail order entrepreneurs and dime store pioneers gave youngsters and others, who would otherwise never have had the opportunity, the chance to learn modern consumer cognitions and behavior. But if merchants exposed both rural youngsters and working-class urban children to consumption, the consumer experience was not monolithic in nature. Businesspeople differentiated merchandising according to social and economic class. As we have seen, the tactile nature of dime store self-service, the sort
working-class customers encountered, differed markedly from the in-home mail order buying rural shoppers and other catalogue customers enjoyed. Both experiences differed significantly from the kind of shopping middle and upper-class department store patrons encountered. Department store customers experienced personality and enjoyed an atmosphere of grandeur and a level of personal service alien to patrons of other consumer institutions. As businesspeople turned to print advertising, however, the cultural experience became more homogeneous for all toy customers.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III


3Boorstin, The Americans, 119; Emmet and Jeuck, Catalogues and Counters, 15.

4Boorstin, The Americans, 121-122.

5Boorstin, The Americans, 122.


7Boorstin, The Americans, 126, 128.


9McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 349.

10McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 349-350.


12McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 350.


14"Mail Order Toys," Playthings, March 1907, 56.

15Sears, Roebuck & Co., catalogue, Fall 1907, 1135.

16"Mail Order Toys," 58.

17Emmet and Jeuck, Catalogues and Counters, 60.

18"Mail Order Toys," 58.

19Sears, Roebuck & Co., catalogue, Spring 1903, 989.

20See, for example, Sears, Roebuck & Co., catalogue, Spring 1903, 989, 990-991.

21Sears, Roebuck & Co., catalogue, Spring 1907, 1252-1253.

Sears, Roebuck & Co., catalogue, Spring 1907, 1252.

Sears, Roebuck & Co., catalogue, Fall 1910, 938.

Sears, Roebuck & Co., catalogue, Fall 1910, 933-934.

Sears, Roebuck & Co., catalogue, Fall 1912, 644.


Nichols, *Skyline Queen and the Merchant Price*, 44.


Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 76-78, 90.

Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 89.


"New York's Oldest Toy Store," 42.

"New York's Oldest Toy Store," 42.

Benson, Counter Cultures, 78.

Benson, Counter Cultures, 78.

"New York's Oldest Toy Store," 42.

Nasaw, Children of the City, 117.

"New York's Oldest Toy Store," 42, 44.

Winkler, Five and Ten, 102.

Nasaw discusses the constraints work placed upon wage-earning youngsters' leisure time; see Children of the City, 120.

Boorstin, The Americans, 115.

Nichols, Skyline Queen and the Merchant Prince, 50-51.

Winkler, Five and Ten, 53.

Smith, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, 8.

Smith, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, 8.

Nasaw, Children of the City, 118.

Smith, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, 8.

Boorstin, The Americans, 114.

Winkler, Five and Ten, 162-164.

Quoted in Winkler, Five and Ten, 118.

Quoted in Winkler, Five and Dime, 118.

Quoted in Winkler, Five and Ten, 170.

Quoted in Winkler, Five and Ten, 146.

Winkler, Five and Ten, 169-170, 227-228.

"Winkler, Five and Ten, 199.

"News of Five and Ten Cent Trade," Toys and Novelties, October 1911, 32.
CHAPTER IV: PRINT ADVERTISING AND THE HOMOGENIZATION OF THE TOY MARKET, 1913-1918

After 1890, print advertising, but especially toy advertising, grew increasingly sophisticated and effective—with major consequences for the toy industry in particular and the consumer culture in general. Even as advertisers offered an illusion of greater consumer freedom, toy retailers and manufacturers with their advertising gained increasing control over salesmanship and, as a result, over shoppers.

Print advertising in general and toy advertising evolved together. In fact, in some instances, toy publicists were in the forefront of advertising developments. Playthings, businesspeople discovered, adapted easily to many of the latest innovations in print selling. The first toy advertisers had merely reacted to the existing market for playthings, and their copy reflected the limits of this merchandising strategy. Toy makers and sellers then began to use print advertising to control, and later actually to create, toy markets. As advertising strategy changed, tactics followed suit. Businesspeople advertised first to
adults, then to children, and finally to adults through children. In this way, especially during the early twentieth century, print advertising helped increase toy sales dramatically.

But if print advertising enabled retailers and manufacturers to sell more toys, there were other, more significant ramifications. As businesspeople relied increasingly upon print advertising to sell playthings and other goods, an ethos of consumption grew more and more pervasive. Through magazine advertising, especially, marketing experts extended the modern consumer experience beyond the confines of department and specialty stores and into the parlors of most middle-class American homes. Newspaper advertising reinforced these developments but also brought messages of consumption into less affluent, working-class households. As the consumption ethos spread in this way, on one level, the modern consumer experience also grew more homogeneous. Changes in retail merchandising necessitated by the First World War, a shift from personal selling to self-service retailing, contributed still further to these developments. At the same time, on another level, the ubiquitous nature of the modern consumer experience made socialization into the culture increasing difficult to avoid. Taken together, these changes marked a major turning
point in the history of the toy industry as well as of the consumer culture.

**Informational Advertising and the Advent of Brand-Name Publicity**

Changes in toy advertising paralleled developments in merchandising strategy and tactics at large. The historical development of advertising has not always been directly linear, however. Indeed, Roland Marchand has shown that print advertising in general has had a complex history, and toy advertising, again, differed little in this regard. Even as more progressive sellers utilized increasingly sophisticated advertising tactics, conservative businessmen continued to employ antiquated styles.¹

But if the history of toy advertising proved somewhat involved, an identifiable pattern of change existed nonetheless. Like other advertising, toy makers and sellers changed their copy noticeably and purposefully over time. Increasingly, advertisers employed emotional, as opposed to rational, arguments to persuade consumers to buy. It was in the course of instituting this change that experts eventually targeted youngsters directly and adults indirectly through children. In the process, copywriters first helped, then replaced, and finally superseded distributors engaged in personal retail selling.

Toy advertisers first employed a rational strategy of informational advertising to sell playthings directly to
adult toy buyers. As businesspeople did so, they envisioned advertising as an aid to salesmanship. As in retail encounters, initially, the producer culture, not the consumer culture, influenced toy advertisers’ strategy. Before 1840, scarcity, as opposed to abundance, shaped merchandising strategy and style. Demand for most manufactured goods, including playthings, far outstripped supply. Unable to provide goods for existing markets, advertisers saw little need to create wants and needs. Instead, advertisers, particularly importers, used print advertising to inform consumers of the arrival of goods in quantity. Indeed, as late as the 1870’s and 1880’s, in Daniel Pope’s words, "‘announcement’ . . . served as a synonym for ‘advertisement.’"2 Prior to the 1840’S, then, businesspeople merely reacted to an existing market.

These contemporary merchandising tactics reflected the limited strategic requirements of the first toy advertisers. Sometime prior to the 1840’S, toy sellers began advertising playthings in local newspapers. In most instances, however, merchants created simple, unimaginative copy designed solely to announce the arrival of imported playthings. In the December 23, 1844, issue of The Daily Keystone, for example, George and John Doll, proprietors of the New Toy and Variety Store in Philadelphia, ran a typical advertisement of this sort. The copy contained no rhetorical embellishments or illustrations and only the barest of merchandising
information. "Just received--" the Dolls reported simply, "a large assortment of Toys, Dolls, Guns, Drums, Harmonicas, Games, Toys in Boxes of every description. (German Pipes, Chess men.) Horses & Wagons, a new style Basket Wagon, Doll Heads, Wax Dolls, etc."³

If mere announcements typified most nineteenth-century toy advertisements, by the 1840’s, according to Inez and Marshall McClintock, chroniclers of the industry, certain toy copy had already begun to take on a more modern cast.⁴ City merchants now began to replace simple advertisements with somewhat more imaginative copy. On one level, advertisers referred to the same personal attention that customers had come to expect while shopping in the traditional toy shop. In one such advertisement, for example, a New York importer, anxious to assure shoppers of the quality of his stock, stressed the special attentiveness he lavished upon the toy selection process. "By packet from LeHavre, bought by himself--" read the advertisement for Woodworth’s Fancy Store in the December 21, 1844, edition of The New York Commercial Advertiser, "Locomotives, Mechanical and Automaton Toys for Children--having been selected by himself personally in Europe and bought from the original manufacturers."⁵

On another level, a different writer coupled reference to his personal selling style to a short jingle:
The subscriber returns his thanks for past favors, and hopes he can solicit a share of public patronage for the coming holidays, to his variety of Toys and fancy articles, etc. Toys of all kinds, newly imported this season with an elegant assortment of Wax Dolls, Doll Heads, Arms and Bodies, and numerous other toys, in which

    Worth and Beauty are combined
    To please the eye and suit the mind. 6

If, after 1840, announcement-style advertisements grew more sophisticated, by the turn of the century, a number of businesspeople found such enriched copy wanting. There were two problems. First, merchandisers had increased the sheer volume of print advertising. Second, technological change rendered more traditional print advertising less effective and more anachronistic. By the beginning of the new century, toy advertisements competed for public attention against not only other informational copy, but also against other, more exciting, visual stimuli. Increasingly, billboards, streetcar advertising, motion pictures, and other media distracted shoppers from messages that print advertisers hoped to convey. Because informational advertising relied almost solely upon the written word, publicists concluded, consumers found such copy dull by comparison. 7

In response to the new visual environment, toy advertisers devised a fresh advertising strategy. Businesspeople now sought less to inform readers than to gain the attention of the buying public. 8 Towards these ends, advertisers employed a rational strategy of publicity
to sell playthings directly to adult shoppers. But as they did so, toy publicists continued to envision advertising as an aid to saleshelp engaged in personal selling.

Copywriters next devised innovative tactics to facilitate the new strategy. In competition with a wide array of visual stimuli, advertisers themselves now adopted visual stimuli as an instrumental part of an overall advertising scheme. Critics attached greater importance to typeface, layout, and composition. At the same time, copywriters employed eye-catching illustrations to grab reader attention. In the December, 1909, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, for example, a publicist for M. J. Chase, manufacturers of the "Chase Stockinet Doll," issued readers a photographic challenge designed to demonstrate the life-like quality of his employer’s product. "Which is the Live Baby?" the copywriter asked. "Ask your family to guess." Both were actually "Chase Stockinet Dolls."

As businesspeople made advertisements more visual, writers also relied increasingly upon clever rhetoric to support illustrations and to sell toys. "Recognizing the great worth of printer’s ink," wrote a *Playthings* analyst, commenting on the 1908 Christmas selling season, "column after column in the big dailies in every part of the country have heralded the return of Santa Claus, by clever prose, by poem and by attractive illustration." Copywriters embellished magazine advertisements with a similar rhetorical
array. Advertisements for The A. Schoenhut Company, well-known wooden toymakers, carried the slogan, "TOYS THAT GLADDEn THE HEARTS OF OUR LITTLE DEAR ONES." A publicist for the Onondaga Indian Wigwam Co. of Syracuse, New York utilized an imaginative saying to sell the company line of "Indian outfits:" "The delight of the healthy boy. The health of the delightful boy."

As advertisers grew more desperate to compete, however, they produced increasingly sensational and outlandish copy. "It is an old-fashioned notion," observed a Playthings writer in 1908, "that an advertisement must 'stand up and flare from the housetops,' pawing the air, throwing mud at a competitor in some cases, or roses in great baskets full at itself." Hoping to capture reader attention, desperate copywriters went so far as to publish toy advertisements upside down. As late as 1914, "The Ad Booster" criticized publicists employed by Strawbridge & Clothier of Philadelphia for either purposefully or accidentally employing the technique. "The type is well chosen and the copy is very well written, but the cut shown upside down is in the writer's opinion a grave mistake," the analyst concluded. "The day has passed when as men believed that an ad must do acrobatic stunt of this kind to attract attention . . . ."

As some businesspeople turned to stunts to capture public attention, sensationalism also crept into
advertisers' rhetoric. Copywriters sometimes exaggerated claims and embellished the truth, and so "informational" advertising developed a reputation for dishonesty.\textsuperscript{16} In a bombastic advertisement for a ten-cent plaything, for example, "STRAUSS, The Toy King," announced availability of the "GREATEST OFFER I HAVE EVER MADE . . . the latest and sweetest sounding Musical Novelty you ever heard."\textsuperscript{17} In another example of puffery, an advertiser for the American Wringer Company, makers of the "Horse-Shoe Brand 'GEM' Toy [clothes] Wringer" with rubber rollers, extolled the hilarious nature of his client's product. "Funnier than a Jack-in-the-Box[,] our surprise toy," the writer concluded, "'It's all in the Rubber.'"\textsuperscript{18} "Not always, but very often, and often enough to impress readers . . .," a Playthings writer concluded in 1908, "sensational advertisement stands for questionable merchandise."\textsuperscript{19}

As some advertisers made increasingly desperate attempts to capture public attention, by the 1890's, other businesspeople grew disillusioned with informational advertising, however large the print. On one level, national advertisers of brand-name products in particular found traditional copy wanting. Whereas many local merchants considered mere publicity sufficient, makers courting national markets required a more active kind of selling. Brand-name products necessitated advertising designed not only to attract shoppers to specific kinds of
products, but also to particular brands, a result
businesspeople found more traditional copy ineffective in
obtaining. 20

On another level, analysts acknowledged the limitations
of display advertising even for local selling. Writers
continued to record the damage bombastic copy had done to
the reputations that certain merchandisers once enjoyed.
Having been misled by hyperbolic copy in the past, many
shoppers were now suspicious of flamboyant advertisments,
commentators warned. Worse still, readers tarred honest and
dishonest advertisers with the same brush. "The buying
public is wonderfully well versed in the judgment of goods--
the result of continuous purchasing--and once duped, is
twice shy of even consideration of future orders . . . .,"
warned a playthings observer. "Briefly, a flamboyant or
sensational advertising copy instantly cheapens the value of
goods handled by the advertiser." 21

At the same time, analysts insisted that contemporary
consumers were now too sophisticated to buy toys based upon
the older copy style. "Nowadays the man who knows reads,
yes studies all the advertisements which have to do with his
affairs," observed one such writer in the August, 1908,
issue of playthings. "He saves money by it." Indeed,
experts came to believe that even the best informational
advertisements did little to convince readers to buy. A
prestigious institutional reputation, analysts insisted,
might maintain customer allegiance for only so long, and did little to convince new shoppers to buy. "New buyers are constantly coming into the field and they must be shown," observed the Playthings writer, "They want the best offers to be obtained in the market, and they do not object to hunting for them."²²

Targeting Adults Directly By Using Reason Why Advertising

By the early 1900’s, having begun to question the value of copywriters’ simple efforts to gain consumer attention, a few marketers pioneered significant strategic and stylistic changes later adopted by toy advertisers. The new strategy, "reason why" advertising, reflected the new demands for creating wants that brand-name selling placed upon advertisers’ copy. The nature of "reason why" advertising changed over time, but broadly defined, the new technique entailed reasoning with consumers in an active effort to convince customers to buy toys and other goods. As we shall see, as the new tactic evolved, experts targeted different audiences and employed different rationales to convince shoppers to buy.

Exactly when and how the doctrine of "reason why" advertising developed still remains something of a mystery. Historian Daniel Pope credits John E. Kennedy, a free-lance copywriter, with creating the new strategy. In 1904, Kennedy approached Albert D. Lasker, a partner in the
prestigious Chicago advertising agency of Lord & Thomas, with his innovative selling strategy. Kennedy envisioned copy designed more actively to convince readers to buy, rather than simply announce the availability of goods. T. J. Jackson Lears has noted that by the early 1900’s, rather than simply trying to attract attention, progressive advertising experts now sought, in his words, "aggressively to shape consumers' desires." In this way, print advertising began to play an increasingly important role in the toy distribution process. Publicists assumed the role traditionally held by store salespeople. "Good advertising is therefore good salesmanship," concluded Kennedy in an article appearing in the February, 1910, issue of Playthings. "But, intensified, so as to compensate for lack of personal salesman’s personal magnetism." Followers of Kennedy’s theories drew similar conclusions. "Whereas a merchant in the past could use but a small force of salesmen, and push forward the development of his business and of the country by inches, to-day he has at his command an army which does the work of years, in weeks or months," insisted one of Kennedy’s enthusiastic disciples in the December, 1910, issue of Playthings. "These silent salesmen go into every house, every store, every office in the country. They can be found in the wilderness and in Wall Street."
If Kennedy played a key role in devising the strategy of "reason why selling," he provided businesspeople with few particulars as to the application of his theories to actual advertisements. Over time, however, those businesspeople developed their own techniques. Pope discovered early antecedents of the rationalist style in newspaper advertisements for John Wanamaker's department stores. John E. Powers, Wanamaker's advertising manager, devised copy containing highly-specific, no-nonsense merchandise descriptions reminiscent of later rationalist, "reason why" advertising. A less bombastic and more subdued form of poster-style advertising than that produced by most contemporaries, the Powers copy first announced the availability of merchandise and then provided readers with evidence of the worth of advertised items. In this way, Powers convinced consumers, albeit often times already motivated consumers, to purchase publicized merchandise.28

Building on the work of Powers and other experts, businesspeople applied Kennedy's theories to toy advertising. Analysts urged a two-phase approach. Hoping now actively and successfully to convince readers to buy, advertisers first sought to counteract distrust engendered by earlier hyperbolic publicity-style advertising. Proponents of "reason why" advertising made every effort to win consumer confidence, not simply gain consumer attention.
Towards these ends, copywriters adopted a new "dignified" and "conservative" advertising style. Illustrations, typeface, and composition continued to play a major role in the latest copy, but experts used them with this new purpose in mind. "Aim always to have a unity of type," a Playthings advertising analyst recommended in the August, 1908, issue. "It makes a pleasing impression and by its quiet, dignified appearance calls forth the unspoken admiration of the reader of your advertisement."\[29\]

Writers urged copywriters to adhere to a rigid policy of honesty in all copy. "A true tale well told--" concluded a Playthings analyst in the August, 1908, issue, "that is the gist of the matter--with easy to read copy and well chosen cuts."\[30\] Indeed, by 1910, a new emphasis on truth in advertising had begun to affect local copy. "That honesty and strict sincerity is the rule; rather than the exception, in department store advertising is brought prominently to one's attention these days," observed another industry journalist in 1910, "and it is with a distinct satisfaction that one writes 'the passing of the days of piffle and prevarication' in ad. writing."\[31\]

Having hopefully won the trust of their readers, analysts next urged copywriters to play an active role in persuading consumers to buy. "A strong 'meaty' copy, introducing convincing argument," advised the Playthings writer, "is the essential in good advertisement."\[32\] In
practice, progressive publicists continued to produce highly visual copy but adopted a new rhetorical style based upon convincing use of factual information.

As early as the first decade of the twentieth century, businesspeople involved in many different consumer industries, including playthings, made use of the new style. Manufacturers of children's vehicles in particular found rational argumentation especially to their liking. Hoping to motivate shoppers, copywriters addressed turn-of-the-century cultural concerns in their advertisements. Employing various functionalist arguments, makers of sleds, wagons, and kiddie cars, for example, ran rationalist advertisements in several national magazines. While publicists stressed unique features—steerable runners on sleds, for example—for the most part, manufacturers' arguments fell into identifiable categories indicative of significant socio-cultural changes. As we shall see, oftentimes the same advertisement contained arguments characteristic of both cultures of production and consumption.

On one level, advertisers' copy reflected the values of the emerging consumer culture. As John Higham and others have already shown, an image of what Theodore Roosevelt termed "The Strenuous Life" dominated American culture and politics. Guided by Roosevelt and other pundits, Americans glorified physical culture and outdoor recreation. In his
work on advertising, T. J. Jackson Lears has identified this preoccupation as crucial to the development and diffusion of the consumer culture. Lears has concluded that a fundamental moral shift enabled the new culture to thrive and spread. The advent of a "therapeutic ethos," in Lears’ words, "the beginning of a shift from a Protestant ethos of salvation through self-denial toward a therapeutic ethos stressing self-realization in this world--an ethos characterized by an almost obsessive concern with psychic and physical health defined in sweeping terms," signalled this moral change.35 The new outlook lent itself well to the manufacturers’ argumentative advertising style, and so toy advertisements reflected this national absorption.

Targeting adult toy buyers with their copy, manufacturers of children’s vehicles promised parents that by playing with the advertiser’s product, youngsters would experience vigorous, salubrious outdoor enjoyment. Manufacturers of "Starbuck’s Juvenile Hand-Car," for example, insisted that by using their vehicle, youngsters would grow strong and straight. "No more weak lungs or stooped shoulders," maintained the Starbuck brothers, makers of the toy, in the May, 1902, issue of The Ladies’ Home Journal. "Physicians all endorse it as a wonder-worker in the health of children . . . [b]ecause it brings into play all the muscles of the body."36 In another, similar advertisement, a sled manufacturer pointed out that healthy
outdoor fun need not end with the first snow of the year, since sledding promised vitality during the winter months. "Fathers and mothers: There's nothing like coasting to bring the ruddy glow of health and happiness to the faces of your boys and girls," insisted management at S. L. Allen & Co., makers of the "Flexible Flyer" in the December, 1909, issue of The Ladies' Home Journal.37

If toymakers promised vigorous play, they were quick to point out that their toys did not offer exercise so rugged as to injure a child. On the contrary, publicists also stressed safety in their advertisements. No harm would come to youngsters from playing with "Starbuck's Juvenile Hand-Car," maintained the manufacturers, "... [b]ecause the feet are near the ground."38 A unique design made the "Flexible Flyer" sled safe, a different maker asserted. "SAFEST--It steers like a bicycle, the steering bar curving the spring-steel runners," insisted manufacturers of "the sled that steers . . . The only sled a girl can properly control."39 Some advertisers connected safety to other enticing attributes. A copywriter for the Worthington Co. of Elyria, Ohio, makers of the "Fairy" velocipede and tricycle, linked safety to quality construction. "Just anything on wheels won't do for your child," insisted a writer in an advertisement in the The Ladies' Home Journal in 1910. "The risk of accident from cheap machines is too
great, they . . . are so hard to operate that injury to the child often results.\textsuperscript{40}

In another way, advertisers continued to reflect the values of a declining culture of production in their copy. Writers stressed durable, high-quality construction, attributes of special interest to Americans who, at least in part, still envisioned their world as one of scarcity and hard work. In advertisements for The Worthington Co., for example, copywriters emphasized superior construction and the use of high-quality materials. "\textit{Fairy} Velocipedes and Tricycles have highest grade bicycle construction—" boasted a publicist in an advertisement in 1910, "steel tubing--regular bicycle saddle--ball bearings throughout . . . ."\textsuperscript{41}

Not to be outdone, a copywriter for sled manufacturer S. L. Allen & Co. insisted that the "Flexible Flyer" would last virtually forever. "STRONGEST--Made of second-growth white ash and steel," boasted this writer in a 1908 advertisement. "Practically indestructable."\textsuperscript{42}

By 1912, thanks in part to the new argumentative advertising style, parents and other adults began to purchase youngsters more toys through out the year, and not simply during the Christmas shopping season. As early as February, analysts sensed the magnitude of these developments. "We have reason to believe," concluded a \textit{Playthings} editorialist, "that the year 1912 will mark one
of the greatest steps forward in the toy trade that has ever been taken."43 Events bore out this writer's predictions. Analysts identified a major shift in buyer behavior. "Broadly speaking, sales of toys, dolls and games over the retail counter aggregate five times as much to-day as they did twenty years ago--and two and a half times as much as they did only ten years ago . . . ," observed Playthings columnist Sidney J. Rockwell in the May issue:

Regarding general all year sales of seasonable playthings, it can be stated briefly that more and more parents are making weekly visits in order to purchase "something new for the youngster just because he's been a good boy" and that churches and other institutions are becoming larger and larger consumers of children's toys, to say nothing of the items purchased by children themselves.44

As they cheered the good fortune of the industry, analysts gave improved advertising techniques at least partial credit for the profitable shift in buyer behavior. Writing in the June, 1912, issue of Playthings, an editorialist attributed increased sales in part to "[t]he higher grade of merchandising which holds sway."45 Copywriters continued to produce improved advertisements throughout the year. "November and December, 1912, saw the greatest quantity of high grade toy advertising for the holidays that the trade has ever known," observed the
Playthings "Ad-Booster" in the year-end issue of that journal.\textsuperscript{46}

High sales solidified merchandiser acceptance of print advertising as an important marketing tool. "The power of the printed page," observed "The Ad Booster" in Playthings, "is now as keenly appreciated by toy men as by individuals in any other line of mercantile endeavor."\textsuperscript{47} Newspaper advertising, the same analyst observed one month later, expanded the consumer experience, beyond the confines of most retail establishments. "The newspaper goes direct to the home," the analyst observed, "and toy advertising in its columns is invariably certain of a careful, attentive and hospitable audience."\textsuperscript{48}

But even as certain businesspeople accepted the general merchandising value of print advertising, more progressive sellers also recognized the particular limitations of the rationalist style. If more convincing than mere announcements, rationalist copy was, for the most part, more passive than dynamic. While honest and explicit, then, the new advertising technique was not necessarily convincing, particularly when employed by manufacturers of similar playthings. Advertising undertaken by two Indiana makers of kiddie cars, the Glascock Brothers and the Hill-Standard Mfg. Co., personified these difficulties. Producers of handcars of similar construction, businesspeople at both
firms targeted the same market: middle-class, adult toy-buyers.

In September, 1906, businessmen at the Hill-Standard Mfg. Co. and the Glascock Brothers both ran advertisements on the same page of the same popular periodical, the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Both makers featured a picture of a young boy stiffly posed upon the vehicle in question, but this did little to commend one vehicle over the other. Nor did the text of the two advertisements reveal major differences between the two cars. "Glascock’s Racers are the fastest and easiest running," the manufacturers boasted. "‘It’s geared’ and runs faster and differently from all other hand-propelled cars." According to the Hill-Standard copywriter, however, gearing also enabled their car to perform with exceptional speed. "The car that’s geared for speed," they boasted.49

Similarly, when Glascock copywriters met Hill-Standard claims by affirming that their racer promised healthy fun, Hill-Standard publicists countered with a similar pronunciation. A potentially emotive theme, neither manufacturer made an effort to dramatize his subject and so engross or involve the reader. "Three Motions: Racing, Semi-Rowing and Rowing. These exercise motions develop all muscles of the child’s body," the Glascocks advertised. "Physicians endorse Glascock’s . . ." Three columns away,
managers at Hill-Standard stressed the salubrious nature of their car, the "Irish Mail." "ARE YOUR CHILDREN HEALTHY?" the makers asked readers. The "Irish Mail," they implied, offered the answer. "An 'Irish Mail' car will give healthful excercise to arms, legs, wrists, ankles, hands and feet," Hill-Standard publicists insisted. "Brings children home happy, hungry and healthfully tired."

Thus as competition for reader attention continued to increase, rationalist "reason why" selling proved too modest for certain proponents of advertising. Copywriters sought other techniques better able to differentiate one product from another. For this reason, businesspeople, particularly brand-name advertisers, adopted more compelling and manipulative versions of "salesmanship in print."

Targeting Children Directly
Using Reason Why Advertising

The relative success of "reason why" advertising focused attention on the limitations of more traditional merchandising methods, and expert scrutiny engendered conclusions certain observers found disturbing. If advertising theorists envisioned copy in partnership with retail saleshelp, analysts found retailers unable to support newspaper and magazine advertising adequately.

Writing in Playthings 1910, one acrimonious analyst, O. L. Dorworth, accused both managers and salespeople of ineptitude. Ambivalence on the part of retail saleshelp,
Dorworth complained, sabotaged expensive publicity efforts. Refusing even to read store copy, salespeople performed their duties in a manner totally out of character with store advertising. "[G]rant that the merchandise is the best possible to secure, that the values are the best possible to offer and the store is probably doing a big business along that line," Dorworth concluded, "still the fact remains that the business is falling far short of the mark it might set, because of the fact that the salespeople do not live up to the advertising." 52

Rather than encouraging clerks to improve their selling techniques, Dorworth observed, managers facilitated ambivalence by allowing misconduct to go unchecked:

Why let the advertising man tell the people about the prompt and efficient service, the conveniences and facilities for quick and satisfactory shopping, the management’s desire to make your store the ‘ideal store,’ and then have the people who ought to ‘make good’ fall down on one, or more often, every single count, because they’re not qualified to sustain the good impression made by the advertising when they deal face to face with the customers[?] 53

Dissatisfied with the uneasy partnership advertising shared with personal selling, innovative sellers sought more compelling copy that would bypass salesmanship. One maker in particular succeeded spectacularly. In so doing, he revolutionized toy merchandising. In 1913, Alfred C. Gilbert, the charismatic inventor of the Erector Set, pioneered direct juvenile advertising and demonstrated once
and for all the power of magazine copy to sell toys. "Construction toys that trained the mind were brought out," recalled an industrial booster in Playthings soon after World War One, "and showed the power of advertising when lined up with a real toy." Because Gilbert relied as he did on his own personality to sell toys, a tactic indicative of the shift from a producer to consumer culture, he differentiated Erector from playthings of similar design. In so doing, Gilbert largely replaced salespeople in the selling process by taking on their role himself.

Despite Gilbert's importance to the history of the toy industry, at first he did not manufacture playthings. In 1909, Alfred C. Gilbert, Olympic pole vault champion, medical doctor, and magician, and John Petrie, a machinist and college acquaintance, began producing magic equipment in a small two-story wooden building in Westville, Connecticut. In 1911, Gilbert's father joined the two partners, and together the three entrepreneurs incorporated as the Mysto Mfg. Co. After only a short time, the new firm proved relatively prosperous. "The Mysto Manufacturing Company was successful," recalled Gilbert years later, "growing so rapidly that the banks had advised caution, and had gained a pre-eminent position in the field." After only two years in
business, the two partners even turned a small profit: $366.37.\textsuperscript{55}

Despite the initial success of the firm, however, Gilbert harbored certain reservations about the magic business, and this dissatisfaction indirectly fueled his merchandising genius. On one level, Mysto’s modest profits disappointed Gilbert. More importantly, Gilbert felt that the magic business offered little opportunity for the corporation to grow. "There were just so many magic-trick boxes you could sell in the country, just so many professional pieces of apparatus," he recalled. "Even when you reached the top you would not have a really big business." Casting about for some way to increase sales and ensure future expansion, Gilbert hit upon the possibility of manufacturing playthings. Gilbert believed that toys offered a potentially larger and more lucrative market than magic did, and so the entrepreneur began to redirect his business efforts accordingly. "I had a lot of fun, all right, but the magic business, which had its heyday in the year 1911, was not enough to satisfy me," Gilbert recalled in his 1954 autobiography. "I made my mind up to push into the toy field, and my father encouraged me for all he was worth."\textsuperscript{56}

In 1911, a series of railroad trips inspired Gilbert to invent the Erector set, one of the most successful construction toys ever devised. Erector provided Gilbert
with the opportunity he sought to enter the toy business.\textsuperscript{57}

A frequent railroad traveller, Gilbert invented Erector
while watching workmen electrify a right-of-way:

\begin{quote}
About this time [1911] I was riding back and forth from New Haven to New York a good deal--the section being electrified by the New York, New Haven & Hartford railroad. I looked out the window and saw steel girder after steel girder being erected to carry the power lines. I found it interesting to watch their progress from week to week, and most other travelers did too. It seems the most natural thing in the world that I should think about how fascinated boys might be in building things out of girders. My increasing association with the toy business set me thinking in that general direction, too. Anyway, that's where the idea for Erector came from.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

If inspiration provided the basic Erector concept, hard work and ingenuity turned Gilbert's idea into a viable and relatively unique plaything. Other steel construction toys then existed, but Erector differed in important respects.\textsuperscript{59}

These dissimilarities contributed both to the realism and versatility of the new toy. These attributes, in turn, increased sales greatly, but shrewd marketing played a crucial role in the success of Gilbert's new toy.

In an effort to duplicate the steel girders used to construct towers, bridges, and other contemporary structures, Gilbert experimented first with flat, cardboard cut-outs joined together with nuts and bolts, planning later to stamp Erector parts from steel. The flat pieces proved inadequate, however. Gilbert discovered that he could not fit the flat parts together into the box girders he hoped to
create in miniature. This difficulty necessitated a small, but highly significant redesign of the Erector pieces. Reminiscing much later, Gilbert recalled the importance of the innovation:

When I tried to put four girders together to make a square girder like those on the railroad, I found it wouldn't work until I made a kind of lip along the edge of each piece. This little invention was probably the most important single factor in the success of Erector, although the principle of action and motion in a toy was a close second. With the groove along the edge of the Erector girder, I could fit four pieces together with two small bolts and I had a square girder.

He also discovered that the improved shape of Erector parts offered an additional bonus. The "lip" gave models a rigidity otherwise lacking.60

Having perfected the basic Erector design, Gilbert now encountered resistance to Erector from businesspeople both inside and outside of Mysto. Pleased with the magic business, Gilbert's partner balked at diversification. Eventually, they amicably dissolved the firm. In so doing, the partners agreed that Petrie would continue to produce magic equipment for the professional market, while Gilbert would retain Erector and produce magic trick sets primarily for amateurs.61

Gilbert found external competition much more difficult to eliminate, however. English businessman Frank Hornby, inventor and manufacturer of the "Meccano System," another steel construction toy, offered Gilbert a particularly
difficult challenge. In 1900, Hornby boarded a train on his way to visit relatives. The steel structures the train passed inspired Hornby to create Meccano, just as track-side construction led Gilbert to develop Erector. Months of experimentation followed, during which time Hornby perfected the basic Meccano design: flat, perforated steel shapes children might bolt together. But having invented Meccano, Hornby now had difficulty interesting retailers in the new plaything. Eventually, however, Hornby sold a set to a large retail establishment, and demand for the toy began to increase soon after.62

Early on, Gilbert recognized what a formidable business opponent Hornby and The Meccano Co. would be. "From the first," he recalled, "Meccano was the chief competitor of Erector and became stiffer competition within a few years, when the company opened an American plant."63 Indeed, by 1911, the Meccano Co. dominated the international construction toy market. The massive size of the Meccano factory testified to the success of the toy. "At the present time the Meccano factory occupies nearly six acres of ground and they ship goods to every part of the world," observed a Playthings writer in 1915. "Their catalogues are printed in more than fifteen different languages."64 At the same time, an international network of distributors contributed greatly to Hornby’s success.65 For many years
in the United States, the Embossing Company, of Albany, New York, acted as Hornby’s agent.66

Anxious to develop a publicity campaign capable of challenging Hornby’s control of the construction toy market and make Erector successful, Gilbert approached Charles W. Hoyt, a young New Haven, Connecticut, adman. With the help of Hoyt and other marketing specialists, Gilbert pioneered a bold and innovative toy advertising strategy: advertising aimed directly at children—in this case, boys—themselves.67

Utilizing fresh tactics, Gilbert now put his strategy into practice and purchased large amounts of space in a host of national magazines, a number of which the publicists chose mainly for their juvenile appeal. "With a new product I decided to do a new kind of advertising," wrote Gilbert. "We had spent money on ads for the magic sets, but now for the first time a toy manufacturer went into big space in magazines with national circulation." Erector advertisements appeared in The American Boy, St. Nicholas, Boy’s Magazine, Youth’s Companion. At the same time, Gilbert ran advertisements in family periodicals, such as Good Housekeeping, Saturday Evening Post, Cosmopolitan, and Popular Mechanics, as well as other magazines.68

Unlike his predecessors, Gilbert also chose to advertise relatively expensive playthings. Although the Erector line featured toys ranging in price from one to twenty-five
dollars, Gilbert shocked toymakers when he decided to advertise a five-dollar set. "Nobody had ever advertised a five-dollar toy before in this country, and it took real courage . . . ," he wrote. "People in the industry, who thought that a dollar was a lot of money for any toy, believed we were crazy. But it worked, and started a new trend." 69

Having purchased magazine space and settled upon the specific subject matter of their marketing effort, Gilbert, Hoyt, and other experts filled Erector advertisements with a new kind of copy. In so doing, they relied repeatedly upon Gilbert's fame and personality to sell Erector. As a world-record-setting Olympic pole vaulter, big-game hunter, adventurer, and corporate president, publicists recognized eventually that A. C. Gilbert cut an appealing marketing figure, particularly among young boys likely to play with Erector. Bearing this advantage in mind, copywriters produced a series of Mysto advertisements featuring Gilbert's photograph above a description of his athletic prowess. Marketing specialists continued to stress Gilbert's fame and personality in mailings sent to boy customers at home. "This same theme was carried out in a newspaper we published called Erector Tips," Gilbert wrote later. "It carried a personal message from me, a story about some athletic event I had engaged in, and other personal items." 70
Having recognized the advertising value of Gilbert’s persona, experts next adopted a familiar, conversational tone in both magazine advertisements and Erector Tips. In this way, Erector publicists enticed youngsters with a level of equality generally reserved for other adults, a tactic department store managers and other retailers were also employing on the salesfloor. "I wanted the ads to read as if they were personal messages from me to the boys . . . ," Gilbert wrote. "I was convinced that boys became interested and excited when a person, not a corporation, spoke to them."71 The slogan, "Come on Boys! Make Lots of Toys!" featured in many early Erector advertisements, typified Gilbert’s conversational style and use of personal appeal. Created by Charles C. Stewart, a veteran copywriter and head of Gilbert’s advertising department, the catch-line proved highly successful and became synonymous with Erector.72

The body of the advertisement continued in the same friendly, conversational tone as Stewart’s slogan. "I know what boys like so I’ve made the Mysto Erector," Gilbert claimed in a typical Erector advertisement of the period, in the November, 1914, issue of St. Nicholas. "I tell you, it’s great fun to make all yourself, dozens of models that run on wheels or by the little Mysto Electric Motor . . . . Just think, boys, you can build bridges, towers, electric engine and trailer, derricks, swings, railways, machine shops, wagons and dozens of other models.”73 A coupon
invited youngsters to write directly to "A. C. Gilbert, President, Mysto Manufacturing Company" for additional information.\textsuperscript{74}

The Erector advertising campaign proved immediately successful. Gilbert interpreted the large number of letters from boy readers as one indicator. "[I] must have been right," he concluded, "for the letters began to flood us that first fall." Sales figures were another measure. In 1913, Gilbert invested $12,000 in advertising, a sizeable increase from previous years. Within 12 months, total Mysto sales more than doubled, from $59,610.42 in 1912 to $141,000 in 1913. Corporate profits increased just as dramatically, from $7,437 in 1912 to $45,619 in 1913.\textsuperscript{75}

Anxious to duplicate Gilbert's success, other toymakers, particularly manufacturers of traditionally masculine playthings, adopted Gilbert's strategy and, to an extent, his tactics. On one level, like Gilbert, marketers targeted youngsters directly. On another level, some copywriters employed maxims reminiscent of Gilbert's well-known Erector slogan. Indeed, certain publicists imitated Gilbert shamelessly. "Come on, Boys!" wrote a copywriter for the well-known Ives Manufacturing Corporation in \textit{St. Nicholas} in 1913, for example. "Build a Railroad With Me!"\textsuperscript{76} Other advertisers demonstrated a more subtle influence, however. "BOYS--" announced a copywriter for the Voltamp Electric
Mfg. Co. in the same periodical in 1914, "This book--our brand-new catalog--is a mine of electrical knowledge." 77

As competitors adopted Gilbert's advertising style, Mysto managers utilized Erector Tips to publicize another innovative publicity effort aimed again at children directly: prize contests. Publicists envisioned contests benefiting the firm on two levels. First, entries provided Erector officials with a source of new models with which they might illustrate Erector manuals. Second, the contest generated interest in Erector among young toy consumers. 78

Again, Erector marketing proved highly successful. "In 1914 our prize contest became the biggest thing of its kind the country had ever seen," Gilbert recalled. Indeed, the eventual response overwhelmed the Mysto staff. "By 1915, the contest was so big that we could not handle it and had to call in outside help," Gilbert remembered. "That year we received sixty thousand entries, and each entry was a photograph of an original model which some boy had built." After the fact, Gilbert attributed the success of the contests to the kinds of prizes Mysto offered: expensive consumer goods. "[B]ack in 1914 and 1915 [contests] were rare and prizes were small," he continued. Not so those Gilbert awarded. "We offered the things most boys wanted most in the world--a shetland pony, a real automobile, a
motorcycle, bicycles, camping outfits, and scores of lesser items."

By 1915, as lesser competitors imitated Gilbert, copywriters employed by Gilbert's principal business adversary, Frank Hornby, began to do likewise, but with, as we shall see, somewhat less success than the initiator of the new strategy and style. Anxious to counter the growing popularity of the Erector set, Meccano officials instituted a major advertising campaign. "In the 1915 plans for Meccano a number of radical steps have been made," reported a journalist for *Toys and Novelties*, "and it should be interesting for the trade to glance over a brief outline of what this firm intends to do for their benefit and for the enlargement of their business." Like Gilbert, Meccano copywriters now aimed their marketing efforts for the most part straight at youngsters. "This is for the purpose of striking directly at the boys themselves," the *Toys and Novelties* reporter continued, "to create a demand for more Meccano in all parts of the country."80

To facilitate the new strategy, Meccano publicists, like those at Mysto, increased both the size and quantity of print advertising. In the words of one contemporary reporter, Meccano officials designated a "large expenditure of money for advertising directly to the boys." Meccano publicists purchased space for full and double-page advertisements in every national boys' magazine in
circulation, as well as Sunday magazines, *Popular Mechanics*, and other periodicals. Like other toy copy, the new Meccano advertisements reflected the success of the Erector style. "Boys--" read one such advertisement in *St. Nicholas* in 1913, "Build Railroads, Bridges--in Play."  

While publicists ran new magazine advertisements, they also provided distributors with other publicity materials, both in print and otherwise. The makers of Meccano offered retailers catalogs, envelope stuffers, working display models, even lantern slides for use at local movie houses. Finally, Meccano executives commissioned author M. P. Gould to write a biography of Hornby and the development of Meccano. Officials then offered the book to youngsters without charge as a premium. "This book will be given free to every boy who sends in the names of five friends to whom he has shown his own Meccano set," the *Toys and Novelties* writer reported, "and it is estimated that thousands of names will be added to their lists."  

If Meccano publicists adopted Gilbert's strategy and increased their merchandising effort, however, their copy differed significantly from Gilbert's in content. Gould's biography of Hornby typified these distinctions. The Frank Hornby whom Gould described personified attributes commonly celebrated by adherents to a culture of production. While Erector's inventor relied upon personality to sell Erector, then, Gould sold Meccano using character instead. One might
develop the sort of character Louis Hornby embodied, Gould advised young readers, and as a result receive a host of rewards, by following Hornby’s example and by playing with Meccano.

Whereas Gilbert’s advertising offered youngsters self-fulfillment through more immediate gratification, Hornby’s copy proposed rewards available only after self-sacrifice and delayed gratification, the antithesis of ideals Warren Susman has linked to the consumer culture.\textsuperscript{84} Meccano, Hornby’s publicist indicated, offered youngsters rewards they might realize only in adulthood. "If this story inspires you to ‘start something’ worth while and carry it on to success, and perhaps make a lot of money and become a strong, successful man—if it makes you want to do what Frank Hornby did—" wrote Gould in the preface to the Hornby biography, "then I will consider this the best book I have ever written."\textsuperscript{85}

Boy readers might gain wealth and respect, then, but only after many years of persistence. "The motto of Frank Hornby is the motto of Meccano—‘Be Helpful, Build on Sound Principles; Do Everything the Right Way’—then though you may have to wait, you will know that you are building for the future, and that you will deserve to succeed," Gould informed young readers. "Build right now, with Meccano, and Meccano will teach you how to build right in the future."\textsuperscript{86} Meccano magazine advertisements carried a similar message.
"Build sky-scrapers for your toy engines and tin soldies--
now," a publicists for the firm insisted, "And you’ll be
training yourself toward success in engineering,
architecture or any business when you grow up."\textsuperscript{87}

If Gould promised youngsters eventual riches and
respect, he also cautioned children that they would not gain
these rewards easily. Over time, self-denial and other
attributes of the producer culture, Gould observed,
materially benefited Hornby. "Thanks to early Christian
training, clean living, right thinking, thrift, and a
conscience that kept him true and strong under all
temptations and hardships," Hornby’s biographer wrote,
"Frank Hornby had developed a character which to-day the
American bankers call 'the finest kind of financial risk.'"
Similar conduct could help others to achieve, Gould
continued, and so success like Hornby’s required young
readers to forfeit certain mundane pleasures temporarily,
pleasures most members of the emerging consumer culture
valued highly, however. "Any boy, any man, any human being
who perseveres," wrote Gould, "who feels down deep in his
heart that he is right, who is willing to sacrifice comfort,
friendship, immediate success, ease, popularity, admiration,
everything we all like, in order that he can keep on and on
and on until he accomplishes the thing that he sets out to
do--that man is almost divine."\textsuperscript{88}
Despite the 1915 marketing efforts undertaken by Gould and other Meccano publicists, Gilbert's personality selling overshadowed Hornby's increasingly anachronistic character-based advertising. Indeed, after 1914, Erector profits kept on increasing. "Erector was going so big [in 1915]. . . .," the inventor of the toy recalled, "that we more than doubled the preceding year's figures, doing a total of $800,887, with a net profit of $133,956."\(^8\)

The next year, Gilbert continued his marketing unabated. First, he changed the Mysto name to the A. C. Gilbert Company, a measure of the role Gilbert's personality had come to play in Erector selling. Next, Gilbert began the "Gilbert Institute of Erector Engineering," a club patterned after an adult engineering college. "During 1916 we spent $144,746 on advertising," the inventor of Erector remembered, "but the most significant new promotion and advertising idea was the Gilbert Institute of Engineering, which many writers have delighted in pointing out, had no faculty and no campus."\(^9\)

In a full-page advertisement for his institute published in the December issue of The Ladies' Home Journal, Gilbert offered youngsters first and foremost the more immediate rewards of the consumer culture. Unlike Meccano publicists, Erector copywriters insisted that young customers would not have to wait until adulthood to benefit from their toy. "Join in the new play of Erector Toy Engineering, boys!" ran
a 1916 Erector advertisement. "Win Fame, Honors, and other Rewards, and have fun—lots of it—while you’re winning."
Participation, Gilbert promised, brought both immediate gratification and a semblance of adult respectability. "As soon as you own a set of Erector the fun starts—you become a member of the Gilbert Institute of Erector Engineering," a Gilbert copywriter wrote. "Then like real grown-up engineers who also are members of Institutes, you can accomplish all kinds of engineering feats with Erector (in miniature), and win the Honors and Rewards."91

Throughout 1916, thanks in part to the success of the Gilbert Institute of Erector Engineering, Gilbert captured a larger and larger share of the domestic steel construction toy market. One meeting in particular exemplified the popularity and marketing value of the Institute. According to Gilbert, six hundred boys attended a single session of the local Olean, New York, chapter. Seating limitations forced organizers to turn away several hundred other youngsters.92

At the same time, A. C. Gilbert and Company turned an unprecedented profit, much to the detriment of the American Meccano Company. "The next year, 1916, was one of the most eventful and successful in the history of the business," the inventor observed. Corporate sales surpassed one million dollars, owing largely to Erector. "Although other products contributed something to the total," Gilbert observed,
"Erector brought in the major share of our volume of $1,285,463 that year, with net profits of $233,131." Faced with the mounting success of Erector, eventually Hornby completely abandoned the domestic steel construction toy market to Gilbert. "Years later," A. C. Gilbert recalled, "we bought out the American Meccano Company."93

Advertising Indirectly to Adults Through Children

By 1910, even as many other publicists successfully employed rationalist arguments to advertise directly to adults and children, other copywriters adopted a different strategy: they began to sell playthings indirectly to adults through children. Influenced at the time by general developments in advertising theory, businesspeople adopted a more manipulative, nonrational strategy of argumentation to convince consumers to buy. Like their contemporaries, these copywriters employed "reason-why" advertising to sell consumer goods. But unlike other advertisers, as Pope, Lears, and Marchand have all observed, they employed nonrational manipulators, not "factual" arguments, to sell playthings and other items. At first at odds with copywriters who employed rationalist arguments, advertising experts eventually concluded that product character best dictated style.94

The new technique differed from rationalist advertising in one other important respect. Proponents of the
nonrationalist style also approached the intricacies and difficulties of personal selling in a new way. For the most part, they simply by-passed personal selling altogether. Instead of replacing salespeople, these advertisers employed subtle, emotive merchandising techniques by their very nature beyond the capabilities of most sales help.

As early as 1911, writers had begun to argue in favor of a fresh advertising strategy by which sellers would approach adult consumers through children. The new promotion evolved over time. Writing in *Toys and Novelties*, one analyst insisted that copywriters succeeded only when they created advertisements geared to both children and adults. "There are three essentials to the well built newspaper toy ad," the booster observed. "It must, in the first place, have two keen cutting edges. It must appeal to the children and to the adults of the community." Building upon the observations of this and other analysts, writers more fully delineated the role that children might play in securing actual toy sales. Youngsters, one such analyst maintained, offered businesspeople a conduit to the adult change purse. "The appeal of the toy department is primarily to the children," observed an industrial analyst, Victor Lauriston, in *Toys and Novelties* in 1915. "True, it is the parents who do the actual buying; but the quickest way to reach the parents is through the youngsters. Hence, a large share of
the merchant's toy publicity must be directed toward the kiddies."96

Having devised a new advertising strategy, sellers now put theory into practice. Their tactics grew increasingly sophisticated over time. At first, businesspeople utilized youngsters in an overt manner. They simply encouraged children to bring advertised playthings to the attention of adults. "Toy dealers sell the Mysto Erector--$1.00 and up," ran one of Gilbert's earlier magazine advertisements in the November, 1913, St. Nicholas. "Ask your parents to buy it for you."97 Hoping to increase the effectiveness of young sellers, another copywriter scripted convincing arguments with which children might persuade their elders to buy. "Your father knows that 'the boy's play makes the man's pay,'" insisted a publicist for The Markhan Air Rifle Co., makers of "King Air Rifles," in the October, 1914, issue of St. Nicholas. "This is why he is willing for you to have a King of your own. Remind him."98

If copywriters first enjoined youngsters to sell toys in a direct manner, however, experts later tried to involve children in more subtle techniques. Over time, businesspeople made less explicit and more implicit appeals to adults through children, using nonrational persuaders.

Analysts stressed the role that "atmosphere," "sentiment," and "human interest" might play in the creation of successful toy copy and urged businesspeople to design
advertisements accordingly. "Copy writer's [sic] who can most vividly picture the little personal feature of the goods," explained a booster of the style in 1910, "their beauty, the good standing which will be produced by their possessor, their exclusiveness, their distinction from common wares, have learned a lesson that has business value." By lending merchandise an emotional dimension, experts insisted, publicists could increase the worth of advertised goods as perceived by consumers. "Half the value of an article may be the sentimental atmosphere surrounding it," the same booster continued. "It makes something more than merchandise out of the goods described. It pictures them as a means to an end. An influence thrown in which frequently is of greater importance than the intrinsic value of the goods." 99

Having discovered the marketing and merchandising value inherent in "sentiment," however, experts at first found "atmosphere" easier to identify than fabricate. "It is somewhat difficult to explain and not easy to secure," observed the Playthings writer referred to the above, "but it will sell goods at a profit and leave the buyer thoroughly satisfied." 100 Hoping to devise a method, analysts suggested that businesspeople start by observing their customers. "Study human nature--acquaint yourself with the fads, foibles and frailties of mankind," suggested C. T. Hunt, a booster of the new tactics, in Playthings in
1910. "When you have become proficient and can strike the chord of human nature and desire with the same facility that the skilled musician manipulates his instrument--then you are a good advertiser."101

Even as analysts struggled to understand the new technique, other businesspeople had already begun to experiment with sentimental and atmospheric copy. "Efforts at building an atmosphere about a product, through the medium of advertising copy, is a noticeable feature behind much of the copy now being run in the magazines and newspapers," the writer observed in 1910. "Perhaps ten percent. of the national advertisers of ‘personal’ articles are making use of sentiment."102

As analysts and sellers experimented, they redefined the role that youngsters would play in print advertising. On one level, certain images of children and childhood, publicists learned, helped to facilitate the atmosphere they sought. "The illustration of a happy, healthy child . . . adds a human interest and sentimental touch very much to be desired in the making of ads," observed "The Ad Booster" in 1912. "Booster recommends this idea to all toymen."103 By employing images of children in this manner, copywriters successfully associated consumption with a host of powerful feelings and emotions: carefree and innocent childish joy, parental love, and nostalgia.
While images of youngsters took various forms, copywriters generally employed standard scenarios, and in many cases, pictures of children complemented the copywriter’s prose. Often times, advertisers showed youngsters happily at play or shouting and jumping for joy after receiving one or more new toys. In The Ladies’ Home Journal in 1910, for example, advertisers for "Chase Stockinet Dolls" filled nearly half of their copy with a charming picture of a well-dressed girl scolding two of her dollies.104 In other instances, however, copywriters indicated that a specific shopping experience engendered a joyous response. "The Laughter of Children Is the Rich Wine of Life!" ran one such advertisement for the New York Wanamaker department store, reprinted in Playthings in 1912 and containing a child and other family members stringing holiday decorations. "See them tomorrow as they shout and laugh, dance and clap their hands, while they wander among the toys! You will say that Christmas is really worth while [sic]."105

As in two of the examples above, writers and illustrators oftentimes associated children with Christmas and Santa Claus, other highly emotive symbols. In another advertisement for the New York Wanamaker department store, singled out in 1914 by "The Ad-Booster" for excellence, a copywriter portrayed two pajama-clad youngsters watching Santa Claus land his sleigh on the roof. "S-h-h-h--and he
comes over the tops of the trees and just under the moon, ad-

driving his reindeer like the wind, on Christmas Eve—and he
leaves each little boy and girl a present," the marketing
expert wrote. "But all day long he sits in the door of his
grotto in the Wanamaker Toy World writing down what the
little boys and girls want who come to see him."

Publicists, in short, utilized children's images to
create an emotional atmosphere and then used this sentiment
to encourage parents and children to share advertisements.
In this way, businesspeople not only employed an image of
children to market playthings but also involved juvenile
family members directly in the selling process. As we have
seen, writers had already employed each ploy separately. By
now combining the two, however, advertising experts created
a new and highly manipulative technique. During the 1914
Christmas shopping season, a Playthings analyst complimented
retailers Sprecher & Ganss of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on
copy of this type. "Here is a message right from the heart
of Santa himself which was well calculated to bring joy to
the kiddies of Lancaster," observed a Playthings analyst.
"There is a broad human appeal in this ad, and it is lined
right up with a strong commercial appeal." If in the
opinion of at least one professional observer, the writer
successfully created an advertisement that engendered the
appropriate atmosphere, publicists also encouraged
youngsters to bring the ad to attention of adult shoppers.
"We have just received a letter from 'Dear Santa Claus,'" they wrote. "Read it or let papa or mama read it for you, and hear the good news . . . ."108

Fragmentary evidence indicates that youngsters did indeed successfully urge parents to share print advertising with them. Sales did increase. And in his biography, A Daughter of the Middle Border, author Hamlin Garland fondly recalled how at his child's insistence, the two of them would browse together through magazine advertisements. "My daughter was preternaturally interested in magazines---" Garland reported, "that is to say she was (at a very early age) vitally concerned with the advertising columns, and forced me to spend a great deal of time turning the pages while she discovered and admired the images of shoes, chairs, tables and babies,--especially babies." In at least this one Midwestern home, the advertisers' strategy met with success.109

World War I

As businesspeople experimented with increasingly manipulative tactics to sell adults and children toys, World War I spurred development of toy manufacturing, marketing, and merchandising. On one level, hostilities benefited established toymakers and stimulated entrepreneurial growth.
On another level, wartime conditions shaped merchandising theory and practice.

Domestic toy production increased dramatically as a result of the war. Hostilities, particularly a British embargo, first reduced, then virtually eliminated most foreign competition for the duration, and these developments benefited domestic manufacturers. Importation of German playthings in particular plunged dramatically. During 1914, domestic distributors imported $7,718,854 worth of German toys, but in 1917 only $19,045 worth. Significantly, over the same period, the amount of playthings received from most other major toy-producing countries also declined. While the importation of Japanese playthings did increase substantially, French and English shipments slumped noticeably.

With demand high and foreign playthings much less available, established makers expanded production, and entrepreneurs organized new factories. Journalists chronicled the growth of the industry. In December, 1915, a New York Times correspondent identified the Pittsburgh area in particular as a new toy manufacturing center. "The temporary retirement of Germany from the toy trade of the United States has built up in the Pittsburgh district a toy manufacturing industry which is rapidly assuming important proportions," the writer observed. "The work, as a rule, is
carried on in factories erected for other purposes, but which lend themselves readily to light manufacturing.\textsuperscript{113}

Beginning in 1914, then, toymakers struggled mightily to meet toy demand. Material insufficiencies, but more importantly labor shortages, hampered the efforts of some manufacturers.\textsuperscript{114} Demand all but overwhelmed other makers. At one firm located in Washington, Pennsylvania, businesspeople enlarged their plant three times and still could not produce enough toys.\textsuperscript{115} In Binghamton, New York, a writer for \textit{The New York Times} found employees struggling to fill other orders for playthings. Hoping to meet the needs of the New York toy trade, management instituted three eight-hour shifts but still could not cope with demand.\textsuperscript{116}

Wartime material shortages, together with the threat of other difficulties should the United States enter the war, also sparked development of a significant industry-wide trade association.\textsuperscript{117} Sometime before the United States declared war on the Central Powers, A. C. Gilbert began lobbying other makers and industry boosters for the establishment of a manufacturers’ organization. By 1916, he had succeeded. Together with 67 other members of the industry, Gilbert founded the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A., still toymakers’ most important trade association. The members then selected Gilbert to serve as the first president of the organization. Under the auspices of the association, officials established a credit bureau and began
to publish a news bulletin. Eventually, authorities also undertook to manage the annual New York Toy Fair.

Despite shortages and other problems, domestic toymakers increased production so dramatically that a Playthings analyst cited 1915 as a major turning point in the history of the industry. "The real increase in American output came in 1915—and the year 1916 was an even greater year," recalled the writer during the last year of the war, "while 1917 eclipsed all former efforts of the American toymen." According to the United States Census, during 1915, domestic toy manufacturers produced $73.5 million worth of toys, games, and sporting goods, enough to supply 30% of the domestic market. But during 1917, American toymakers manufactured playthings valued at $198.5 million and gained an additional 67% of the American toy market.

As toymakers increased production, customer buying habits also changed, a shift domestic producers found advantageous. On one level, American-made toys found new acceptability among domestic consumers. "The war had upset many long established ideas and prejudices," noted A. A. Mann in Advertising and Selling in 1920, "and among them was the widespread feeling that German toys were somehow superior and that only foreign workmen could make playthings that expressed the full spirit of childhood." On another level, consumer demand for more expensive, high-quality playthings also increased markedly. "This war has brought
about increased buying not only, but a gratifying demand for better grade toys," observed a Toys and Novelties analyst addressing distributors in 1919. "You are quite aware of the fact that a large percentage of your toy sales during the past year has been in the more expensive toys."\(^{123}\)

But if shoppers now willingly purchased more expensive playthings, they did so only if convinced of the worth of the toys in question. "Prices are so high that people insist on having quality goods in order that they may get the maximum amount of benefit from their expenditures," concluded another Toys and Novelties writer in 1918. "They are willing to pay more when by so doing they can get values that make their dollars go farther."\(^{124}\)

If consumers still required convincing before they would buy, however, wartime conditions forced department store sellers to abandon more traditional selling methods in favor of self-service. At Lit Bros. in Philadelphia, for example, one toy buyer anticipated a reduction in sales staff from 125 or 150 salespeople to 60.\(^{125}\) At about the same time, New York buyers predicted unprecedented difficulties. Faced with the loss of more traditional selling methods, businesspeople who once complained bitterly about inept saleshelp now viewed the demise of personal selling with trepidation. "New York buyers are dubious as to the practicability of self serve toy basements," reported a Toys and Novelties correspondent in November, 1918. Indeed, a
fearful retail buyer predicted a 30% decline in toy sales resulting in part from breakage but also due to the demise of salesmanship. "You must also remember," the buyer observed, "that selling toys is not like selling staple goods, and the number of toys sold, and the creating of a demand for better and high priced toys in the mind of the customer, is as much a selling factor in the toy department as in the jewelry department."126

With fewer salespeople available to sell playthings, makers and distributors turned increasingly to pre-selling through print advertising to convince consumers to buy. "The toy industry, while long established in America by a few leading concerns," observed a Toys and Novelties analyst in 1917, "did not reach much volume in advertising until the great expansion that has taken place during the great war."127

If hostilities solidified the importance of print advertising in general, the war also convinced at least one expert of the feasibility and wisdom of early consumer training, as well as the viability of youngsters as consumers. Columnist W. Barrett Hankins argued that juvenile advertising was not only ethically justified, but also a moral imperative. Stressing the resiliency of the young mind, Barrett dismissed the notion that consumer training might somehow harm young shoppers. "We are today learning something new about children--it is the
extraordinary elasticity of their mentality," he observed in the July, 1917, issue of *Toys and Novelties*. "It can stretch itself to the performance of man-like duties and rebound to the innocence, simplicity and purity of child life."\(^{128}\)

Barrett went on to insist that sellers were not only justified in advertising to children but honor-bound to aid parents and educators in juvenile training. "In fact," Barrett wrote, "it is the TOYMAN'S duty to advertise with advertisements that couple to the value of the child-factor." Through advertising, he insisted, businesspeople could teach children the skills required of respectable citizens, including appropriate consumer behavior:

The TOYMAN'S advertisements should dwell upon the importance of properly training the child's mind; of preparing the child for its future place in the national life; of placing in the hands of the child things which represent first, money values; second, proper mental training; third, correct physical development; fourth, the appreciation of the real through the nearest to the real as represented by playthings--summed up, it is TOYS.\(^{129}\)

Conclusion

World War I, therefore, intensified and solidified earlier perceptions of toy marketing and merchandising developed since the first decade of the twentieth century. In this way, business elites, especially manufacturers, gained greater control over the national market for toys.
On one level, wartime conditions forced businesspeople to rely more heavily upon alternatives to personal selling than they had in the past, and so toymakers and distributors used more print advertising. As they did so, experts successfully employed the highly manipulative techniques advertisers pioneered earlier. By the end of the First World War, then, toymakers and sellers had attained a considerable degree of market control.

As toy advertisers gained control of the toy market through newspaper and magazine advertising, they contributed to the homogenization of the consumer culture. Print advertising, particularly newspaper copy, excluded almost no one from the process of consumption. By expanding the scope of the consumer experience beyond the confines of retail establishments, print advertisers provided class-conscious shoppers with anonymity. Now, for example, working-class readers might consume without exposing themselves to the indignities department store managers and salespeople foisted upon them. At the same time, advertising allowed middle-class customers to shop at home for low-cost merchandise without embarrassment. In this way, businesspeople enabled all sorts of consumers to indulge in a similar consumer experience, the experience of viewing and reading print advertising.

The content of print advertisements also fostered homogeneity. Publicists employed children and the idea of
childhood, symbols familiar to virtually every individual regardless of class, ethnicity, whether rural or urban, to sell toys. This common iconography not only encouraged readers to consume but also to share in the culture. Because shoppers shared the iconography, toy advertisers aided in the homogenization of the culture.

Having gained significant market control as they participated in the homogenization of the culture, manufacturers, as we shall see, sought next to create toy markets deliberately, as well as answering demand. The discovery of toy fashion spurred their efforts and changed the nature of the manufacturing process. Increasingly marketing considerations shaped design decisions.
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV


4McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 142.

5Quoted in McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 143.

6Quoted in McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 142.


8Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization," 18.


12"Christmas Advertising by Retail Toy Men," Playthings, December 1908, 32.

13The Youth's Companion, 23 November 1905, 596.

14The Youth's Companion, 4 May 1905, 219.


17The Ladies' Home Journal, December 1906, 74.

18The Ladies' Home Journal, December 1901, 49.


22 "Advertising Copy," 26, 28.


24 Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization," 18.


33 *The Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1909, 58.


39 *The Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1908, 73.


42 The Ladies' Home Journal, December 1908, 73.
43 "Good Times Here," Playthings, February 1912, 65.
45 "Progress," Playthings, June 1912, 71.
49 The Ladies' Home Journal, September 1906, 52.
50 The Ladies' Home Journal, September 1906, 52.
51 Pope, The Making of Modern Advertising, 239.
57 Many writers have described how Gilbert invented the Erector set, but not all have agreed. For the most common interpretation of events—the one related here—see, for example, McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 378; and Marvin Kaye, A Toy is Born (New York: Stein and Day, 1973), 162. A contemporary Playthings writer suggested another explanation, that the girders used in Chicago bridges, cranes, and building under construction inspired Gilbert. See "Dr. A. C. Gilbert: Medicine Man, Master Magician and Manufacturer," Playthings, September 1914, 55.

59 On Erector's predecessors, see McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 378.


62 "The Development of 'Meccano,'" Playthings, September 1915, 44, 46. Writer Leslie Daiken describes the creation of Meccano differently. Daiken makes no mention of Hornby's train ride and insists instead that a large crane inspired Hornby to invent Meccano. See Children's Toys Throughout the Ages (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1953), 89-93.


64 "The Development of 'Meccano,'" 44.


66 McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 379.


72 "Dr. A. C. Gilbert: Medicine Man, Master Magician and Manufacturer," 55.

73 St. Nicholas, November 1913, 43.


*St. Nicholas*, November 1913, 31.

*St. Nicholas*, January 1914, 23.


"The Development of 'Meccano,'" 46.

"The Development of 'Meccano,'" 46.

*St. Nicholas*, November 1913, 35.

"The Development of 'Meccano,'" 46.

Susman, *Culture as History*, xxiv.


*St. Nicholas*, November 1913, 35.


Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising*, 241; Lears, "From
Salvation to Self-Realization," 18; Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 10.

95"Cleaning Out Old Stock," Toys and Novelties, October 1911, 43.


97St. Nicholas, November 1913, 43.

98St. Nicholas, October 1914, 11.


100"Atmosphere in Advertising," 82.


102"Atmosphere in Advertising," 82.


104The Ladies' Home Journal, 1 October 1910, 73.


106Reprinted in Playthings, January 1914, 115.


115"Boom In Toy Trade," 6.


117Hollander *All Aboard!* 55; McClintock and McClintock, *Toys in America*, 417.


119Hollander, *All Aboard!* 55. As expected, war-related circumstances soon demanded that association officials act on behalf of the industry. In 1917, hoping to conserve materials, as well as galvanize psychological support for the war by impressing upon the public the need for sacrifice, members of the Federal Council of National Defense proposed that federal authorities ban Christmas gift giving. Desperate to convince authorities otherwise, members of the toy manufacturers’ association dispatched Gilbert and other representatives to Washington to appeal the decision. They arrived armed with a host of playthings and addressed the members of the council, including the secretaries of commerce, state, the navy, and the interior. As a result, the officials relented, and, in the words of one contemporary journalist, Gilbert "saved Christmas." According to tradition, Gilbert spoke persuasively about the educational function of certain toys, as well as the fun playthings engendered, but the toys the toy manufacturers brought had a special influence on opinion. Members of the President’s cabinet began to play with the toys, and as they did, they supposedly recognized the validity of Gilbert’s case. Writers have recounted the incident often. See, for example, McClintock and McClintock, *Toys in America*, 417-19; Gilbert with McClintock, *The Man Who Lives in Paradise*, 152-57.; and Hollander, *All Aboard!* 61.

A. A. Mann, "Toys to Build Patriotism," Advertising and Selling, 3 January 1920, 5.

Mann, "Toys Build Patriotism," 5; McClintock and McClintock, Toys in America, 417.

Toy Situation Shows Constant Improvement," Toys and Novelties April 1919, 54. See also "Difficulties of the Toymakers," 7.

Feature Quality Goods," Toys and Novelties, April 1918, 49.

Self-Service Toy Store at Lit Bros.," Toys and Novelties, November 1918, 32.


Helps Advancement of Toy Advertising," Toys and Novelties, June 1917, 67.


Hankins, "Toy Talks," 81.
V: THE ASCENDANCY OF THE DOMESTIC TOY INDUSTRY, 1919-1925

Scholars have noted that during the 1920’s and 1930’s, the consumer culture largely came to dominate American society.¹ By employing deliberate obsolescence and new production methods, businesspeople succeeded in creating demand, but unwittingly they also continued to solidify and maintain this hegemony. Through playthings, makers and sellers helped to disseminate a common consumer iconography of fashion, trademarks, and brand-names. Through toys especially, but also through advertising and other marketing and merchandising, manufacturers and distributors were acculturating children in particular to new symbols and other consumer cognitions. As these youngsters and other consumers shared fashions through toys, they also participated more fully in the culture.

Production changes made this new role possible. One change was technological. Using innovative devices, toy manufacturers revamped the toy production process. Modern plant design and machinery, particularly conveying equipment, further cut costs and increased output. In this
way, manufacturers made more factory-produced playthings available to a greater number of American youngsters.

Other mechanical developments helped to facilitate a different, conceptual change important to the spread of a consumer ethic: the marriage of marketing to production through the toy design process. Mechanization made production of a wider variety of detailed playthings technologically feasible and cost effective. Businesspeople utilized this potential to incorporate the marketing and merchandising considerations they perceived into the new playthings they developed. Hoping to spark consumer interest, makers miniaturized full-sized consumer goods, complete with the trade-marks and fashion characteristic of the originals.

Readjustment and Postwar Prosperity

The rigors of readjustment after the First World War helped to redefine the toy business during the 1920's. Between 1919 and 1922, toy manufacturers and sellers rode a roller coaster of financial boom and bust. "Those first three years of the twenties," recalled A. C. Gilbert in his autobiography, "were up, down and up."² Beginning sometime during 1920 and lasting into 1922, Americans experienced a severe economic downturn. To an extent, toymakers and sellers misinterpreted both the causes of this depression in general and their financial misfortunes in particular. As
prosperity returned, manufacturers and distributors based business decisions upon this misinformation. Ironically, in doing so, toymakers and sellers altered the production and distribution of playthings in significant and profitable ways.

If the not-too-distant future held financial disaster, 1919 proved extremely profitable for most manufacturers and distributors of domestic playthings, as well as many other businesspeople. After the Armistice, federal deficit spending continued to fuel national prosperity. Unfortunately, circumstances conspired to facilitate, as George Soule notes in his standard account, a "change from a desirable recovery to an unwholesome boom." Private borrowers found bank loans readily available, even as federal officials relaxed price controls. Together, these policies fueled inflation and encouraged speculation.3

At first, most members of the toy industry benefited from the "boom." A sellers' market of unprecedented proportions enriched toy producers and distributors alike. Consumers complained of high prices, but purchased playthings anyway. "Just twelve short months ago the American toy manufacturer, jobber, and retailer were working days and half the nights to supply a demand which seemed to have no limits," recalled a Toys and Novelties editorialist at the end of 1920. "It was a greedy monster with insatiable appetite."4
Government pronouncements testified to the extent of the market, as well as the degree to which American makers met this demand. Federal officials reported that world-wide in 1919, only Japanese toy makers manufactured more playthings than American producers, and yet domestic makers sold most of the toys that they produced in the United States. Of the $45,657,000 worth of playthings domestic makers manufactured in 1919, businesspeople gained a mere $2,869,529 from exports. At the same time, toy imports accounted for just 6% of all domestic sales.

Anxious to take advantage of a profitable situation, wholesalers and retailers struggled to meet market demand. Having enjoyed unprecedented sales in 1919, buyers now made plans to increase factory orders by 50 to 300 percent. Unfortunately, they found available stock insufficient for their needs. Speculation, Soule has explained, created artificial shortages of materials, and these insufficiencies limited factory output and forced prices up. Driven by the prospect of quick riches but faced with an inadequate supply of goods, competition for available merchandise grew fierce, even physical at the New York Toy Fair early in 1920. "[T]here isn’t a manufacturer, who has been showing his line at the New York Toy Fair now in progress," a Toys and Novelties editorialist observed, "who will not tell you that, from the very first day of the show, buyers have
literally tumbled over each other trying to get their orders in first."9

Thankful simply to have found stock, buyers haggled little over cost, and this contributed to high retail prices. "As fast as toys could be put together they were hustled to the stores and then over the counter into the arms of the waiting multitude," the Toys and Novelties writer continued. "'To ---- with the price; give us the goods!' was the cry!"10 In this way, then, inflation contributed to an already volatile financial situation.

When possible, given postwar labor and material shortages and transportation difficulties, toymakers obliged distributors. Yet in most cases, demand swamped the capacity of production facilities. After only the first week of the 1920 Toy Fair, certain exhibitors found that they had little left to sell. In fact, conditions forced some makers to turn business away. "The demand for toys is insatiable, insistent, overwhelming!" reported a triumphant Toy Fair reporter for Toys and Novelties. "Exhibitors are amazed and perplexed! They are wondering how already overburdened factories are to turn out the goods for which ravenous and capacious orders have been booked."11

As orders flooded factories, certain manufacturers soon took their market and, some sellers believed, distributors for granted. "By April a great many manufacturers were sold up for the season and were inclined to think that the
manufacturing business was so easy there 'was nothing to it,'” recalled a Toys and Novelties writer in 1920. "Of course they had their troubles in getting materials and labor. But orders were comparatively easy."\(^{(12)}\)

Retail buyers accused producers of taking advantage of rising prices at the expense of distributors. As manufacturers did so, toymakers, like toy sellers, fueled the inflation. "American manufacturers," maintained an angry official for The Abrahamson-Bigelow Co., of Jamestown, New York, "have tried to work the thing for all there is in it." First, another seller insisted, manufacturers set prices arbitrarily. "There seems to be no stability at all as to prices," a different distributor, Albert A. Brager of Baltimore, Maryland, contended, "and an absolute disregard of the usual practice of give and take in the trade between retailer and manufacturer."\(^{(13)}\)

Next, having inflated wholesale prices, the seller continued, producers refused to negotiate cost with distributors. "[I]t was the general opinion of the retail buying trade at the New York Fair," Brager continued, "that there never has been such an attitude as was shown by the seller this year--it was take over merchandise when you get it--at any price we ask--pay for it as soon as you get it." In addition, another seller insisted, makers ignored loyalties traditionally afforded buyers who placed orders early. "Manufacturers advise early buying in February," the
Jamestown buyer observed. "You place an order then for September 1st delivery. Then when prices advance they sell goods up to November 1st at advance prices and make shipments to such customers and let the early buyer go without." 14

As manufacturers filled distributors' orders, some turned a considerable profit. In 1920, businesspeople at the Lionel Manufacturing Company, a well-known maker of electric trains, for example, recorded their best year ever. Sales surpassed $1 million, earning Lionel President Joshua Lionel Cowen a fifteen-thousand-dollar bonus. 15 Profits were also substantially higher at A. C. Gilbert and Company, where sales surpassed $2 million, marking the highest sales to date. 16

As profits reached new heights, unhappy consumers and journalists accused businesspeople of profiteering. "[L]ast year," a Toys and Novelties reporter observed in the November, 1921, issue, "the consumers came in with a fighting spirit and bought with the attitude that they were being held up." 17 Earlier, a sympathetic analyst observed similar behavior among consumers and journalists. "[The retailer] sells direct to the public;" wrote a trade journal editorialist in the June, 1920, issue, "he has had to bear the brunt of the public's indignation against the rising costs of living and he has been the object of numerous newspaper attacks on the charge of profiteering." 18
Toymakers and sellers bristled over consumers' accusations and vehemently denied any wrongdoing. "In the toy field, there has practically been no such thing as profiteering," insisted a Toys and Novelties editorialist in the June, 1920, issue. "The American toy manufacturer has gone steadily about his legitimate business, taking his legitimate profits." High prices, journalists assured disgruntled shoppers and fearful businesspeople, would decline gradually. "There is nothing to be afraid of," advised another industry writer in the July issue, anticipating a price drop. "Things are not going to happen abruptly. The change is going to be gradual." The analyst's prediction proved only partially correct. Prices declined, but they did so much more rapidly than most businesspeople expected.

Depression

The national prosperity toy manufacturers and distributors shared in therefore did not last. Before the end of 1920, general business conditions gradually worsened. Different circumstances conspired to limit the availability of credit, and this precipitated the crisis. By the early 1920's, most banks had little money to lend, having in many instances previously extended credit to finance speculative schemes. When federal officials realized that businesspeople were renewing rather than repaying their
commercial loans, they began to fear for the integrity of the entire banking system. Hoping to avoid disaster, officials raised rediscount rates and warned bankers to stop renewing loans.21

Previously, many businesspeople, both manufacturers and sellers, had financed voluminous inventories using bank credit. In the toy industry, where businesspeople expected sales to continue to grow in light of a reduction in foreign competition, manufacturers and distributors made extensive use of this practice. "Many toy makers figured that they had captured the American market for good and all [from foreign competition after the war]," Joshua Lionel Cowen observed in an interview with a New York newspaper. "So they came up to 1920 with the biggest inventories in their history."22 Now, however, new credit procedures made older inventory finance methods impossible.

As businesspeople found credit increasingly difficult to obtain, desperate manufacturers and distributors, hoping to raise capital by liquidating inventory, cut prices substantially. Department store pioneer John Wanamaker became the first major retailer to lower prices dramatically. In May, 1920, he announced a 20% unilateral price reduction on all goods then in stock.23

Wanamaker’s decision precipitated other price reductions, especially, one analyst concluded, after overanxious journalists misinterpreted Wanamaker’s action.
"Newspapers, viewing the thing from a superficial standpoint, at once jumped at the conclusion that prices were on the skids," a Toys and Novelties editor complained, "and started out on a propaganda campaign that aroused false and useless hopes among the people." Believing a crash now imminent, other distributors reduced their prices hoping to dispose of merchandise before prices fell. "Many a hard headed retailer caught the fever and started to slashing his prices right and left," a Toys and Novelties analyst observed. "If the crash was coming, then, he thought, he had better get from under as far as possible."²⁴

At first, retail price cuts affected the toy industry only marginally, but with prices falling and inventories high, retailers grew increasingly reluctant to place orders. "Toys were not affected directly as the reductions were made on more staple and seasonable goods," a Toys and Novelties analyst explained. "But it wasn’t long until buyers became rather apathetic towards the deliveries of their toys and in fact some of them cancelled a few orders."²⁵ In this way, fiscal difficulties spread from toy selling to toy production.

By the middle of the summer, manufacturer representatives seeking orders for the remainder of 1920 encountered a very different atmosphere from that of a year earlier. "Salesmen who ventured forth in quest of a few additional sales to keep the factories sold up for the rest
of the year experienced a perceptible chill when they approached the buyer," recalled a *Toys and Novelties* analyst in the December, 1920, issue. "This was something unusual and upon inquiry they found that 'some one higher up' had instructed the buyers to buy no more."26 As a result, a buyers' market replaced the lucrative sellers' market manufacturers had enjoyed only a few months earlier. "The buyer, who for a couple of years, had been the suppliant and the beggar," the writer concluded, "quickly became the king in the violent overturn of conditions."27

Anxious to rationalize high prices and explain declining sales, by August, 1920, analysts began blaming toymakers' economic woes upon external forces. As writers tried to fix guilt, they identified other domestic businesspeople as the culprits. At the same time, businesspeople again began to view international producers with trepidation. As we shall see, in focusing their attention on malefactors, both real and imagined, corporate and political leaders significantly reshaped the industry after the crash.

On one level, analysts blamed automakers for a whole spate of current toy production problems. The automobile industry, a disgruntled *Toys and Novelties* editorialist maintained, deprived businesspeople manufacturing "other sensible, staple lines of trade" of the necessities of production. "[The auto industry] has diverted vast quantities of labor and capital from more useful
industries," the writer insisted, "and has pushed the prices of many kinds of materials to impossible figures; also taxing the transportation facilities of the nation to the breaking point." Because the needs of automaking increased toymakers' costs, this observer concluded, toy producers raised prices.

Even as industry spokespersons accused automakers of causing difficulties for manufacturers, however, toymakers warily eyed more traditional competitors, German toy exporters, with renewed apprehension. The restoration of toy shipments to Great Britain increased producer anxiety overseas, but also in the United States. "Germany is recovering much of her pre-war trade, especially in toys, with England," reported a writer for The New York Times in August, 1920, "much to the concern of British trade interests, according to reports received today by the Department of Commerce." At the same time, by publicizing the arrival of German toy shipments to the United States, journalists fueled manufacturer anxiety further. "When a shipment of a few cases of foreign toys arrives at one of our ports it is a matter of news to the reporter who meets the ship," Harry C. Ives, president of the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A., complained, "but if he would go to the freight terminals in his home city, on the coast or to any of the large toy distributing centers throughout the country, he would find carloads of American toys pouring
into those terminals week by week in a volume that would exceed the imported toys many times over.\textsuperscript{30}

As one sign of growing apprehension, analysts noted that some businesspeople had begun to impute pre-war German playthings with an almost mythical character. "It is five years since we had a representation range of German toys, and we begin to think that during their absence from this market many people have invested them with qualities which they never really possessed," observed a writer in a bulletin published by the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A. in 1920 hoping to calm fears. "That distance lends enchantment is a well known truth and the ‘beautiful German toys’ which have been talked about so often have really become a fetish with many people."\textsuperscript{31}

While federal figures indicate a substantial increase in German toy imports between 1919 and 1921, these statistics also show the limit to which German imports threatened domestic control of the American market. In 1914, German toymakers shipped $7,718,854 worth of playthings to the United States. The value of German toys sent by exporters to the United States dipped spectacularly during World War I, as noted above, but rose soon after. From a nadir of $19,045 worth of toys in 1917, German plaything shipments increased to $137,752 in 1918, and then to $983,730 in 1919. In 1920, German toy imports increased more dramatically to $4,238,017, and then only slightly more so in 1921 to
$4,867,814. As these statistics indicate, despite a noticeable rise in toy imports, German control of the domestic market remained well below pre-war levels. In addition, while toy importers in general supplied 41% of the U.S. domestic market in 1914, they met only 6% of that demand in 1919 and 11% in 1921.32

While some analysts attempted to quell makers' fears, fiscal conditions continued to decline. By the end of 1920, as prices fell and distributors continued to curtail orders, toy journalists admitted that the crash had come. "Then it developed that we were in the midst of the looked-for and naturally-to-be-expected readjustment period," a Toys and Novelties writer observed in December, 1920, "which all of us theoretically admitted was necessary, but few of us expected would come quite so soon or so dramatically."33

As businesspeople sought to adjust to mounting fiscal difficulties, makers cut prices, hoping to stimulate buying and reduce inventories, but with little success. "Knowing that conditions of the market were different this year from those in previous years," a writer analyzing the New York Toy Fair reported in March, 1921, "the manufacturers of toys did their utmost to give the best quality at the lowest prices compatible with efficient production." Distributors, however, still refused to buy. "It must be admitted," the same writer confessed, "that business ran true to form and that the buying at the New York Toy Fair was greatly under
that the buying at the New York Toy Fair was greatly under the 1920 volume."\textsuperscript{34}

At the Chicago Toy Fair, conditions improved slightly, but for the most part, distributors remained adamant in their refusal to purchase stock. "Prices of merchandise show a reduction of ten to thirty percent from those of a year ago on most lines," a writer observed in the April, 1921, issue of \textit{Toys and Novelties}. "Manufacturers have met buyers more than half way, and have made price concessions greater than their own primary markets might justify." Despite manufacturers' efforts to stimulate distributor interest, sales stayed low. "At the New York Toy Fair the reluctance of buyers to place orders was very marked," the writer continued, "It was a little less marked at the Chicago Toy Fair . . . . The general financial situation retarded buying more than usual."\textsuperscript{35}

The impact of the crash varied from firm to firm. As prices fell and sales declined precipitously, some established toymakers suffered serious financial losses. At A. C. Gilbert and Company, by then one of the most prestigious toy firms in operation, sales plummeted from more than $2 million in 1920 to $747,000 in 1921, leaving the firm $63,605 in arrears. "I don't like to think about the year 1921," wrote Gilbert in 1954. "My father had been through a bad depression, but I had never experienced it." Anxious to keep his company solvent, Gilbert approached his
regular banker for a loan, but the toymaker was only partially successful. "The trouble was that we had been dealing with only one New Haven bank and in bad times one bank couldn't lend what we needed," wrote Gilbert. It was a difficult job to go out and get new banks to help us . . . ."36

Desperate now to secure capital, Gilbert employed both conventional and unconventional business methods. In one instance, for example, by holding a seance, Gilbert successfully convinced a doubtful lender, A. L. Aiken, president of the National Shawmut Bank in Boston, to extend credit. Impressed both by Gilbert's legerdemain and business records, Aiken made Gilbert the loan. "[W]e pulled through all right," Gilbert recalled years later, "paid off all of our debts and made some excellent banking connections."37

Gilbert survived the depression, but other businesspeople were not so fortunate. In the country as a whole, financial difficulties forced 100,000 firms into bankruptcy, toymakers and sellers among them.38 "A considerable addition to the financial cemetery has been made this year," observed a Toys and Novelties editorialist in August, 1921. "In the last six months numerous funeral trains bearing the remains of toy firms have journeyed to the graveyard and deposited the last vestiges of mortality beneath the sod."39 Federal statistics bore out these
Observations. In 1919, census takers counted 541 firms that manufactured playthings. In 1921, however, officials found only 362 such establishments.\textsuperscript{40}

Insolvent toy firms varied in size and prestige, but some were quite prominent. In March, 1921, for example, the owners of the venerable Strauss Toy Shops declared bankruptcy. "While there have been quite a number of failures among toy manufacturers the last two months, the largest and most impressive so far is that of Ferdinand Strauss, Inc., and Strauss Toy Shops, Inc., both of New York," reported a \textit{Toys and Novelties} writer in the April issue. "A receiver was appointed for these concerns the latter part of March by Judge Mayer in the U.S. District Court, pending a reorganization of the business."\textsuperscript{41} As the depression continued, writers reported the failure of other important toy concerns. In a \textit{New York Times} interview published in late March, for example, Joshua L. Amberg, head of Louis Amberg & Son, and President of the Doll and Stuffed Toy Manufactures Association, cited "the recent failure of two of the largest metal toy makers."\textsuperscript{42}

But if writers reported the failure of certain influential businesses, journalists and other analysts counted less prominent makers and distributors most often among the fallen. When the owners of the Bobby Toy Shops of Rockford, Illinois, declared bankruptcy, for example, management reported a mere $4,966 in assets and $8,251.91 in
liabilities. Exactly when the owners established the Bobby Toy Shops remains unclear, but journalists concluded that most often relatively new firms founded during the war fell victim to the depression. "Most of them were young in life, so far as experience in the toy business was concerned," a Toys and Novelties editorialist continued. "They were offspring of the fortuitous circumstances of the war. Life was easy when they came on the scene." Accustomed to favorable wartime entrepreneurial conditions, such concerns succumbed readily to the financial rigors of the depression.

As toy firms failed, makers and sellers continued to blame German imports for their misfortunes. The managers of the Bobby Toy Shops, for example, cited German competition as the chief cause behind the demise of their company. "It is the first year since the war that the German toy industry could send over a formidable array of its product," reporter Eugene Szepesi observed in the Boston Transcript in 1921, "and it will leave no stone unturned to reconquer one of its most profitable fields lost in the last five years."46

Given statistical data and other information, experts inside and outside of the industry questioned the extent to which German exporters truly threatened the prosperity of domestic makers. "In our last issue we asked readers to 'Face the Facts,' and endeavour to show how little substance
there was in the bogey of cheap German toys flooding the English market," wrote one analyst in a 1920 Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A., Inc., bulletin. "We stated there the opinion which we had come to from a careful study of the real facts as supplied to us from reliable sources in Germany." At least one official close to the Strauss bankruptcy proceedings also remained dubious. "B. W. B. Brown, lawyer, of 27 Cedar Street, named by Federal Judge Mayer a few days ago as receiver of Ferdinand Strauss, Incorporated, toy manufacturer and dealer," a New York Times journalist reported in March, 1921, "said that he had heard the report that German competition was responsible for the trouble the American toy manufacturers are now having but that he doubted it."  

Despite expert efforts to calm businesspeople’s fears and the fact that in 1913, officials established tariff protection amounting to 35% ad valorem, members of the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A. began formal lobbying efforts for additional tariff protection. "The American toy industry, which had just organized itself, was seriously threatened," A. C. Gilbert recalled in his autobiography. "It had to have tariff protection to survive. So once more the toy association called on me to head a committee for a trip to Washington." Armed with "a great many fine toys," Gilbert appeared before the House Ways and Means Committee,
much as he had before the Council of National Defense in 1918. Eventually, he succeeded beyond his hopes.50

As most manufacturers and distributors struggled to remain solvent, more fortunate makers and sellers actually benefitted considerably from conditions. The depression contributed, for example, to the founding of a major toy concern, the Marx Toy Company. Fiscal difficulties led Strauss's to sell Louis Marx and a partner the dies necessary to produce two venerable Strauss toys, a climbing monkey and a minstrel dancer.51 Certain dime store merchants also turned a sizable profit. For 1921, officials at F. W. Woolworth & Co. reported record high sales of $147,500,000, a six-million-dollar increase of over 1920, the previous record year.52

As national economic condition in general began to improve, however, the fiscal situation also turned more favorable for other toymakers and sellers. By 1922, in the economy as a whole, many businesspeople had absorbed inventory losses resulting from the crash. At the same time, makers and distributors repaid inventory-based loans. By 1922, businesspeople once again deemed profit making a genuine possibility, and makers began to expand production.53

In early 1922 at the Annual Toy Fair, the toy industry exhibited the first signs of recovery. In reviewing events, one analyst reported that while buyers remained
conservative, the Fair recalled earlier meetings and reminded those who attended of more regular business conditions. "Old-timers say that the Fair is approaching those of normal times," a writer concluded, who saw in the Toy Fair an end to the depression. "Conditions prevail at the New York Toy Fair which are somewhat similar to those of last year," another writer in the same issue observed, "with the difference that these conditions are in the last stages of deflation and readjustment rather than the first stages." If wholesale selling remained slow, analysts recorded few business failures during January or February, and this fact lent additional credence to the analyst's contention. "Well, two months of the new year have passed and most of us are still on the job," a Toys and Novelties editorialist observed in the February, 1922, issue, "That critical period immediately following the Christmas selling season passed by with a minimum of casualties."

Later in the year, wholesale selling increased, and the recovery continued. Businesspeople disagreed over exactly when the situation first improved, but by spring, many makers reported increased buying. "Many manufacturers report that the middle of May saw the breaking point in the buyers['] fast," a Toys and Novelties editorialist reported. "Others say the first of June. But the great majority are agreed that the month of June ushers in a busy season which will run from now till the holidays."
As the fiscal situation improved, three things happened. First, businesspeople drew lessons from the depression. Second, as we shall see, they gained significant tariff protection. And third, the context of a buyers' market played a significant role in reshaping businesspeople's perceptions. Businesspeople based their observations upon a greater appreciation of consumer power. Shoppers, writers insisted, now recognized the role consumers ultimately played in purchasing decisions. "During the exigencies of the last year or two they have found they can do without certain classes of merchandise," a Toys and Novelties writer observed. "This has confirmed them in something that had been running through their minds for a long time, namely, that they, and not the people who sold the goods, were actually the masters." 57

Under these new circumstances, marketing took on greater importance. If, as many toy analysts believed, to a large extent shoppers dominated the relationship between buyer and seller, nevertheless industry analysts maintained that businesspeople need not remain helpless in the face of consumer decision making. 58 On one level, businesspeople acknowledged that they might not coerce shoppers into making purchases. "The outstanding lesson," a Toys and Novelties editorialist observed in March, 1922, "is that people can't be forced." But on another level, analysts judged that businesspeople might convince consumers to buy, and this
realization contributed to greater manufacturer emphasis upon marketing. "This does not mean that the man with goods to sell must throw himself unreservedly on the mercy of his customers," the journalist continued. "Far from that."
Through marketing, the writer insisted, businesspeople might still persuade shoppers to buy a particular manufacturer's product. "[H]e must consider the ideas and preferences of his customers instead of insisting on his own, as hitherto has been the case in many instances," the analyst explained. "Basing his manufacturing or buying on this principle, he can depend upon the educational power of advertising to secure a fair and decent deal for himself."59

If businesspeople's experiences in a buyers' market contributed to a renewed emphasis upon marketing, fiscal hardship also led makers and sellers to re-examine the nature of retail merchandising. As a result, according to observers of the industry, manufacturers and distributors redefined their relationship. As early as 1922, maker and seller had begun to cooperate more fully than they had in the past. "One of the numerous benefits arising from the remarkable experience business has undergone during the last two years is the disposition of retailers and producers to recognize more fully how necessary each is to the other and to pull together harmoniously for the common good," observed another Toys and Novelties editorialist in May, 1922. "Possibly this condition has been caused more by the
necessity of presenting a common defense than from any personal love the retailer might have had for the manufacturer, or vice versa." Whatever the origins of the new partnership, the analyst predicted, cooperation between toymakers and distributors would play an important role in future toy selling. "An offensive and defensive alliance has been formed--" the writer concluded, "one that really will endure."60

As businesspeople tried to reshape toy manufacturing and selling, politicians also made decisions with important consequences for the industry. On September 21, 1922, the Congress enacted the Tariff Act of 1922. In doing so, officials provided domestic toy manufacturers with substantial protection from foreign, particularly German, exports. A. C. Gilbert had argued for a tariff of 60% on all toy imports. But Gilbert proved so persuasive that he even convinced ardent supporters of free trade that domestic makers of playthings required protection.61 In so doing, he secured a tariff of 70% ad valorem.62 "I must admit," said Texas representative John N. Garner, a free-trade advocate, "that this is one industry that needs tariff protection--at least for a while."63

Precursors to Fashion

As 1922 gave way to 1923, the national economic situation continued to improve. Indeed, the recovery marked
the start of an era of domestic economic expansion not seriously interrupted until the stock market crash of 1929. If not every industry or sector of the economy shared equally in the prosperity, toymakers and distributors, were among the fortunate. As they profited, businessmen observed the behavior of toy customers and reacted to what they found. In this way, market demand contributed to businessmen's interest in fashion.

The return of prosperity reinforced certain wartime consumer preferences. Industry journalists observed that "quality," a forerunner to fashion, supplanted price as the major motivation behind most consumer purchasing decisions. "There is a pride that goes with the possession of a quality product that overcomes the difference in price----" observed a Playthings writer in January, 1923, "and the industry has realized that the taste of quality obtained during the war years has carried through to present day demands." James Taylor, Manager of the Toy Sales Division at the Miller Rubber Co., concurred. "[T]oday," he observed in 1924, "price has been replaced by quality, making it necessary for a different type of merchandising plan, if one is interested in successfully selling the maximum value."

But whereas quality once meant durability, writers noted that consumers now defined the term differently. Indeed, as early as 1922, at least one analyst recognized that toy "quality" resembled the concept of fashion clothing
manufacturers and distributors already employed. "Just as Paris fashion dictators are always creating something new to delight the feminine fancy," this writer observed, "so the American-National Company, manufacturers of juvenile and baby vehicles, . . . are always first on the market with something new in wheel playthings that captivate the kiddies."67

Like fashion, the new concept of quality encompassed design, not simply construction. Charm and originality, writers explained, characterized contemporary playthings of quality. "The people will respond," observed a Toys and Novelties analyst in 1922, "to something that is cute, clever, and which is a miniature of its big brother . . . ."68 Other writers now defined quality in a similar manner. Quality toys, another journalist explained in the January, 1923, issue of Playthings, were "ingeniously conceived, well made and artistically finished playthings."69

As the purveyors of fashion had discovered in other industries, toymakers soon learned that quality lent playthings value beyond mere production costs. Adult purchasing habits, as well as changes in toy nomenclature, reflected this shift in toy value. When toymakers at the Arcade Manufacturing Co. released their "Toy Yellow Cab," a highly-detailed, die-cast automotive miniature and a quality plaything, for example, some adults purchased the item for
themselves as a collectible, not for a child as a toy. "Gray-haired men and women have been seen purchasing these toys, apparently for some child or grandchild," a Toys and Novelties writer reported in March, 1922, "but in reality to take home where they can put it on their library table and push it back and forth as delightedly as any towhead youngster." Electric train manufacturers enjoyed a similar change in the status of their product. As makers at Lionel and elsewhere produced increasingly exact railroad replicas, "toy trains" gave way to "model railroads" with adult appeal.

As makers experimented with fashion, retailers also recognized the attraction "quality" playthings held for contemporary toy shoppers. "Quality," distributors observed, lent a plaything an air of novelty, of freshness, that consumers found particularly alluring. As a result, sellers sought "quality" in their stock. "Fresh new toys must greet visitors who frequent the department," observed M. R. Johnston, toy buyer for Boch & Kuhls of Peoria, Illinois, in 1923. "They come in to see what is new." In this way, by stocking "quality" playthings and exposing shoppers to fashion, distributors not only catered to current consumer wants, but also encouraged the development of ever newer fashions.

Aware of the demand for "quality" playthings among both shoppers and sellers, toymakers, in turn, struggled mightily
to produce quality designs, but often with only partial success. "The buying public is a fickle public," a Toys and Novelties writer observed in 1922. "Manufacturers rack their brains to produce or invent a novelty which will catch the passing fancy and produce sales."73 Unfortunately, however, most makers found quality easier to describe than produce. The toy market, analysts determined, remained highly unpredictable. "There is no greater gamble," another Toys and Novelties reporter observed in 1925, "than putting a new toy on the market."74 Makers found a fad or craze, an intense and lucrative fashion phenomenon common during the 1920's, but also periodically across the history of the industry, difficult to create at will.75 "It is only once in a great while that a manufacturer produces a toy or novelty which rings the bell," the industry journalist continued in 1922. "When this is done, Mr. Manufacturer wakes up some morning to find himself deluged with orders and learns that he has hit upon a real sensation."76

Hoping to render the production of quality toys more predictable and thus gain additional market control, over time, however, a few producers began not only to manufacture "quality" toys but also to systematize the design and production of fashionable playthings. As they did so, manufacturers increased the likelihood that they might create a marketable product. Such was the case at the Arcade Mfg. Co. of Freemont, Illinois, in particular, where
makers produced the highly-successful "Toy Yellow Cab" mentioned above, a plaything with the attributes of a "quality" toy. Like many successful playthings invented earlier--Gilbert's Erector set, for example--the idea for the Arcade "Toy Yellow Cab" began as the momentary inspiration of a single individual. Impressed by the many taxis plying the streets of Chicago, I. P. Gassman, Arcade secretary and sales manager, concluded that a toymaker might produce a successful plaything by miniaturizing these ubiquitous vehicles. Having devised this initial toy idea in a traditional manner, however, Gassman approached the rest of the toy design process differently than most, if not all, toymakers had done before. Significantly, Gassman incorporated marketing considerations directly into the design process almost from the inception of the new plaything.

Earlier, production experts alone held sway over toy development, and authorities consulted sales experts little on design. "There were groups of designers, engineers, production men who could work out an idea," Gassman explained. "Usually the company's officers had almost entirely the production mind." Indeed, most toymakers approached members of their sales staff with new toy ideas only after production had already begun. "Very often the sales department would know nothing about it at all until it was put in as part of the line and production was started on
the new item or the new product," Gassman recalled in Printers’ Ink in 1928. "Then it was told to sell the thing which the production department had worked out."78

At Arcade, however, selling became an integral part of the developmental process. While competitors relied primarily upon distributors to convince shoppers to buy whatever manufacturers chose to produce, market-conscious Arcade engineers designed the Toy Yellow Cab with consumer selling foremost in their thoughts. "[T]he applause of the final buyer is the only thing that makes production profitable," Gassman explained. "Unless a man builds backward from the sale to the production he is likely to be going up a blind alley."79

Hoping to stimulate consumer demand through toy design, Gassman approached Yellow Cab company managers with a mutually advantageous marketing agreement. If Yellow Cab officials would grant Arcade the right to miniaturize their taxis, Arcade officials would grant Yellow Cab management sole authority to use the new playthings in Yellow Cab advertisements.80 By cooperating, toy designers and taxi company managers would publicize each other’s product or service. Eventually, Yellow Cab officials proved amenable to Gassman’s terms, and so the design phase of the manufacturing process moved forward.

Before production could begin, however, circumstances forced Arcade designers to make another sales-related
production decision. "Almost immediately on entering the iron-toy field with new items, we were up against a merchandising problem," Gassman recalled. "Should we make it cheaply and get into the price fight, or should we make it of excellent material and finish exactly as we thought the children wanted, following the lines of the real Yellow cab in every way and trying to take it out of the price class by trading up?" Eventually, Gassman and his associates decided upon the latter course of action, trusting in their strategy of designing merchandise with consumer demand in mind. "Our solution to this question was again an inspiration from the sales end," Gassman noted years later. "I insisted on quality and a high grade finish." 81

The design of the new toy opened less traditional avenues of distribution to the Arcade sales staff. On December 21, 1921, for example, Arcade officials opened their marketing effort with a public display at the Sherman Hotel in Chicago. 82 The diorama publicists constructed there featured a railroad station and viaduct complete with working light posts and street signs, as well as a miniature police officer, ostensibly to direct traffic. The display drew crowds. "Apparently all that is necessary in order to sell this cab is to show it," a Toys and Novelties commentator observed. Soon businesspeople at marketing-conscious taxicab companies also began to sell the
miniatures. "Unique methods have been used by yellow cab operators and auto firms the country over to distribute the yellow cabs for advertising purposes," another Toys and Novelties writer reported.83 Businesspeople also participated in the Arcade distribution network at other travel-related establishments. "News companies and railway stations are selling quantities of them every day to the traveling public," the first journalist explained. "Almost all toy jobbers are feeling the unprecedented demand."84

Soon more traditional distributors also began to stock the new Arcade product. In Chicago, for example, businesspeople at The Fair Department Store offered the new toy for sale. To test the popularity of the plaything, store publicists "ran a very small item in one of their large full page ads in a Chicago evening paper."85

Arcade marketing efforts proved spectacularly successful almost from the start. The Hotel Sherman exhibit, for example, produced nearly instantaneous results. "The display has been almost constantly surrounded by a crowd not only of youngsters, but of grayhaired persons, ever since it was first erected," a writer for the trade explained, "and sales have averaged as high as ten dozen a day." At taxicab companies, businesspeople also enjoyed impressive sales. Through his distributors, over a four-week period, for example, a single Omaha, Nebraska, taxicab operator sold 2,400 of Arcade miniatures. At The Fair, even meager
advertising brought impressive returns. "They decided from the way in which people poured into their store the next day to buy the toy cab," the reporter continued, "that they had stocked a very fast selling item." Indeed, the suddenness and magnitude of the fad shocked at least one distributor.

"The Yellow Cab," observed an Arcade customer, "seemed to drop like a bolt of lightening from a clear sky." As the Toy Yellow Cab grew steadily more popular, Arcade managers increased output to meet demand. "We’re running a race with Henry Ford! Here is proof!" announced a giddy Arcade publicist in a *Toys and Novelties* industrial advertisement in 1922. "An actual photograph of ten hundred and fifty Toy Yellow Cabs—just about one half a day’s output. And the orders are pouring in—more every day." Over time, employees increased shipments to two thousand units a day. By March, 1922, officials predicted a year-end production total of one million units.

Like the toymakers at Arcade, during the early 1920’s, certain doll makers also developed quality playthings by miniaturizing reality more effectively than their competitors had. One fashion tactic involved the development of increasingly more animated dolls. A *Toys and Novelties* writer, "One Who Knows," described the nature of these innovations in 1923:

By animation is meant the capturing and expressing—with ordinary cotton and stuffing, if you please—those qualities which mechanically humanize what would
otherwise be just an effigy—a caricature of childhood. In other words, the walking and talking elements are those which have made the American doll.91

Several dolls of the period displayed such attributes. At the Averill Manufacturing Co. in New York City, for example, makers produced the "Rock-a-Bye Baby Doll," "The Miracle of the Doll Business." The toy, producers insisted, "cried" until rocked "to sleep," only to open its eyes and call "mama" when the motion stopped.92 In a different industrial advertisement for Horseman Mama Dolls in 1922, the manufacturer boasted that his product featured "The Lloyd Patented Voice," as well as "Guaranteed Moving Eyes."93

A different fashion policy involved creating more artistically life-like dolls. The development of one of the most successful dolls of the 1920's, "The Bye-Lo Baby," epitomized efforts of this sort. Sculptor Grace Storey Putnam modeled the doll on an actual three-day old baby, and then approached an official at Geo. Borgfeldt and Co., toy jobbers and importers, with her creation.94 The executive reacted enthusiastically, but while an American designer conceptualized the new toy, businesspeople turned to a German maker to manufacture bisque heads for the new doll.95 Contemporary observers noted that the resulting product greatly resembled an infant child. "Months have been spent perfecting the head and experts say it is as true to life as it is possible to make it," reported a Toys and Novelites journalist in 1924. "Place a Bye-Lo Baby alongside a new
born babe and you would have difficulty in determining which is the doll and which is the baby, so perfect is it modeled."96

As doll makers continued to develop quality by creating realistic playthings, they exposed themselves more fully to the use of fashion in other industries. Over time, manufacturers recognized the profits that accurate doll’s clothing promised. In a 1924 *Toys and Novelties* industrial advertisement, for example, businesspeople at E. I. Horsman Co., Inc., listed clothing as a significant marketing attribute. "DRESSED AS FASHION DICTATES," the advertiser boasted.97 Later in the decade, M. Nathan, head of the Gimbel Brothers’ doll department in New York, observed a similar trend characteristic of baby dolls in general. "We sell doll clothes here which are made just like the clothes worn by babies," she noted. "The styles in infants’ clothing are watched and copied very carefully."98

If during the early to mid 1920’s, the realities of daily life, especially urban living, inspired a wide range of highly successful playthings, over time, the hectic pace and technological congestion of the city also made for a significantly more competitive business environment. Urban areas contained a greater concentration of advertising and other distractions than did other places. Contemporary observers imagined that most consumers were too rushed and preoccupied to notice all but the most imaginative of
advertisements. Toymakers, therefore, not only struggled with other toy advertisers for shopper attention, but also against the purveyors of most other products, services, and diversions. As a result, innovative marketing and design techniques took on added importance. Motion pictures offered toy marketing experts and other advertisers a particularly troublesome challenge, but also eventually succor.99

Analysts noted that movies not only distracted readers from advertisements, but also reduced consumer interest in certain traditional playthings. The growing popularity of motion pictures among American youngsters, writers observed, changed play habits, and this shift affected demand for certain toys. "Do Your Children Play--or Go to the Movies? . . .," asked James J. Walsh and John A. Foote, proponents of rigorous outdoor play, in 1924 in The Ladies' Home Journal. "In our day there is a distinct tendency for city children to get no inconsiderable part of their recreation in attendance at moving-picture theaters." For this reason, the authors explained, youngsters abandoned play with balls, kites, and hoops involving other youngsters.100

Faced with greater competition for consumer attention, toy manufacturers turned increasingly to the mass media for marketing assistance and toy ideas. Hoping to personalize their advertisements, gain consumer attention, and influence
shopper decision making, marketing experts selling a wide range of merchandise increasingly employed testimonials in their advertisements.\textsuperscript{101} In the toy industry, the popularity of motion pictures in particular fueled interest in this selling tactic.

The advent of the child-star film genre helped greatly to solidify the relationship between the motion picture and toy industries. The period from 1925 to 1945 marked the heyday of films starring children, and dozens of young actors and actresses gained fame during the era.\textsuperscript{102} One particularly successful child celebrity, Jackie Coogan, had actually launched the genre somewhat earlier. During his career, Coogan also helped to define the role that other young actors and actresses would assume within the toy industry. By the mid-1920’s, Coogan proved so effective as a toy spokesperson as to set the stage for future endorsements by child stars.

At the same time, on another level, Coogan shaped toy design. As they had earlier, manufacturers continued to design their playthings with marketing considerations in mind. While the makers of other consumer goods utilized celebrities to endorse their products, the nature of toymaking enabled marketers to make the endorsers’ likeness an integral part of the merchandise. Because toymakers used the young celebrity’s image and placed his likeness on toys
with great success, different producers eventually followed suit and used other young stars on their toys.

Coogan first gained notoriety at the age of five playing a street urchin opposite Charlie Chaplin in the 1921 silent film, *The Kid*. In making *The Kid*, Chaplin revived a well-worn dramatic vehicle used often thereafter by directors making films in the child-star genre. Former child actress Diana Serra Cary has called the story line "the myth of the redemptive child." Proponents of the myth equated morality with innocence. Purity, they explained, enabled youngsters like "The Kid" to triumph over evil and adversity. Denied their own innocence by a sordid and disillusioning world war, filmgoers found the myth appealing, even enthralling. According to Cary, public fascination with childhood innocence contributed substantially to the success of young stars, especially Coogan. For many audience members, in fact, Coogan in particular came to embody the innocence they craved.¹⁰³

But *The Kid* also proved tremendously popular thanks at least in part to what Coogan brought to the film. The young celebrity, writers observed, possessed marketable qualitites all his own. Contemporary critics and other observers acknowledged that Coogan was more than just cute. They recognized that he could in fact act.¹⁰⁴

Despite his contribution, Coogan earned relatively little monetarily from his appearance in the movie. The
young actor benefitted in other ways, however. Chaplin formally premiered the film in New York in January, 1920, and Coogan’s performance brought him almost immediate fame and recognition. In addition, the visual nature of silent films made The Kid readily understandable to a broad international audience. As a result, Coogan’s notoriety soon spread overseas, too.\textsuperscript{105}

Hailed by critics and adult performers for his acting ability and adored by millions of movie-going youngsters and adults, Coogan eventually generated substantial earnings. After The Kid, the young star embarked upon a series of lucrative films, first for National and later for Metro Pictures. On January 12, 1923, Metro executives paid eight-year-old Coogan a half million dollar bonus to leave National and sign a contract with them. The new contract entitled Coogan to $1 million for four pictures, as well as a percentage of the profits from each film, and during 1924 and 1925, Coogan earned $22,500 a week.\textsuperscript{106}

Coogan’s growing financial success earned him additional publicity. "Increasingly, when Jackie and I were interviewed, reporters wasted less time speculating on how many stars these angel children might have in their respective crowns," wrote Diana "Baby Peggy" Serra Cary, Coogan’s contemporary. "What gripped them were the material, even crass, aspects of the new child star phenomenon, such as how many dollars we were putting into
So wealthy did Coogan become in fact that Jack Coogan, Sr., incorporated his son, creating the first celebrity corporation in motion picture history. The new organization, Jackie Coogan Productions, Inc., earned profits from substantial real estate investments, but also royalties on a wide variety of merchandise, including playthings. Each time the manufacturer sold a Coogan-endorsed coaster, a wagon for children, for example, the young star earned 50 cents.

Marketing experts and toy designers capitalized on audience interest in Coogan's screen persona, as well as his reputation for great wealth, to sell playthings. As late as January, 1927, E. J. Clary of the Merchandising Council that year noted the demand Coogan's image continued to engender. "Let Jackie Coogan come out in a moving picture riding a new type of scooter," he wrote, "and the trade immediately feels the reaction to the publicity by inquiries and the manufacturer feels it in the way of dealer orders."

Hoping to take advantage of the selling power of the actor's image, toymakers miniaturized Coogan as urchin when designing playthings in his likeness. In 1921, for example, manufacturers produced a Coogan doll, and they dressed the figure much like "The Kid," in a turtleneck sweater and a cap worn askew.

But when a Photoplay journalist photographed "The Million Dollar Kid" and his father beside a Toledo De Luxe
pedal car, however, publicity-conscious marketing experts quickly brought this fact to the attention of distributors. The magazine exposure publicized the toy, but there were also other merchandising benefits. As a youngster renowned for his wealth, Coogan’s association fostered an image of luxury and prestige that defined the vehicle as fashionable. As indicated above, observers reported that consumers found fashion, or "quality," alluring. Coogan’s wealth, the pedal car makers maintained, demonstrated his authority in such matters. "When a youngster can, through his own unaided efforts, earn one million dollars in a year, we must grant him pretty high average in intelligence and discrimination," a Toledo publicist maintained. "That’s Jackie Coogan, the most famous kid in America—who drives a 'Toledo' De Luxe with the utmost pride and satisfaction."  

Having witnessed how profitable Coogan’s endorsement could be, toymakers turned to other young actors and actresses to endorse toys or lend their images to playthings. Writing years later, Cary remembered "constant product endorsements" during one period in the 1920’s. In 1923, for example, the young star lent her support and likeness to the first American-made Baby Peggy doll. The young celebrity opened the merchandising campaign for the new toy by signing autographs at a day-long personal appearance at Gimbel’s Department Store in New York.
Writing long after the child star genre faded, Diana Serra Cary has admitted that few first hand accounts survive to explain her appeal. One former fan, a six-year-old Salt Lake City girl when "Baby Peggy" visited her city, contacted Cary as an adult and described the impact that the appearance had had upon her life. In so doing, Cary's erstwhile fan indirectly illuminated the appeal licensed toys had for many young consumers. While perhaps atypical in at least one regard--Cary has described her as "a lonely and unappreciated child trapped in a cold and loveless home"--her reaction did not necessarily differ from that experienced by other youngsters fascinated by child stars.116

According to Cary, the author of the letter confessed that as a child, she not only envied Peggy's celebrated station but also coveted the young star's persona. "I felt such a nonentity," the writer recalled. "I wanted more than anything to be you, to possess your black hair and brown eyes that sparkled fire." Towards these ends, the girl tried to make herself look like her idol. Disappointed by the effect, the youngster discovered, however, that a toy helped her feel close to her idol. "So I named my favorite doll and then myself Peggy after you, hoping your magic would rub off on me," the writer revealed. "Your confidence, your charm, your happiness and fame--oh, you were everything I yearned to be!"117
Licensed playthings manufactured by professional toy makers served much the same purpose that the fan's doll, "Peggy," had. By producing licensed toys, manufacturers offered young viewers, and eventually radio listeners and comic strip readers, a desirable personal connection to their favorite personalities. As the child star genre grew increasingly popular after mid-decade, makers continued to manufacture playthings bearing the likenesses of the young celebrities.

During the mid-1920's, the child stars of the Hal Roach "Our Gang" films found themselves especially in demand among toy designers and marketers. As they had in earlier instances, makers also produced playthings bearing likenesses of these young actors and actresses. In 1926, designers for Schoen and Yondorf Co., Inc., of New York, developed dolls modeled after "Our Gang" characters. The makers named the dolls "Farina," "Patty," "Freckles," "Mary," and "Jackie." 118

Other businesspeople sought out "Our Gang" members to endorse their toys. One maker relied upon a charming eight-year-old female lead, Mary Kornman, to sell dolls. In 1926, businesspeople at Geo. Borgfeldt & Co. in New York used the young celebrity to endorse the Bye-Lo Baby and had a publicist photograph Kornman hugging the doll. 119 Another maker employed the Rascals' destructive screen-image to market a different kind of toy. In 1929, Bowman publicists
utilized Rascals to demonstrate the sturdiness of a Bowman coaster. A photographer posed all six youngsters, together with Pete the dog, on the wagon. The effect left at least one adult, a reporter, with the impression the promoter intended. "[I]t remained for Rascals ('Our Gang') to show how many pounds of lively boys and girls could be piled onto one Bowman Coaster without damage to the coaster or danger to the kids," observed the *Toys and Novelties* writer. "In their wide experience on the screen, these fun-loving youngsters have broken almost everything that is breakable; but their best efforts seem to have no effect on this strongly built coaster."120

Mass Production and Toy Marketing

As toymakers continued to employ fashion in design and advertising, even as they sought to understand the marketing phenomenon fully, revolutionary production procedures and new factory equipment made many more "quality" playthings technologically and financially feasible. Greater reliance upon machinery, as well as sophisticated manufacturing methods and plant design, allowed makers to incorporate options and details earlier rendered impractical or too costly by limited technology. At the same time, by employing innovative production methods and equipment, toymakers also increased output dramatically. While the number of firms manufacturing playthings between 1921 and
1923 increased by less than 14%, from 362 to 411 concerns, toy production jumped by greater than 57%, from $57,208,184 to $90,239,437.121

Oftentimes, businesspeople adapted machinery and techniques commonly used in other industries to toymaking. In this way, the automobile industry again came to play an especially influential role in manufacturing playthings. "In spite of its age, however," a Toys and Novelties editorialist observed in 1924, "it has perhaps taught us more about production methods, the value of automation and general manufacturing procedure than any other industry."122

Innovative production techniques spread from the auto industry to the toy industry by two different routes. In certain instances, a direct connection existed between automaking and toy manufacturing. Originally, for example, the Murray Ohio Manufacturing Co. of Cleveland fabricated metal stampings for the automobile industry. But in 1924, the firm also began to produce toy "pedal cars." Parts manufacturers found automaking, like toy manufacturing, to be highly seasonal in nature. At the same time, the manufacturing process left Murray management with large quantities of high-grade scrap sheet metal. While makers generally sold the metal to junk dealers, managers sought a more lucrative way to dispose of metal remnants.123

Toymaking, Murray executives eventually learned, put idle machinery to work using on-site scrap metal. "From the
standpoint of seasonal demand the two lines fit together admirably," observed a reporter for Toy World, a West Coast trade publication:

A rising demand for automobile stampings usually starts in January but tapers off in June. During the following month toy manufacturing begins its seasonal activities, reaches its prime during August and ends with November. Nearly all toys must leave the factory not later than December 1 to reach retail stores for holiday trade.

But as Murray-made playthings grew in popularity, management discovered that on-site scrap alone would not meet production demands. Instead, officials began to purchase new stock with the manufacture of playthings specifically in mind.  

As automakers cum toymakers introduced advanced manufacturing methods and machinery directly to the toy industry, automobile manufacturers influenced other producers in more subtle ways. Certain toymakers adopted factory organizational methods championed by automakers and other pioneers of mass production. At the same time, businesspeople not directly connected to the automobile industry adapted to the manufacture of playthings machinery used by automakers.

Towards these ends, managers reorganized the production process to expedite the flow of materials through their factories. The Gilbert Company factory, in New Haven, Connecticut, "one of the largest toy manufacturing establishments in the world," embodied the sort of efficient
organization other toymakers sought. "The factory immediately impresses one as being perfectly organized, a condition not easy to attain in a rapidly expanding business with the peculiar conditions that he [Gilbert] faces . . . .," observed a Toys and Novelties journalist in 1922. "From the time the sheets of steel are received from the company's private siding until the Erector sets packed in the attractive Gilbert cases await shipment to all parts of the country, there is careful direction which minimizes waste and puts a premium on efficiency."125

The quest for greater efficiency led to other changes. Hoping to facilitate material flow, businesspeople redesigned toy factories. The new Geo. H. Bowman Company plant in Cleveland epitomized these developments when it opened on October 1, 1924. As workers did at the Murray factory, employees here fabricated toys from metal stampings. "Because of the system of continuous operation," a Toys and Novelties reporter observed, "raw materials come in at one door and go out at the other side of the building in the form of all steel coasters, toy wheelbarrows, toy wagons, toy snow shovels, etc."126

Single-floor construction, together with the physical dimensions of the Bowman facility, made maximum efficiency possible. "This plant was very carefully laid out by expert engineers," reported another Toys and Novelties journalist, "in order that material would not be handled twice in its
Situated on 200,000 square feet of company-owned property, the Bowman factory measured 178 feet by 200 feet and contained 35,000 square feet of floor space, large enough to enable four freight cars to enter the factory proper. The single-floor plant design facilitated the movement of materials and subassemblies from one work station to the next by eliminating the time, effort, and cost necessary to transfer materials from floor to floor. "Raw material, sheet steel, bars, machined steel, screw parts, handles, enamels, cartons, supplies--a thousand things necessary for the making of a good wheel toy--all these come into the plant by car-load or truck-load and unload at the northern door of the pressroom," a reporter observed in 1926. "The progression of the manufacturing is to the south."

Within the toy factory, manufacturers relied upon machinery to further facilitate the efficient flow of materials through the production process. At the Anderson Rubber Co., where manufacturers produced playballs, footballs, balloons, and novelties, for example, businesspeople relied on "conveying machinery" to speed up production. At the Bowman factory, management employed similar equipment. There a conveyor system fed ovens used to bake the finish on metal playthings. "For baking on the finish, there has been installed the latest Swartwout Oven of the same style as used by leading automobile companies.
for finishing their bodies," a Toys and Novelties writer observed. "The various parts are dipped, put onto racks and carried to this baking oven by a wonderful overhead conveyor system which permits the maximum of speed with minimum of labor cost." 131

By employing the innovations described above, managers successfully reduced costs. "But above all," concluded a Toys and Novelties editorialist in 1923, "the American toy manufacturer is producing today better toys than have ever been seen and at a price seemingly inconsistent with costs of production." 132 Analysts and other businessmen recognized the role new production and operations management methods played in generating these savings. "The cost-reducing factory' is the term used by Mr. Neely Powers to describe this new [Bowman] plant and an inspection of the modern machinery and carefully planned layout confirms this statement," a Toys and Novelties journalist reported in the February, 1924, issue. "Mr. Powers is in charge of the manufacture and sales of all Bowman toys." 133

As they reduced production costs, businessmen devoted funds to toy marketing. One strategy affected consumers indirectly. At Bowman, for example, management passed cost reductions on to buyers who could, if so inclined, reduce retail prices. "[The] idea has been to be satisfied with a reasonable profit, always passing along to the customer through the sales force any saving in labor, material or
manufacture," an industrial journalist reported. "Whenever any method is found to be saving five per cent, a five per cent cut in prices immediately follows." 134

A second marketing strategy affected consumers more directly. Reduced production costs made highly-detailed "quality" designs affordable, and so certain businesspeople began the manufacture of these toys. "Another favorable factor is the American mass production of pressed steel toys, as exemplified in the Murray Ohio plant, which results in a marked decrease in the cost of making a high-grade article," a reporter for Toy World observed. "Thus the manufacturers have kept pace with the demands of the youngsters for toys that are equipped with most of the extras they see on grown-ups' vehicles." 135 In this way, marketing concerns directly influenced toy design and production.

The technology and fabrication methods that "pedal-car" makers in particular employed epitomized the role mass production played in the manufacture of quality toys. Sometime prior to 1890, toymakers had introduced the first pedal-cars. Mechanically, these children's vehicles were of two types. A chain drove some early cars. In other instances, however, foot-cranls enabled youngsters to operate the vehicles, and this system eventually predominated. In any event, after 1890, pedal-cars gained steadily in popularity. Indeed, before the turn of the
century, the popularity of the toy led mail-order merchants to list these vehicles in their catalogues.\textsuperscript{136} By roughly 1910, according to Edoardo Massucci, a later student of the pedal-car, a secure market for the pedal-car existed in the United States.\textsuperscript{137}

Hoping to lend their pedal-cars greater authenticity, toymakers affixed actual automobile names to these miniature vehicles. This custom began relatively early in the history of the pedal-car. Even before 1910, for example, certain domestic pedal-cars bore the name "Cadillac" or "White" on their toy radiators. Massucci is careful to point out, however, that primary manufacturers of full-size automobiles played no part in the construction of these playthings.\textsuperscript{138} In any event, during the mid-twenties, the practice of naming pedal-cars for actual automobiles grew increasingly common. By 1922, toy vehicles produced by The American National Company carried the names "Packard" and "Stutz Bear Cat."\textsuperscript{139} By 1923, a pedal-car produced by The Gendron Wheel Co. also bore the "Packard" name.\textsuperscript{140} Gendron also manufactured two "Buicks," as well as a "Dodge," "Nash," and "Reo."\textsuperscript{141}

Given the interplay between toy and full-size vehicle marketing, pedal car producers may have influenced the sale of adult autos. Analysts believed that the manufacturer of branded toy consumer goods influenced the decision-making of adult shoppers, a perception department store entrepreneurs
in particular had held earlier. On one level, writers concluded that a toy might convince an adult shopper to purchase a particular brand. "[A] toy sweeper in the home," a writer in *Toys and Novelties* observed in 1921, "is clearly a good advertisement for the full sized sweeping devices." On another level, however, analysts also believed that toys bearing brand names would influence decision-making of future consumer. "It is common experience that what the grown-ups use and want the youngsters generally want too, for the childhood impressions are vivid and lasting," observed a *Toys and Novelties* analyst in 1923. "Preferences formed upon the threshold of life are more than likely to be permanent and it's only a comparatively short time before little Bill Smith graduates into the long trouser class." Intentionally or unintentionally, then, the practice of affixing the names of adult vehicles to pedal-cars may well have influenced automobile purchasing decisions.

By the early 1920's, manufactures of other consumer goods had begun to produce playthings with marketing in mind. At the H. C. Fry Glass Co., manufacturers of oven glass, for example, management produced a bake set for children, while the Singer Sewing Machine Co. also produced a working toy replica. Similarly, at the Bissel Carpet Sweeper Co., makers miniaturized a portion of their line. The toy sweepers prominently displayed the Bissel name.
"You may have wondered how we can make these miniatures to retail as low as 25c and still yield you a decent profit," wrote a Bissell publicist in a *Toys and Novelties* industrial advertisement in March, 1924. "The plain truth is that we make them primarily as missionaries for the large size carpet sweepers and our real returns lie in their advertising value."145

After the first decade of the twentieth century, but especially during the first half of the 1920's, pedal-cars, like adult autos, continued to change. Historian James J. Flink has observed that by the late 1920's, automakers had incorporated into production most innovations associated with the modern automobile. Hoping, nonetheless, to keep sales high, automakers instituted stylistic changes on a regular basis, a procedure since dubbed "planned obsolescence."146 Innovations in children's vehicles paralleled the mechanical and fashion developments automakers applied to full-size vehicle design.147 In this way, toymakers, like their counterparts in the auto industry, fostered consumption.

Like adult vehicle manufacturers, pedal-car makers incorporated mechanical innovations designed to improve the workability of their product. In 1923, for example, the Toledo Metal Wheel Company of Toledo, Ohio, introduced the "'Toledo' No-Dead-Center gear." Especially on inclines, earlier, non-rotating pedals sometimes locked-up, leaving
young drivers temporarily stranded. The new Toledo pedal system, manufacturers insisted, avoided locking. "Up-hill, on the level, at slow or high speed, the 'Toledo' equipped Kid pedals happily along," explained a copywriter in the March, 1923 issue of Toys and Novelties, "while the ordinary gear refuses to make the grade--locks in the most provoking manner and must be started by hand turn of the wheel, to the untold annoyance and humiliation of its youthful owner."148

As automakers equipped adult vehicles with a host of accessories, pedal-car makers did likewise. Like their full-size counterparts, pedal-cars varied considerably in price and equipment. "The discriminating buyer will find in this model, all of the features required to make it a leader--Ball Bearing Disc Steel Rubber Tired Wheels, Windshield, Gas and Spark Control, Upholstered Seat, Gear-shift, etc.," boasted a copywriter for The Lirk-Latty Mfg. Company of Cleveland, Ohio, in an industrial advertisement for "The Cleveland Line" in the March, 1922, issue of Toys and Novelties. "Handsomely finished in bright snappy color varnishes."149 Not to be outdone, that same year, T. M. Vaughn of Lisbon, Ohio, released a pedal-car complete with a detailed engine. "The engine does not run the car," an industrial reporter explained, "but runs with the car.150

Like certain full-size vehicles, some pedal-cars bordered on the luxurious. Manufacturers lent toy vehicles elegance in a number of ways. Some toymakers imitated the
shape of impressive full-size vehicles. "See the flowing lines of the GENDRON pictured," advertisers boasted in an industrial advertisement in 1923 featuring their "Packard." "They are created from those of most expensive big cars."151 Other manufacturers detailed their cars with nickel-plated fenders, radiators, and hub caps, or crowned miniature radiators with intricate hood ornaments in a manner again reminiscent of adult autos.152

Finally, by adding accessories, makers also increased the perceived value of the vehicle. Marketing experts coupled Coogan’s endorsement of the "Toledo" De Luxe, as mentioned above, with detail changes designed to enhance toy realism but also to create an association with full-size automotive opulence. The vehicle featured disc wheels, three-leaf cantilever springs, road lamps with non-glare lenses, stop signal, adjustable spot light, an adjustable wind shield complete with wipers and wind breakers, hinged doors, side-mounted spare tire, radiator cap with meterometer, a fender mirror, and a ventilator on the hood. The interior included a wood rim steering wheel, auto horn, an instrument panel with clock and speedometer, spark and gas control, and a gear shift.153 "A study of the real features as incorporated," boasted a Toledo copywriter in 1924, "makes our line a year in advance of competition," in other words more up-to-date and fashionable.154
Massucci has questioned the utility of the innovations, particularly the addition of working headlights in 1922, "since the drivers of these cars had not yet reached the stage of going off on night-time jaunts." On pragmatic grounds, Massucci could have criticized most other pedal car ornaments and gadgets. In this regard, for example, step plates, spare tires, and nickel plating all served little purpose.

But if in Massucci’s eyes, many pedal-car innovations offered no practical improvement in vehicle performance, they increased pedal-car appeal and vehicle sales. Pedal-car innovations and embellishments attracted children, as well as adults. On one level, the new vehicles lent young operators the sort of feelings of power and prestige that children associated with adulthood. Earlier, department store salespeople encouraged similar feelings as they merchandised playthings on the salesfloor. Makers now designed the toys themselves to engender a similar response. Accessories in particular, Massucci hypothesized, contributed to these perceptions enjoyed by children. "[T]hose little lights lit-up certainly gave the driver the feeling of importance," Massucci admits. "The whole experience of driving became more 'real' as it were, and the distance separating the child driver from the grown-up was reduced still more."
On another level, however, pedal-car innovations also held a certain allure for adults. As early as 1899, Thorstein Veblen described the role that "conspicuous consumption" had already come to play in American culture. His observations may help to explain the popularity of the pedal-car among adult shoppers. "The basis on which good repute in any highly organized industrial community ultimately rests is pecuniary strength:" wrote Veblen, "and the means of showing pecuniary strength, and so of gaining or retaining a good name, are leisure and a conspicuous consumption of goods." In this regard, Veblen continued, "the gentleman of leisure" himself need not consume to enjoy the accolades linked by the members of society to consumption. "Vicarious consumption," consumption enjoyed by a wife or child, for example, Veblen concluded, though ancillary, might also benefit family reputation. Large and highly visible, extravagant pedal-cars functioned admirably in this role. As young drivers happily drove their pedal-cars up-and-down neighborhood streets and sidewalks, they unknowingly advertised parental consumption and, in so doing, fostered adult prestige.

Retailers supported the pedal-car craze by holding auto shows patterned after adult exhibitions. In so doing, distributors further exposed children to the concept of fashion as well as to the automobile buying process. In Boston in 1924, for example, officials at Filene's
department store held a miniature Auto Show designed to coincide with the adult version in town at the same time.\textsuperscript{158} In Washington, D.C., managers at Lansburgh & Brothers staged a similar, two-day event, a "Kiddies Automobile Show."\textsuperscript{159}

A reporter credited Mr. Perkins, toy department assistant buyer, with the idea for the R. H. Macy's exhibition in New York. After visiting an actual auto show, Perkins learned that pedal-car makers had roughly 200 samples of "their newest models" available for display. His recent visit to a regular auto exhibit, together with the availability of samples, inspired Perkins to suggest a miniature version. His superiors liked the suggestion and allotted a large area to the show. Here employees erected booths within which specially trained salespeople might display and sell the toy autos. At the same time, planners left room for on-site demonstrations. In addition, to ensure pedestrian safety, but also to add atmosphere to the exhibit, managers assigned "policemen" to regulate traffic.\textsuperscript{160}

Merchandisers' efforts succeeded admirably. The Macy's exhibition attracted over three thousand spectators, and increased toy auto purchases substantially. "The automobile show increased the sale of cars at Macy's several hundred per cent," the reporter continued, "and what is more, the increased sale is still continuing."\textsuperscript{161} At the Lansburgh show, retail efforts proved even more successful. D. L.
McCarthy, toy buyer for Larsburgh & Brothers, estimated that 1,500 youngsters test drove pedal-cars. Another 6,500 individuals visited the exposition.¹⁶²

Conduct that reporters and businesspeople observed during and after the shows indicated that automakers, as well as toy merchandisers and manufacturers, had been at least somewhat successful in training nonrural children as consumers. In this way, businesspeople also socialized the youngsters into the culture. Children, observers noted, not only recognized different automotive brands but also demonstrated certain partialities. "The kiddies seemed just as good judges, and showed as much preference for certain kinds to others, as their elders at the Boston Automobile Show," observed a reporter analyzing the Filene's display.¹⁶³ Macy's officials noticed similar behavior. "Almost every day," the journalist reported, "some young buyer who was not able to purchase the car of his choice during the show comes in to ask for a 'Rolls' or a 'Packard' or whatever it may be."¹⁶⁴

Conclusion

By 1925, thanks in part to pedal car production, American manufacturers had become the largest makers of playthings world-wide by a substantial margin. "The United States is not generally thought of as the greatest toy manufacturing nation in the world," reported J. M. Calvin,
of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. "yet its production is more than twice that of Germany, the nearest rival." During 1925, domestic makers produced roughly $75,000,000 worth of playthings. Despite high production levels, businesspeople continued to export a relatively small percentage of the playthings they produced. They chose instead to concentrate their selling efforts upon the domestic market. A *New York Times* journalist reported that retailers distributed 75% of all playthings produced in the United States to domestic shoppers. Federal authorities attributed high sales at home to quality designs and then singled out pedal cars as one example. During 1925, Calvin reported, children's vehicles alone accounted for 25% of all toys produced in the United States.

By fusing production decisions and marketing considerations, businesspeople unwittingly or coincidentally bolstered the developing culture of consumption. Sometime prior to the 1920's, makers and sellers had begun disseminating messages of consumption using print advertising. During the first half of the 1920's, however, a number of manufacturers began to incorporate consumption into the playthings themselves. At the same time, new mass production methods provided manufacturers with the tools necessary to increase production greatly and thus disseminate their messages more widely than had been possible in the past.
As we have seen, as early as 1922, analysts had come to recognize the existence of toy fads and appreciate the lucrative potential of such crazes, as in the case of the Arcade taxicab. If businesspeople recognized the reality of these fads, by mid-decade, they had also begun an active search to understand and recreate the phenomenon. "What are the underlying principles of longevity in the popularity of toys and games?" a Toys and Novelties analyst asked in 1925. In answer to the journalists' question, industrial leaders hypothesized that an identifiable pattern might exist. The discovery of a readily imitated, rational progression by which makers might duplicate earlier fads, they knew, promised substantial profits in return. "The manufacturer or dealer who could answer this with certainty would indeed have a gold mine at his command," the Toys and Novelties writer concluded.168

Despite the marketing reverie of the writer above, as well as the success of certain quality toy producers, people in the business remained doubtful that manufacturers would ever control demand. As late as 1926, the nature of the toy market remained largely a mystery to most analysts. Businesspeople discerned no pattern to the demand for innovation, and without this understanding, they could not hope to create a market. Clary of the Merchandising Council described the haphazard nature of the toy market. As distributors sought to forecast demand, he noted, the
capricious nature of the market led retail toy buyers to continue to rely on relatively primitive methods. Entrepreneurs continued to base their buying decisions on trial and error. "He can only hope to strike the public fancy more or less at random," wrote Clary, "and then turn his stock and take his profits quickly." Toymakers, he concluded, generally fared no better in their forecasting efforts. "Even with all the data possible in hand," he concluded, "the toy designer still is shooting at random, as I see it."169
NOTES TO CHAPTER V


4 "Re-Adjustment," Toys and Novelties, December 1920, 127.


6 Calvin, International Trade in Toys, 3.


8 Soule, Prosperity Decade, 94.


10 "Re-Adjustment," 127.


12 "Re-Adjustment," 127.

13 "Retailers Discuss Toy Situation," Toys and Novelties, June 1920, 66.

14 "Retailers Discuss Toy Situation," 65-66.


16 Gilbert with McClintock, The Man Who Lives in Paradise,
175.

17"Better Toy Buying Spirit by Consumers," *Toys and Novelties*, November 1921, 68.


19"Toy Manufacturers are Asking Only Reasonable Profits," *Toys and Novelties*, June 1920, 76.


21Soule, *Prosperity Decade*, 98.

22Quoted in Hollander, *All Aboard!* 86.


26"Re-Adjustment," 127-128.

27"Re-Adjustment," 127-128.


33"Re-Adjustment," 127.


37 Gilbert is careful to indicate that the individuals present understood that the seance was a fake: "They all took it in the right spirit and knew it was a hoax, of course, but some of the people there, as in almost any gathering, wanted to believe in spirits. And the others had no idea how I had managed to do it. Mr. Aiken, above all, couldn’t figure out how I knew these facts about his past." See Gilbert with McClintock, *The Man Who Lives in Paradise*, 178-180.

38 Soule, *Prosperity Decade*, 96.


41 "Strauss Toy Shops Bankrupt," *Toys and Novelties*, April 1921, 82.


44 "Requiescat in Pace," 53.

45 "Bankrupted by German Competition," 22.


48 "Toy Trade Fears German Rivalry," 8.

49 *United States Statutes at Large*, 38 (1913), sec. 1, 147.


51 See, for example, The Little King," *Time*, 12 December 1955, 96.

53 Soule, *Prosperity Decade*, 107, 110-112.


56 "Toy Buying Starts in Earnest," *Toys and Novelties*, June 1922, 41.


58 Daniel Pope has observed that toy marketers perceptions coincided with beliefs commonly held among advertisers at large. See *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983), 249.

59 "Study Your Customers’ Wants," 77.

60 "Working with the Producer," *Toys and Novelties*, May 1922, 47.


64 Soule, *Prosperity Decade*, 107, 124-25.


67 "‘Something Else Again’ from the American-National Co.,” *Toys and Novelties*, April 1922, 69.


69 "Quality Toys," 250.

Hollander, All Aboard! 36.

"Variety is the Thing," Says Toy Buyer," Toys and Novelties, October 1923, 50.


"Why Do Some Toys Live Long While Others Die Young?" Toys and Novelties, September 1925, 69.

Journalist Frederick Lewis Allen has discussed the prevalence of fads during the 1920's, especially the role played by the mass media in their dissemination. See Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920's (New York: Harper & Row, 1931 [reprint 1964]), 155-179.


I. P. Gassman, "We Built Backward from the Final Sale," Printers' Ink, 10 May 1928, 54.

Gassman, "We Build Backward from the Final Sale," 57.


Gassman, "We Built Backward from the Final Sale," 58.


"Arcade's Big Advertising Stunt," Toys and Novelties, December 1922, 105.

"The Story of a Remarkable Toy Sensation," 93.

"The Story of a Remarkable Toy Sensation," 93.

"The Story of a Remarkable Toy Sensation," 93.


Toys and Novelties, March 1922, 141.


"The Story of a Remarkable Toy Sensation," 93
91 "Biography of the Animated Doll," *Toys and Novelties*, September 1923, 52.

92 *Toys and Novelties*, January 1921, 215.

93 *Toys and Novelties*, September 1922, 11.


96 "Bye-Lo Baby Doll a 'Hit,‘’ *Toys and Novelties*, July 1924, 59.

97 *Toys and Novelties*, May 1924, 11.

98 Dorothy Lucas, "Dolls No Longer Mere Dolls--They Are 'Humans,'" *Toys and Novelties*, January 1926, 291.

99 Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 95.


Adela Rogers St. John, "The Kid Who Earned a Million," *Photoplay*, February 1923, 45. In another photograph of Coogan in an earlier issue, the young star posed in his playroom with some of his other playthings, among them an electric train set and a toy boat. See, "The House That Jackie Built," *Photoplay*, January 1923, 47.

*Toys and Novelties*, January 1923, 68.


"Hal Roach's Rascals Try the Strength of Bowman Coasters," *Toys and Novelties*, April 1929, 86.


123"7500 All-Steel Toys a Day," Toy World, February 1929, 73.
124"7500 All-Steel Toys a Day," 73.
125"A Story of Growth," Toys and Novelties, October 1922, 64.
126"New Bowman Toy Factory a Wonder in Efficiency," Toys and Novelties, February 1924, 151.
127"From Jobbers to Big Manufacturers," Toys and Novelties, June 1925, 62.
128"New Bowman Toy Factory a Wonder in Efficiency," 151.
129"Mass Production in Cleveland Toy Factory," Toys and Novelties, June 1926, 73.
130"How Toy Balloons Are Made," Toys and Novelties, February 1922, 143.
131"New Bowman Factory a Wonder in Efficiency," 151.
132"Toy Business Comes Into Its Own," Toys and Novelties, February 1923, 118.
133"New Bowman Toy Factory a Wonder in Efficiency," 151.
134"From Jobbers to Big Manufacturers," 62.
135"7500 All-Steel Toys a Day," 73.
138Massucci, Cars for Kids, 8, 24-25.
139Toys and Novelties, January 1922, 140.
140Toys and Novelties, March 1923, 34.
142"Big Business in Toy Sweepers," Toys and Novelties, May 1921, 70.
"Wonderful Toy Miniatures," *Toys and Novelties*, October 1923, 54.

"Wonderful Toy Miniatures," 54.

*Toys and Novelties*, March 1924, 70.


Massucci, *Cars for Kids*, 12.

*Toys and Novelties*, March 1923, 72.

*Toys and Novelties*, March 1922, 23.

"And the Engine ‘Runs Just Like Dad’s’," *Toys and Novelties*, March 1922, 96. See also *Toys and Novelties*, March 1922, 77.

*Toys and Novelties*, March, 1923, 34.


*Toys and Novelties*, January 1923, 68.

Massucci, *Cars for Kids*, 35.


"Filene’s Put on Toy Auto Show," *Toys and Novelties*, April 1924, 67.

"Lansburgh’s Auto Show," *Playthings*, January 1925, 388.


"Lansburgh’s Auto Show," 388.

"Filene’s Put on Toy Auto Show," 67.


"Why Do Some Toys Live Long While Others Die Young?" 69.

CHAPTER VI: THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOY FASHION, 1927-1938

As we saw in the last chapter, during the first half of the 1920’s, makers and sellers relied in part upon children to increase market control. In the process, these businessmen unintentionally lent continued support to a consumer ethic. In succeeding years, children continued to play an important role in the marketing and merchandising efforts that businessmen employed, as well as maintaining the culture.

Throughout much of the last half of the 1920’s, the toy industry continued to flourish. Social changes fueled demand, and toymakers and sellers earned substantial profits. Children themselves, as independent economic agents, constituted a significant portion of this newly expanded market. Among middle-class, and eventually working-class families, with ever-increasing frequency parents provided youngsters with an allowance. As their working-class counterparts had earlier, middle-class youngsters now became important shoppers in their own right.1 Young consumers from different backgrounds shared

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similar consumer experiences and learned common behavior and
cognititions. In this way, the culture became diffused.

As demand increased for new toys, manufacturers
continued to experiment with fashion. As indicated in the
previous chapter, earlier in the decade, businesspeople
identified the toy fad as a marketing phenomenon and then
redefined the concept of plaything quality. During the late
1920’s and 1930’s, however, manufacturers came to certain
key conclusions in their quest to reproduce toy fads at
will. Experts noticed a connection between the subject
matter of certain profitable toys and current events of
public interest, particularly images generated by the mass
media. Over time, therefore, producers consciously applied
observers’ perceptions to plaything design and
manufacturing. They licensed the images of media
characters, often children, and used them in toy design.

As we shall see, as media celebrities and then through
licensing as the subject matter of certain playthings,
children contributed again to the demand for toys but also
helped to maintain the consumer culture. Child stars became
an important part of an iconography of consumption widely
shared by Americans at almost every age and social station.
As they experienced licensed marketing, youngsters in
general learned other common behaviors and cognitions
characteristic of the culture.
Developing Fashion

By the late 1920's, sociologists and other commentators recognized that the American family, especially urban, middle-class households, had begun to change in certain important respects. The transition, a significant demographic shift, experts noted, comprised a reduction in family size. In their 1920's study of Muncie, Indiana--Middletown--for example, Robert and Helen Lynd found prevailing views on household size consistent with this trend. "Families of six to fourteen children, upon which the grandparents of the present generation prided themselves," they wrote, "are considered as somehow not as 'nice' as families of two, three, or four children . . . ." Over time, observers recorded other related changes in the character and function of the institution. The changes in the family stimulated toy demand.

The fact that middle-class couples chose to have fewer children contributed to a change in the societal role of the family, as well as the character of that institution as an isolated phenomenon. "[W]ith increasing regulation of the size of the family," the Lynds explained, "emphasis has shifted somewhat from child-bearing to child-rearing." As parents began to concentrate on child rearing, they also adopted a more affectionate and egalitarian family model. One aspect of the new democratization specifically affected the relationship between children and their fathers. The
new model allowed fathers to take a more active role in child rearing. A second aspect of the model altered the relationship between children and both parents. With fewer children to care for, parents now more often had the time and money to cater to the unique needs and qualities of individual youngsters. While the typical middle-class household contained fewer children, then, parents lavished greater attention—and expenditure—upon the youngsters they did have.5 "If care for children in the home was less extensive than formerly, it was also more intensive," historian Preston Slosson, a contemporary of the phenomenon, concluded in 1930. "At no previous period were children tended with such watchful care of their health, diet, habits and abilities."6

As parents grew increasingly preoccupied with the intricacies of child rearing, they sought guidance, but contemporary parents often found sage advice lacking.7 As Robert Wiebe has indicated, by the late 1920's, social change had rendered much traditional business and economic expertise ineffective.8 Contemporary observers found that the same situation prevailed in regard to the family. "In earlier times, when life was much the same from generation to generation, rules for bringing up children were developed in detail and readily disseminated," concluded sociologist William F. Ogburn, a student of the modern American family at that time. "But the new and changing perplexities of
modern life require education for parenthood." Concerned adults concurred and turned to experts for their insights.

During the 1920’s, a number of sources offered anxious parents the child-rearing advice they sought. The federal government constituted one outlet. Experts working for the U.S. Children’s Bureau disseminated a certain kind of advice through their publications. As they did so, government authorities unwittingly also promulgated the ethos of consumption.

Federal child-rearing experts encouraged consumption as the healthiest way to circumvent abhorrent behavior in youngsters. After examining succeeding issues of the U.S. Children’s Bureau Bulletin, Infant Care, anthropologist Martha Wolfenstein identified a new "fun morality" evident in child-rearing literature by the late 1920’s. Between 1914 and 1921, officials had encouraged physical restraint as the most successful way to discourage masturbation, thumbsucking, and other behavior that experts and other individuals identified as inappropriate. By the late 1920’s, however, Wolfenstein found that authorities had begun to promote much different advice. Rather than suggesting that parents bind their youngsters, experts instead encouraged adults to distract errant children using toys. By redirecting the youngster’s attention, officials maintained, parents might readily interest the child in more wholesome pursuits.
Advertisers offered consumers a second source of child-rearing advice based upon the insights above. Recognizing the marketing potential inherent in the latest child-rearing literature, certain copywriters adapted expert suggestions to the selling of toys and other consumer goods. The new marketing strategy differed qualitatively from the advice federal authorities distributed, however. Roland Marchand has explained that in comparison, advertisers disseminated an especially indulgent interpretation of the "fun morality."\textsuperscript{13}

The new marketing strategy meshed well with an advertising style only then coming into vogue among certain marketing experts, "dramatic realism." Advertisers who used "dramatic realism" to sell consumer goods relied upon a standard pattern to devise copy. Copywriters first described a harsh, unforgiving social order in which members constantly judged their fellows. The smallest mistake, advertisers suggested, could cause disapproval, even humiliation. In this way, copywriters elevated common, everyday problems to new levels of significance. Then, posing as a confidant and an adviser--a ploy salespeople had employed earlier on the department store salesfloor--copywriters offered the consumer a solution to his or her problem in product form.\textsuperscript{14}

Certain toy manufacturers, in particular, found the new style especially appropriate to their advertising needs.
Print advertisers persisted in their strategy of selling playthings to adults indirectly through children, using the new, more manipulative technique. "All over the country there are millions of eager, keen-eyed boys who have made up their minds to get a Daisy Air Rifle," explained a major proponent of the new style in an industrial advertisement in 1926. "To assist their attack, we carry on a ‘barrage’ on the parents, in the shape of a strong, educational advertising campaign in the Saturday Evening Post, American Magazine, and other national publications, reaching practically every better-class home in the United States."15

Marketing experts who employed "dramatic realism" structured toy advertisements around contemporary child-rearing concerns, and Daisy copywriters tapped these parental fears. As part of a series of Daisy air rifle advertisements marketing experts ran in 1926, copywriters echoed the self-consciousness parents faced with the uncertain development their youngsters experienced. "Your Boy--What Kind of a Man Will He Make?" asked a Daisy advertising expert.16 At roughly the same time, copywriters also tapped the anxiety parents felt over their role in this process. "Are you guiding your boy’s play habits?" inquired another writer in a different advertisement for the same product.17

Other copywriters addressed the concerns fathers felt as they assumed a more active role in child rearing. In an
advertisement for Daisy Air Rifles, for example, a
抄writer described the gradual dissolution of comraderie
once common between a father and his son:

The most farseeing father is sometimes blind
to the fellowship of his son. For no apparent
reason, a rift comes gradually.
Where has that 'pal idea' gone? They were such
good friends a few years back!18

After focusing reader attention on typical child-rearing
concerns, advertising experts offered parents solutions to
these problems. Daisy copywriters assumed the role of the
traditional adviser and confidant. At a time in which
parents faced unprecedented child-rearing concerns, Daisy
advertising experts marketed their guns as a link to
traditional values and customary developmental methods. "My
Boy Is Going to Have the Training that I Had," announced a
fictitious father in a Daisy advertisement in The Saturday
Evening Post in December, 1926.19

Having adopted the role of mentor, copywriters offered
anxious parents succor through specific toy purchasing
suggestions. In one series of advertisements, for example,
marketing experts insisted that Daisy air rifles embodied a
solution to the uncertainties of contemporary child rearing.
"This campaign . . .," the advertiser explained to
distributors, "tells a convincing story of manly training
and character development that has made a strong appeal to
intelligent parents everywhere."20 In one advertisement,
for example, copywriters offered "Boy Training That Makes Self-Reliant Men:"

It’s surprising how fast boys grow. Only a short time ago, that boy of yours played with simple little playthings. Now he’s keen about target-shooting, and wants a rifle all his own. Don’t put him off needlessly. Think it over. Won’t he be a better man, with the training in clean, manly sport that he can get from a Daisy Air Rifle!

Particular products, toy advertisers also insisted, offered family members, especially fathers, opportunities for familial togetherness and affection through play. In an S.L. Allen & Co. advertisement in The Saturday Evening Post in 1926, for example, a graphic artist illustrated the sort of fellowship a "Flexible Flyer" sled might rekindle. The illustration featured a boy lying on top of and hugging his prone father as the two sped down a snowy hill. "Nothing else," a copywriter concluded in the same advertisement, "gives Dad such an opportunity for sharing with his child the enjoyment and companionship of vigorous play." 21 Daisy management insisted that their air rifles offered fathers and sons similar benefits, notably comraderie and understanding:

Here is a useful medium of contact—the Daisy method of boy-training. A Daisy rifle unfailingly provides "the common touch" between boy and man. Millions of sons have received their first lessons in marksmanship with the Daisy—and of these, many thousands were made pals to their fathers by its friendly influence. 22
If child-rearing experts and businesspeople encouraged parents to distract children through consumption, however, adults reportedly had more trouble manipulating contemporary youngsters to change their behavior than parents had had convincing youngsters in the past. While this may have been the case, the change certainly did not curb parental toy purchases.

Witnesses complained that youngsters were now less easily taken in by adults, since contemporary youngsters were more worldly, even jaded, than their predecessors. "Their imagination has been stifled;" insisted P. K. Crocker, Advertising and Sales Manager at John Schoonmaker & Son, Inc., "for little is left to them to imagine these days, thanks to the elaborateness and mechanical perfection of what used to be called ‘playthings.’"23 In an interview conducted in 1925, Harry A. Hartman, by then a department store Santa Claus for fourteen years, also testified to the change. When asked if children still believed in Santa, Hartman replied in the affirmative and then qualified his answer. "But you find more who are ‘wise’ at a younger age," Hartman observed. "I’ve seen little five-year-old tots with the knowingest smiles on their faces as they watched older children who were spellbound in the presence of Santa Claus."24 In at least one case, such a youngster, egged on by her mother, attempted to pull off Hartman’s beard in front of the other youngsters.25
As one aspect of the worldliness modern youngsters exhibited, observers identified a new acquisitiveness, a side of their nature many children expressed willingly. "Anyone who has read a few hundred 'messages to Santa[,]’ formalities without belief, too often, noting the complacent demands and extravagances," Crocker continued, "knows something of the modern youngster’s practical and possessive, not to say acquisitive, attributes."²⁶ Although somewhat more charitable, a second observer drew a similar conclusion. "The child is a veritable collector," concluded the analyst in Toys and Novelties in 1926, "and likes to have his collection increased."²⁷

By the late 1920’s, youngsters could indulge their acquisitiveness primarily in two socially acceptable ways. One option offered children a direct means by which they might obtain playthings. As "allowances" became increasingly common among middle-class, and eventually working-class, youngsters, children now could purchase toys and other consumer goods themselves. Indeed, some parents and certain child-rearing authorities encouraged consumption as a kind of fiscal training.²⁸

As children developed both the will and the means to obtain toys, manufacturers and distributors encouraged children to act upon their desires. One tactic involved accessory toy sales, the development of supplementary components or replacement parts sold separately.
Businesspeople at The Ives Manufacturing Company, the Weeden Manufacturing Company—makers of miniature steam engines—, The Lionel Corporation, and other firms all benefited from the concept. Executives at The A. C. Gilbert Company championed accessory sales with particular enthusiasm. Officials, for example, provided every Erector distributor with a specially designed parts cabinet containing hundreds of pieces. Over time, their efforts succeeded measurably.29 "Some boys come into the store three or four times a day for parts that they want," reported H. L. Tisch, Gilbert's head of sales and advertising, in 1926, "and the total sales during one month are really sizeable."30 Traditionally, Tisch noted, businesspeople placed few orders immediately after the beginning of the year, but Erector orders received during January, 1925, totaled $50,000.31

Potentially, parents and other adults provided children with a second, less direct avenue of consumption. Youngsters could urge parents or other adults to make purchases, an alternative, as we saw in chapter IV, advertisers were already fostering. Indeed, evidence continued to suggest that many youngsters successfully encouraged parents to buy playthings. In a 1926 issue of Toys and Novelties, one observer commented on the influence youngsters now exerted over their parents' toy purchasing decisions. "Dealers are more and more finding that children have instructed their parents what toy they want," the
writer reported, "and if we can keep them wanting more toys
throughout the year and telling parents to buy definite
items, that means increased all year toy business."\textsuperscript{32}

If distributors now found that children often persuaded
their parents to buy toys, little direct evidence exists to
indicate the degree to which other individuals influenced
adults to make purchases. Paula Fass and others have shown,
for example, that during the 1920's, parents read child-
rearing literature avidly.\textsuperscript{33} Less evidence exists to
indicate whether or not parents actually applied what
experts recommended, however. For this reason, Wolfenstein
has warned readers against assuming that parents actually
took the advice of experts simply because the officials at
the U.S. Children's Bureau published child-rearing
information.\textsuperscript{34}

Whether the result of expert advice, the encouragement
of children, or some other influence, by the latter half of
the 1920's, businesspeople reported a marked increase in
demand for innovative playthings, especially from adult
purchasers. "More than ever before people are demanding new
things," observed Mr. Martin, proprietor of Martin's Toy
Shop on Portland, Maine, in an interview in early 1926.
"The time was that you could buy the same toy year in and
year out, but in order to sell toys these days the dealer
must carry novelties."\textsuperscript{35} A well-known Chicago toy buyer
noted a similar call for fresh playthings. "Were it not for
the parents, we would hardly have to make any alterations in
the style of our toys," the buyer observed. "It is not the
youngsters who ask continually for something new, but their
mothers and fathers." 36

As consumers increasingly demanded innovation—the
semblance of which is an important aspect of fashion—in
playthings, other factors also combined to increase
businesspeople's interest in marketing and merchandising in
general. As indicated in the previous chapter, by the late
1920's, businesspeople confronted a highly competitive urban
business environment. Sellers found the market more
difficult still, when, in 1927, the economy went through a
recession. As a result, manufacturers also grew
increasingly concerned about overproduction and,
consequently, they were anxious to sell all they produced. 37

Late in the decade, as businesspeople's interest in
marketing and merchandising increased, observers within the
toy industry demonstrated that they now had a clearer
understanding of toy fashion. By 1927, industry
spokespersons began to comment on the role that current
events played in fostering the phenomenon. In a newspaper
interview, Leo Cohn, toy buyer for the Schlesinger chain of
stores, concluded, for example, that youngsters appreciated
topicality in their playthings, and that this interest often
fueled toy fads. "It is surprising," he observed, "the
extent to which children reflect the interests of their
elders and require the news of the day to find expression in their toys." Cohen divided successful playthings into three categories: "There are certain staples which appeal to something permanent in the child heart; there are other temporary interests which demand satisfaction; and sometimes what began as a fad has a mysterious quality of its own by virtue of which it endures and becomes a staple." Referring to Lindbergh's recent flight and increased interest in all sorts of toy planes, Cohen observed that the subject matter of fashionable playthings, toys in Cohen's second category in particular, often bore a noticeable relationship to current events.³⁸

Soon E. J. Clary of the Merchandising Council also recognized the link between toy fashion and popular concerns, but unlike Cohen, Clary stressed the appeal topical playthings held for adult shoppers. Topicality enabled businesspeople to meet new standards of quality or fashion developed earlier in the decade and increase adult sales. "As a matter of fact," Clary concluded, "I think most toy retailers will agree that a large percentage of their best sales are made by adults on impulse, suggested, perhaps, by some incident at home or some event that is getting big space in newspapers at the time."³⁹

Observations made by Clary, Cohen, and other businesspeople signaled a major conceptual breakthrough in toy merchandising. Having recognized the link between
fashionable playthings and media topicality, analysts now concluded that retailers might not only predict, but also foster, consumer interest in specific toys by purposefully associating the playthings with public events. "The close connection with retail demand for certain toys which are associated with outstanding events in the public mind and press brings about a noticeable reaction, probably much stronger than the average dealer realizes . . . .", Clary wrote. "There is no question but we have here an interesting fact in connection with retail toy merchandising, and one that the dealer can take practical advantage of."40

As observers within the toy industry demonstrated an improved understanding of fashion, businesspeople grew increasingly disenchanted with certain older marketing practices employed to promote a semblance of value. Despite the success of some testimonial campaigns, by the late 1920's, marketing of this sort fell into disrepute among certain experts. Readers, these publicists feared, had begun to doubt the sincerity of testimonial advertisements. As a result, publicists began to question the usefulness of the format. Several factors contributed to public, and then expert, disillusionment. Overexposure rendered certain personalities less effective than they had been earlier, and a series of revelations also reflected poorly on the tactic. Rumors circulated to the effect that certain celebrities had
made the solicitation of endorsements their profession. Other stories dealt with the high salaries businesspeople willingly paid famous individuals for endorsements. The fact that certain celebrities never used the products they recommended further damaged the reputation of the testimonial.41

Rather than abandoning the testimonial format altogether, some marketing experts within the toy industry retained the strategy but changed tactics. Hoping to recapture the sincerity inherent in certain earlier testimonial advertisements, for example, publicists at The Dorfan Company, an electric train manufacturer, relied upon more typical children to endorse the toys in their copy. "We might have tried the scheme of going to Jackie Coogan or other well-known boys and getting them to say something nice about our trains for a price," admitted John E. McCrady, General Sales Manager for the Dorfan Company, in a Printers' Ink interview in 1929, "but the harder and more logical plan seemed to us to be a dramatized test at some convenient boys' camp where the actual construction work could be done by regular boys and the results made into newsy advertising."42

The advertisements, aimed at youngsters themselves, featured boys whom the publicists photographed at a New Jersey Boy Scout Camp, Camp No-Be-Bo-Sco, playing with Dorfan electric trains and equipment. One particularly
evocative picture featured a smiling scout, surrounded by his fellows, holding an engine aloft. Publicists coupled this picture with others and then added text in what McCrady termed "boys' language." Through these advertisements, publicists described attributes of the trains but also announced a lucrative Dorfan contest, directing youngsters to local dealers to obtain additional information.43

After officials ran the advertisements in several boys' magazines, train sales improved substantially. McCrady attributed the 50% increase at least in part to the advertising. These earnings only solidified McCrady's disillusionment with celebrity endorsements. "The results of this digging for facts to get a copy angle were interesting and profitable," McCrady observed, "and proved to us that the human interest angle in national advertising is of far more importance than ridiculous claims or cheap circus stunts."44

As the decade began to draw to a close, many Americans, particularly toymakers and distributors, remained highly optimistic about the future economic well-being of the nation.45 Demographic developments, analysts observed, suggested substantial future sales. After analyzing federal population statistics, a Toys and Novelties writer found "a total of 31 per cent distinctly of toy age throughout the country, and with slight variations the same proportion in each individual section."46
The actions of certain toymakers exemplified manufacturer optimism. Conditions fueled the entrepreneurial spirit of would-be producers. The number of establishments manufacturing playthings increased substantially between 1927 and 1929, from 397 to 476 concerns.47 At the same time, efforts undertaken by businesspeople managing more established firms also testified to a general sense of economic well-being. At A. C. Gilbert and Company, for example, businesspeople bought out a major competitor, the Meccano Company of America.48

The Great Depression

October 24, 1929, "Black Thursday," marked the start of the stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression. While many individuals connected with the toy business characterized their industry as depression proof, over time, the magnitude of the disaster drew toymakers and sellers into the maelstrom nonetheless. "When the thirties started," Gilbert recalled, "nobody had any idea what we were in for ... ."49

The impact of the depression varied from firm to firm. While certain manufacturers survived—sometimes, as we shall see, because they pioneered innovative marketing and merchandising techniques—many other makers were unable to withstand the financial rigors of the 1930’s. "The list of
toy companies killed by the depression," Richard O'Brien, a recent chronicler of the industry, has observed, "is almost endless."50

Almost immediately after the crash, certain manufacturers found conditions significantly more difficult. On May 11, 1930, a New York Times journalist reported a 10% drop in toy orders compared to the same period a year earlier. The same writer observed that sales disappointed doll makers in particular. Despite a reported popularity of mechanical and electrical playthings, the Depression affected Lionel immediately.51 At A. C. Gilbert and Company, by contrast, management continued to turn a sizable profit. "The year 1930 was still good for us," Gilbert later recalled, "and our sales stayed up over the two-million mark, with profits of $189,000."52

By 1931, however, as in other industries, virtually all toy retailers also felt the impact of the depression on sales. "Christmas lists will be cut down to the minimum," warned a Toy World editorialist in the November issue. "It's the heart strings against the purse strings this Christmas." Hoping to encourage consumer spending, retailers opened Christmas toy departments weeks earlier than usual and arranged "elaborate Santa Claus arrivals and publicity stunts."53 Despite sellers' efforts, however, financial realities increasingly took precedent over sentiment. By 1931, even Gilbert experienced the impact of
the depression. Although his firm remained solvent, sales deteriorated, and corporate profits declined markedly. "We began to feel the depression seriously the next year, when sales dropped below two million for the first time in quite a few years," Gilbert recalled. "We kept up our advertising, however, so profits were naturally down, to $74,000." Nonetheless, declining sales required stringent measures, and so Gilbert along with his managerial colleagues took a 10% cut in pay.54

At Lionel, managers presided over the first losing year in the history of their company.55 At the same time, however, other toy manufacturers suffered proportionately greater financial losses than either Gilbert or Joshua Lionel Cowen. When that happened, these makers sometimes went out of business entirely. Indeed, in 1931, federal officials counted 96 fewer toymakers than they had in 1929.56

As conditions worsened during 1932, distributors postponed factory orders, and their decision had a deleterious effect upon employees at every level of manufacturing. Having at first turned a profit despite the rigors of the depression, A. C. Gilbert and Company now lost money for the first time. When sales plummeted, Gilbert and other managers accepted another salary reduction. "We voted a second 10 per cent cut in 1932," Gilbert wrote, "the first year of the depression we went in the red." Eventually, Gilbert faced other personal fiscal difficulties. When the
Mechanics Bank failed under the directorate of Gilbert and other businesspeople, the toymaker lost substantial personal deposits, and as a stockholder he suffered other losses.57

As Gilbert struggled to keep his firm solvent, retailers postponed orders, and their decision contributed to widespread hardship among toy workers. Eventually, labor unrest threatened makers and sellers with additional business problems. Employees complained of unsanitary, sweatshop conditions, low wages, erratic payment, and long hours. As a result, in August, 1932, 2,500 New York members of the Doll and Toy Workers' Union struck 75 establishments. "Throughout most of September," wrote Toys and Novelties columnist Sidney J. Rockwell, "every doll factory in New York, save one, was either wholly inactive or working with greatly reduced old and new operators."58 Labor organizers chose late summer for their strike with reason. By stopping work then, organizers threatened Christmas toy and doll production and the most profitable part of the manufacturers' selling season.59 "If the doll strike was timed to work the greatest possible injury to manufacturer and merchant," Rockwell continued, "the date was correctly chosen."60

The rhetoric of striking workers and their besieged managers illuminated factors contributing to the failure of certain toy manufacturing establishments during the depression. Labor leaders cited managerial ineptitude as the root cause of their dissatisfaction. Factory
modernization and industrial growth brought new challenges, they claimed, and toymakers were not always able to contend with the changes. The strikers called into question, therefore, how broadly based and effective manufacturers' modernization efforts had been during the last decade. "The strike leaders charged that while the industry prospered during the World War it has since then been experiencing a steady decline," a writer for The New York Times reported, "due to 'cut-throat competition,' lack of proper organization and the failure of employers to adjust themselves to modern production methods."61

On September 9, 1932, labor leaders officially brought the strike to an end with significant ramifications for both workers and managers.62 "Under the agreement the men will have a forty-six-hour week until January, when a forty-four-hour schedule will go into effect," reported a New York Times journalist the next day. "Overtime will be paid for at 25 per cent above the regular rate of pay."63 If the new labor agreement satisfied most strikers, however, Rockwell remained critical of labor in general and the doll workers in particular. He blamed, for example, increased raw material costs on strikers in other industries and complained that the doll strike sabotaged manufacturers' effort to shake off the depression during 1933. In the November issue of Toys and Novelties, however, Rockwell admitted that the victories won by strikers may have
actually benefitted management: "For the future, known labor costs will provide a stabilizing influence and it must be admitted that there were manufacturing conditions which should have been corrected long ago. These inevitably resulted in cut-throat conditions. If the new labor set-up should ameliorate this condition there will be a long-range gain."64

Whatever the impact of the strike, as the depression exacerbated the difficulties manufacturers confronted, circumstances drove more makers into arrears. Rejecting the workers' charges, James L. Fri, director of the Toy Association, instead blamed worker dissatisfaction upon the buying behavior of toy distributors. "Mr. Fri attributed the reduced earnings of the workers to the depression," reported a journalist for The New York Times in late August, "aggravated this year by delay in buying on the part of stores and retailers."65

The next year conditions worsened for the survivors, as for the whole economy. During 1933, Americans experienced the nadir of the depression. By now, the gross national product and national income had declined by one-third, and 25% or more of the workers of the United States remained unemployed. The impact of the depression varied from place to place, however. In industrial centers, like Cleveland, officials recorded much higher unemployment levels than the national average. As a result, urban families in particular
suffered substantial deprivation. Economic historian W. Elliot Brownlee has observed that destitute families lived under conditions akin to those preindustrial families endured during times of famine. Brownlee has concluded that while rural families may have fared somewhat better than their urban counterparts, they also suffered. In Appalachia, along the Northern Great Lakes, across the Great Plains, and in cotton-producing areas of the Southwest, for example, where regional economies had never fully recovered from the fiscal difficulties of the early 1920’s, Americans struggled mightily against hardship.66

As more and more Americans lost their jobs and incomes declined, fewer and fewer individuals could afford to purchase playthings to the extent they once had. "We in the toy trade once took a sort of smug satisfaction in the belief that toys were always able to ride out every business storm on even keel," admitted a Toys and Novelties commentator in the October, 1933, issue. "Toys are panic-proof to a greater degree than any other articles. But the period immediately behind us proved that even the tremendous powerful sentiment surrounding toys was not sufficient to do the impossible in extracting normal cash from pocketbooks that were sorely pressed for food and shelter."67

When consumers did buy toys, increasingly they purchased foreign items, especially Japanese imports, much to the consternation of domestic toy makers. During World War I
and after, the United States remained by far the largest importer of Japanese playthings. Beginning in 1915, Japanese toy manufacturers significantly increased exports in general, but especially shipments to the United States. When hostilities forced a reduction in German exports, Japanese makers increased production markedly to meet world-wide demand. Between 1915 and 1917, Japanese toy exports to the United States rose from 1,100,709 yen to 3,790,499 yen. After the war, toy exports to the United States continued to increase, until they peaked in 1920 at 10,813,138 yen. Over the next four years, however, a resurgence in German competition reduced demand for other playthings, and Japanese export levels declined. Later, the Tariff Act of 1922, with an ad valorem duty discussed in the previous chapter, also affected Japanese exports to the United States.

After 1931, however, several factors enabled Japanese businessmen to secure a larger segment of the American toy market and finally to exceed export levels reached during 1920. First, when world-wide demand for German toys declined, international buyers sought out other sources of merchandise. Eventually, many chose to purchase toys from the Japanese. Meanwhile, Japanese makers instituted product improvements that made their toys more agreeable to foreign buyers, including Americans. Writing at the time, officials of the United States government hypothesized that Japanese
makers themselves sometimes originated these refinements. But, they concluded, in other instances foreign buyers, former German customers visiting Japan, actually encouraged higher standards of quality. By providing samples and then making sure that Japanese producers manufactured acceptable merchandise, these individuals spurred international demand for toys made in Japan. Finally, when Japanese officials devalued the yen, this act further stimulated foreign trade in toys.69

As a result of these developments, after 1931, total Japanese toy exports, as well as shipments to the United States, grew dramatically. In aggregate, the value of Japanese toy exports increased from 15,118,969 yen in 1932 to 26,374,572 yen in 1933. Over the same period, the value of toy shipments to the United States also increased substantially, from 4,986,566 yen to 6,975,586 yen. Indeed, in 1933, for the first time since the war, the dollar value of toys Americans imported from Japan, $1,231,181, surpassed that imported from Germany, $934,647. Not until 1938, when the Sino-Japanese War resulted in material shortages, did domestic makers enjoy a decline in Japanese competition.70

As consumers grew more reluctant to buy playthings, and as Japanese competition increased, makers endured the brunt of the depression. "We were in unfortunate color of ink only two years of the depression, 1932 and 1933," Gilbert recalled, "but," he added, "even then our credit was never
impaired, the banks never lost confidence in us, and we kept working as hard as we could." Other makers, however, struggled even more desperately to remain in business. Anxious to cut costs, for example, management at Dorfan dramatically reduced their labor force. Having at one time engaged 150 workers, by 1933 Dorfan managers employed only thirty individuals. Despite these cut-backs, the managers stopped production entirely one year later. The owners remained in business for four more years, but only to liquidate a substantial inventory backlog. Other, less fortunate or adept makers lost their struggle sooner, however, and failed by the end of 1933. Indeed, that year, federal officials counted only 285 firms manufacturing playthings, 95 fewer than the reduced number of just two years earlier.

Toy Industry Recovery Efforts

After 1933, the American economy began a rapid but still partial recovery. That the depression continued only testified to the magnitude of the calamity. Corporate leaders did not simply wait for the Roosevelt administration to rescue the economy from disaster. Instead, businesspeople actively pursued recovery and often did so successfully. Such was the case in the toy industry. While corporate failures continued, more flexible and innovative
toy manufacturers adapted to conditions, increased sales, and saved their struggling firms from bankruptcy.

Businesspeople acknowledged the fact that factors external to the industry contributed to improved market conditions. Commenting at the annual Toy Manufacturers convention in New York in early in December, 1933, for example, W. C. Lehman, president of the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A., contended that as consumers accepted a new educational role for playthings, toy sales increased. Lehman credited National Recovery Administration regulations in particular with an increase in sales. "The increased purchasing power under the NRA has already been felt," Lehman reported. He also predicted an additional 15% increase in unit sales resulting in a 10% gain in dollar volume as a result of New Deal recovery program.75

At the same time, however, toymakers themselves took steps to stimulate the market and rescue their floundering firms. In so doing, they experimented with various combinations of traditional and more modern marketing and production methods. Certain manufacturers employed price as one approach, a tactic exemplified by the efforts of inexpensive toy soldier makers. At the same time, other producers utilized licensing and merchandising through toy design, either combined with price or as an incentive alone, to increase sales.
Before mid-decade, some toy manufacturers began to produce miniatures, usually cast metal soldiers three to three-and-a-quarter inches tall, using simple fabrication techniques, for distribution most often through five-and-ten-cent stores. The miniatures proved indicative of the entire era of the Great Depression. "Possibly the greatest toy symbol of the era was the toy soldier," writes O’Brien, who has studied the toy soldier phenomenon. "It was about as cheap as a toy could get, almost wholly confined to inexpensive stores, and, as war clouds inexorably gathered, it was pretty much a product of its time."76

In 1933, businesspeople at Grey Iron of New York became the first important manufacturers of dime store toy soldiers.77 Early that year, Grey Iron managers announced plans to release a series of thirty-five different cast-iron figures. During 1933, the new line proved profitable, but not spectacularly so. The next year, however, the military figure market improved noticeably. Fueled by world events and the availability of the new Grey Iron line of miniatures, consumer purchase of dime store soldiers blossomed.78

As the soldier market improved, the toymakers at Grey Line soon had competitors. In fact, playthings produced by the most important of these makers, the Barclay Mfg. Co. in New Jersey, eventually outsold the Grey Iron line of miniatures. Like the manufacturers of the Grey Iron line,
the Barclay toymakers had begun to produce toys before the mid-1930’s. In either 1934 or early 1935, however, they released their first dime-store size figures. The line consisted initially of twenty-three different miniatures, including infantrymen, marines, and sailors. Not all were soldiers, however. The series encompassed two pirates, two Indians, and a cowboy.

Especially at first, Barclay miniatures differed markedly from other dime store soldiers. Young shoppers and other consumers found certain features attractive. In many instances, for example, Barclay figures featured a separate helmet glued, and later pinned, to the head of each figure. A collector of dime store miniatures as a child, O’Brien has noted that this development constituted "an attractive innovation." Barclay miniatures were also handsomely finished in a shiny lacquer of good quality, and this fashion feature also added to the allure of these figures.

Together with aspects of fashion and design, the miniatures sold well at least in part because of effective merchandising incorporated by the makers into the toys themselves. Sometime before 1930, William J. Thompson, a buyer for Woolworth’s, and Barclay management entered into a symbiotic relationship. Thompson made frequent toy buying trips to Europe where he acquired toy samples. Upon returning, he would bring these playthings to the toymakers at Barclay and request less expensive imitations designed to
fit dime store price restrictions, a merchandising and design tactic known as "price lining." Encouraged by Thompson, Barclay managers obliged happily, since, in the words of one former employee, Thompson "purchased practically everything we made." By designing figures as they did, toy soldier manufacturers encouraged consumption. Price lining in particular spurred youngsters to buy. By limiting the price of the figures to only a few cents, retailers kept the soldiers well within the price range of most children. In most instances before World War II, for example, Barclay figures cost only five cents apiece, and so youngsters needed to spend little to indulge their wants. Other aspects of design also fostered consumption. Retailers merchandised the soldiers in series, and the collectible nature of the figures encouraged repeated purchases.

In 1934 or 1935, initial figure production began in volume despite the fact that workers did most manufacturing by hand. Indeed, utilizing rather primitive fabrication techniques, three-hundred employees--many nearly children themselves when they began at Barclay--produced thousands of toy soldiers. After allowing the painted figures to dry, workers wrapped each in tissue and packaged the toys a dozen or two dozen to a box. Employees next shipped the finished figures to various merchandisers, but most often to dime store sellers,
distributors readily accessible to children. As we have seen, Thompson bought large quantities of toys for Woolworth’s, but buyers for Kresge’s, Kress’s, W. T. Grant, E. C. Murphy, Sears-Roebuck, Ben Franklin Stores, and Lamston also purchased Barclay miniatures.86

Upon receiving the figures, salesclerks gave toy soldiers special merchandising attention. At W. T. Grant, for example, employees carefully classified and then labeled each miniature with a typed gummed label. After attaching the appropriate sticker to the base of each soldier, employees displayed the soldiers so that each figure might best sell itself and encourage children and other shoppers to buy. Towards these ends, clerks displayed toy soldiers in glass showcases where young customers and other patrons might readily examine each type of figure in stock.87

The proliferation of inexpensive toys and their availability in dime stores encouraged a new generation of youngsters to experience certain consumption-related pleasures. Recalling his own childhood shopping trips during the 1930’s, O’Brien noted the appeal dime store shopping for toy soldiers held for young consumers. In this regard, the allure youngsters found in the dime store changed little over time. Aspects of O’Brien’s experiences, for example, paralleled those enjoyed by Betty Smith’s Francie a generation earlier. For many young consumers, O’Brien has written, the dime store continued to offer
freedom from parental dictates and that independence appealed greatly to children who shopped:

No mother saying, 'What would you do with that?' or 'You already have one of those.' No father putting in his two cents' worth about the toy he was attracted to. A young boy or girl walked in on his own, and walked out of the store with exactly the toy he or she wanted. Freedom. 88

Despite a certain level of consumer opposition to toy guns, two events testified to the continued vitality of toy soldier demand. 89 On one level, Barclay employees increased output. In fact, sometime during the late 1930's, the Barclay Mfg. Co. became the largest maker of toy soldiers in the country. Before the end of the decade, 400 Barclay workers were manufacturing 20,000,000 playthings a year. 90 On another level, at the same time, other manufacturers also began to produce inexpensive toy soldiers, notably those at Manoil and Auburn, the other two important makers of toys soldiers during this period, together with a number of minor producers. 91

In other instances, modern design and manufacturing methods played a greater role in corporate success than they had in the case of toy soldier makers. As makers had done earlier, manufacturers of other dime store toys, but also more expensive playthings, turned to fashion to create desirable toys and increase sales. During the depression, the licensing of cartoon characters, film stars, radio personalities, and brandname trademarks played an especially
important part in profitable toy merchandising and
marketing.

The relationship between the toy and motion picture
industries in particular continued to developed steadily
over time. As explained in chapter V, during the first
part of the decade, businesspeople turned to film stars to
publicize toys, but also as the subject matter of
playthings. By 1926, however, without realizing the full
implications of his observations, Clary of the Merchandising
Council also recognized that businesspeople in both
industries shared similar problems. While Clary concluded
that toy marketing differed substantially from most other
selling, he cited film and theater as major exceptions.
Unlike most other businesspeople, motion picture and stage
producers, like toymakers, Clary observed, struggled most
fully with the public's enigmatic taste. "The above are the
views of a hard boiled merchandising man, used to 'shoes,
and ships and sealing wax' in the every day course of
business," wrote Clary in 1926. "They are made after some
recent contact with the toy trade and they are made
respectfully, with the feeling that the toy designer, the
toy maker and the toy seller stand side by side with the
theatrical producer and the movie magnate in taking long
chances with the public fancy, fickle and yet worth
wooing." 93

Quite early in the decade, the practice of toy licensing
received a major boost, and this development further
solidified the conection between the toy and film
industries. Soon after the 1930’s began, the monumental
marketing and merchandising success of one movie cartoon
star in particular, Walt Disney’s Mickey Mouse, fueled
manufacturer interest in the licensing of animated motion
picture characters in particular. While several
businesspeople contributed to the successful use of the
Mouse as a merchandising property, one individual, promotor
Kay Kamen, played a particularly important role in this
regard. Kamen revolutionized merchandising using Disney
licensing with ramifications beyond the toy industry.

Disney licensing pre-dated Kamen’s involvement with that
organization, however. In 1930, two years before Kamen even
met Disney, businesspeople produced the first licensed
Disney item, a children’s writing tablet rather than a
toy. 94 Financial difficulties had convinced Disney to
merchandise Mickey. Hoping to force Disney to sign a formal
distribution contract, Patrick Powers, Disney’s de facto
distributor, withheld profits resulting from Disney’s most
recent work. In debt and with few cash reserves, the young
cartoonist required immediate capital. 95 Succor came from
an unsuspected source. While in New York to negotiate with
Powers, in the words of Robert Heide and John Gilman, authorities on Disney merchandise, "a persistant little man . . . pestered" Disney until he allowed him to use Mickey Mouse on merchandise. At first, Disney refused, but when the entrepreneur offered him $300 in cash, Disney accepted the businessman’s proposal.96

Later that same year, however, other entrepreneurs created the first licensed plaything with Disney’s help and support. A Mickey Mouse cartoon inspired Charlotte Clark, a free lance toy designer, to develop the first Mickey Mouse plush doll. Clark approached Bob Clampett, a young commercial artist and later a famous motion picture cartoonist, with her toy idea, and Clampett agreed to collaborate with Clark on the project. The young artist drew sketches of the proposed toy, and then the two designers presented these drawings to the Disney brothers, Walt and Roy. The doll design pleased the cartoon entrepreneurs greatly, so much so, in fact, that the Disney brothers offered to finance manufacture of the plaything. Together, Clampett, Clampett’s father, Clark, and a staff of female employees under Clark’s supervision began to produce the dolls in a small Hollywood factory.97

The broad celebrity appeal of Mickey Mouse helped Disney and his partners sell additional playthings bearing likenesses of the character. Film critic Richard Schickel has attributed audience affinity for Mickey Mouse to a
certain universality Disney fostered in his cartoons. Because Disney employed simple characters and elementary story lines, individuals regardless of age or education comprehended his motion pictures easily and embraced the Mouse readily. "Dialogue was minimal; action, drawn in high definition and never needing any verbal explanation, was as easily understood by an Italian peasant as it was by a New York intellectual--" Schickel explained, "more easily perhaps, given the propensity of the later to look for complications where none exist." Because an animal has no nationality, viewers regardless of ethnicity related easily to the character. Other techniques also led viewers to develop an association with the Mouse. Disney used experiences familiar to most audience members to build audience sympathy. Disney characters struggled, for example, with customary problems and devised equally familiar or stereotyped solutions.98

Largely because the character proved so popular, the plush toys sold well, and Disney’s good fortune helped him to recognize more fully the profit merchandising promised. The makers convinced businessmen to put the Mickey Mouse dolls on sale initially at two prestigious Los Angeles department stores, The May Company and Bullock’s, and then at stores across the country. They charged retailers the wholesale price of $30 a dozen, or $2.50 a doll. Retailers, in turn, sold each toy to consumers for $5, a sizeable sum
for a toy in the 1930's. Children, however, cried until parents agreed to purchase one of the new dolls for them. Partly as a result, demand proved substantial despite the high price.  

Following the success of the first Mickey Mouse dolls, other manufacturers began to produce items with Disney's permission. At George Brogfeldt & Co. in New York, managers first worked with Disney, distributing the plush dolls Clark manufactured. In 1930, however, they concluded a licensing agreement with Disney and began to manufacture their own Disney toy, an articulated wooden Mickey Mouse doll. Other playthings followed. In 1931, the same makers added a selection of Mickey Mouse plush toys to their line, a development Disney found disturbing, since he preferred the design of Clark's dolls. While Clark continued to manufacture her own line of dolls, she also designed new dolls for businesspeople at the Knickenbocker Toy Company.  

A turning point in the history of Disney merchandising in particular and marketing in general came in 1932. By then, Disney enjoyed licensing arrangements with fifteen different manufacturers producing a host of consumer goods. Having developed a certain appreciation for the importance of licensing, however, Disney found that he could ill-afford the managerial distractions merchandisings entailed. "Fifteen [manufacturers], it turns out, was just about the
point of diminishing returns for the Disney enterprises in the dual management problems of production and commercial exploitation," observed George T. Bristol, an editorial staff member for *Dun’s Review*, later in the decade. "There the worries of infringement and misuse of rights began to obscure film-making." 101

Anxious to concentrate upon other aspects of the cartoon business, Disney sought the help of a full-time merchandising manager. Eventually, and with historic consequences, he enlisted the services of Herman "Kay" Kamen, a Kansas City hat salesman turned merchandising promoter. Sources describe the start of Kamen’s relationship with Disney differently. Disney biographer Leonard Mosely reports that Kamen recognized the limitations in Disney’s merchandising efforts and offered his services first. 102 Other writers claim that Disney found one of Kamen’s department store merchandising campaigns so compelling that he contacted Kamen. 103

Kamen’s thorough understanding of both the tactical and strategic aspects of merchandising greatly impressed Disney. A highly effective salesman in his own right, Kamen understood the intricacies of day-to-day selling. Observers also commented on Kamen’s charismatic nature, particularly his ability to connect readily with all sorts of individuals. Kamen attributed this easy familiarity, and thus his accomplishments as a salesman, largely to his
looks. Striking, but not handsomely so, Kamen took tremendous pride in the fact that few customers who saw him could forget him. "He was an incredible-looking man," recalled De Witt Jones, a former Disney employee who knew Kamen:

He had a wide nose and wore thick glasses, was six feet tall and very strong physically. And he was proud of the fact that he wasn't exactly pretty. He maintained his appearance was a great advantage in his profession. Any good salesman will tell you that if you want to be remembered, you're either completely bald, you have flaming red hair, or something else is striking about you. Guys who wear Brooks Brothers suits just get forgotten, but not extraordinary-looking guys like Kay Kamen.

As Disney's prospective merchandising director, Kamen possessed other appealing qualities, notably the managerial skills and promotional experience necessary to manage Disney merchandising nationally. A department store promotional expert, Kamen understood retail selling, especially the distribution of child-related merchandise. At the same time, as a partner in his own firm, Kamen-Blair, since 1922, Kamen negotiated promotional contracts with clients all across the country. "With headquarters in Kansas City, Disney's birthplace, Kamen was the sales dynamo of the firm Kamen-Blair," wrote Hirsch. "He was the man who went to Tacoma, New Orleans and Worcester, brought home the contracts, and left in his wake a shining trail of healthier children's departments in hundreds of retail stores."
Other candidates may have enjoyed the managerial skill and experience Kamen had, but Kamen also possessed the strategic imagination necessary to manage Disney merchandising more profitably than his predecessors had. Kamen recognize how valuable the Disney properties could be. Properly managed, he believed Disney’s cartoon characters promised greater longevity and profits than mere merchandising fads.

Impressed by Kamen’s credentials, on July 1, 1932, Disney contracted with Kamen to manage all future merchandising efforts. To facilitate his new role, Kamen, like Disney, created a unique business organization. That same year, he formed Kay Kamen Ltd., an independent promotional firm geared to the needs of a single client, Walt Disney Enterprises, Inc.

Soon after signing with Disney, Kamen began the reorganization of the Disney merchandising network. He first centralized all marketing and merchandising decision-making in his office. Then, as part of a comprehensive merchandising strategy, Kamen issued a series of policy decisions designed to facilitate both long and short-term goals. "These measures were taken to give each licensee an incentive to make the most of his privilege," a Forbes reporter explained in the October 1, 1933 issue, "and yet to keep promotional activities under strict control lest the
value of the name deteriorate and the resulting ill-will harm Mickey Mouse's value as actor."

Hoping to encourage his client's most profitable merchandisers, while guarding Disney's wholesome reputation, Kamen selected licensees carefully and then maintained substantial distribution control. He retained Disney's most successful contracts but cancelled less lucrative agreements arranged with less famous or ambitious merchandisers. At the same time, Kamen also restricted licenses to one manufacturer of each type of goods. Officially, for example, only watchmakers at Ingersoll-Waterbury could produce Mickey Mouse watches. Fearful that the wrong retailer might sully Disney's reputation, in every instance Kamen insisted that Disney also retain the right to dictate the distributors of licensed products.

Following the plan outlined above and building upon the near universal appeal of his client's characters, Kamen cultivated a broad and profitable market for Disney merchandise. Kamen not only increased the sales volume of Disney's most reliable licensees by hundreds of percent, but also attracted the accounts of other prestigious manufacturers, notably Congoleum-Nairn, General Foods, National Dairy Products, and Ingersoll-Waterbury. Together, these makers produced a wide variety of goods bearing likenesses of Mickey and other Disney characters. Retail prices differed depending on the nature of each item--some
were quite expensive— but makers commonly produced playthings and other consumer goods geared to the smallest of budgets. "Under his leadership, Mickey has emerged, not only a tycoon, but a mighty democratic one at that, for no snobbery limits his class appeal," wrote Hirsch. "The poorest can afford the Mickey Mouse balloon for a nickel, a toothbrush for a dime, ice cream rolls, watches for $1 to $1.95."\textsuperscript{112}

Alone, Disney's cartoon shorts earned him relatively little. "Mickey Mouse, in so far as his money-making ability as an actor is concerned, is a dud," reported a \textit{New York Times} writer in 1934. "So, too, are the Three Little Pigs, the Big Bad Wolf, Horace Horsecollar and the rest of them." A number of factors substantially reduced Disney's film profits. First, high production costs absorbed significant funds.\textsuperscript{113} In addition, a series of expensive distribution agreements, first with Powers, then with the Columbia Pictures Corporation, and finally with United Artists, limited earnings further.\textsuperscript{114}

Fortunately, the same \textit{New York Times} writer observed, Disney's characters earned substantially more as merchandising subjects than they did as cartoons: "They're worth a hundred times more off the screen than on."\textsuperscript{115} According to Gilman and Heide, during 1933, the depths of the Great Depression, for example, Kamen increased merchandising revenues by "several million dollars."\textsuperscript{116} The
next year, Disney merchandising figures again climbed substantially. In 1934, retailers sold $35,000,000 worth of Disney merchandise in the United States alone. In other countries, businesspeople distributed licensed goods worth a similar sum.\textsuperscript{117} Contemporary writers acknowledged Kamen's contribution to Disney's merchandising success. "In four years, he has increased this phase of Disney's business 10,000 per cent. . . . .",\textsuperscript{118} observed a writer in \textit{Literary Digest} in 1936.\textsuperscript{118} Without popular cartoons to provide licensed subjects, of course, Kamen's successful merchandising would have been impossible.

By combining film production with merchandising, then, Disney and Kamen developed a profitable symbiosis. Disney utilized merchandising profits to finance studio development and new cartoons, and the films, in turn, produced other properties suitable for licensing.\textsuperscript{119} "[I]t is no exaggeration to state that Walt Disney Enterprises has become the tail that wags the mouse," the \textit{Literary Digest} writer concluded.\textsuperscript{120} Merchandise and cartoons bolstered overall revenues in another important way. Each publicized the other. "It was more like a revolving door," Bristol explained. "The pictures promoted the sale of goods; the likenesses on the merchandise enhanced the popularity of the pictures."\textsuperscript{121}

As licensed goods generated larger and larger profits for Disney, the same merchandise also provided many
licensees with substantial returns. The right to manufacture licensed merchandise conferred advantages the ability to produce other fashionable goods did not. As mentioned above, by their very nature, licensed goods advertised themselves, but there were also other benefits. A license, particularly a Disney agreement, limited competition from other makers. "A licensee, after all is an extension of a patent or a copyright," Bristol explained, "giving the licensee a monopolistic privilege." In addition, as mentioned above, Kamen limited each type of merchandise to a single licensee. At the same time, Bristol continued, Kamen aggressively defended licensees from unauthorized use of Disney characters:

On the licensees's side there can be no doubt the license privilege is attractive. It affords him a protection rare in fashion merchandising, where design piracy is always a nuisance, often a costly one. With the clear legal case of an agent acting for an artist whose works are copyrighted and registered, Kamen finds that merely the threat of an alert police force is an effective deterrent. A pirate, furthermore, has to get along without the help of Kamen designers, and usually the imitations are poor likenesses."122

Given the advantages outlined above, a Disney license often furnished struggling, depression-era toymakers with an influx of capital just when they needed money most. Already in receivership by 1934, for example, Lionel in particular benefitted appreciably from two licensed Disney characters: Minnie and Mickey Mouse. Designers used the the characters on a miniature handcar so successfully that when Judge Fake
dismissed the Lionel receivership on January 21, 1935, he cited the mice as instrumental in the resurgence of that firm.123

Sources provide different explanations for the origin of the Mickey Mouse handcar. Worcester Bouck, a receiver, told Judge Fake that he invented the toy himself just before the 1934 Christmas shopping season began. Lionel chief engineer, Joseph Bonanno remembered the development of the car differently, however. According to Bonanno, a customer actually provided the Lionel staff the idea for the toy, along with a prototype. The model, a relatively massive contraption featuring a Popeye doll as crew, proved impractical, however. Intrigued nonetheless by the handcar concept, Bonanno redesigned the car. In so doing, he not only reduced the toy to a more practical size, but also replaced Popeye with rubber dime store figures of Mickey and Minnie Mouse.124

With the design phase complete, Lionel executives began to produce the handcar in quantity and then distributed the toy to retailers, where the new plaything proved highly popular with all sorts of consumers. At a dollar for the car and a circle of track, the toy remained within the price range of all but the very poorest of consumers. Individuals unable to afford an electric train for Christmas bought the new sets instead, but the fashionable toy also appealed to wealthier shoppers. A journalist reported that the ten-
year-old ruler of Siam, King Ananda, owned a handcar and
track and enjoyed playing with the set on the floor of his
palace. As more and more shoppers of all sorts sought the
toy out, however, demand unfortunately far surpassed
availability. Indeed, even as workers shipped 253,000
handcar sets to anxious distributors, circumstances forced
Lionel managers to reject orders for 100,000 additional
units. Time simply would not permit Lionel employees to
produce any additional sets before Christmas.125

While acknowledging the success of the toy, sources also
differ about the extent to which Lionel’s connection to
Disney rescued the firm from insolvency. As mentioned
above, a New York Times reporter cited Fake’s observations,
but other contemporary writers downplayed the role a Disney
license played in saving Lionel. A writer for Sales
Management in 1935, for example, attributed the Lionel
resurgence less to licensing than to other design decisions.
"A somewhat larger percentage of added business was in the
form of streamline electric trains selling at $19.50," the
writer explained. "The public interest in streamlining
whipped up by Burlington, Union Pacific and other railroads
during 1934, offered Lionel an opportunity in toy trains
that it seized eagerly."126 More recently, O’Brien has
attributed the myth that Mickey Mouse saved the firm to the
machinations of publicity-conscious executives at Lionel.127
A general improvement in the economy during 1934 may also have stimulated toy demand at Lionel and other firms.

If a Disney license alone failed to save Lionel, however, revenue generated by the handcar certainly aided in the recovery of the firm. "It would be a good story if Mickey had done it all alone," observed the Sales Management analyst at the time. "The comic movie figure did enough, however, to win special mention from Judge Guy L. Fake, who dismissed the receivers in United States District Court at Newark, New Jersey, and handed the business back to its owners." Having down-graded the role Disney played in saving Lionel, the same writer acknowledged, nonetheless, the sizeable role licensed toys played in the resurrection of Lionel. "This item . . . constituted less than 5% of the total Lionel business," this observer continued. "But it was a percentage that Lionel would not have had without Mickey."128

Sound licensing decisions, based sometimes on characters popularized through mediums other than motion pictures, contributed substantially to the fiscal well-being of other firms. Into the early 1930's, most toy makers continued to neglect radio as an advertising medium.129 In his 1931 primer for toy makers, Toy Manufacturing and Marketing: A Text Book for Toy Producers, Homer Sinclair concluded that at most, six major manufacturers used radio in this manner.130 Like motion pictures, however, radio offered
makers other lucrative marketing and manufacturing possibilities.

O’Brien has observed that in part because radio programs generally ran longer than most films, radio programs in fact inspired more toys than motion pictures. Manufacturers produced two different kinds of licensed radio playthings. In each instance, a different marketing rationale determined the nature of the toy. Like manufacturers using film characters in their designs, certain makers licensed radio images to sell more playthings. At different times, however, marketers selling other consumer goods used toys to encourage the purchase of their commodities. In these cases, playthings served as premiums, inexpensive novelties offered by advertisers to listeners, often through the mail, as an incentive to buy products such as breakfast cereals.

The availability of radio premiums provided listeners, especially young audience members, with a wide range of shared consumer experiences. On one level, publicists predicated interest in premiums upon knowledge of a common iconography encompassing radio programming, personalities, and brands. The ordering process constituted a second level of shared experiences, however. Through premium sales, programmers and advertisers trained young shoppers in new behaviors and cognitions. In order to obtain the premium desired, sponsors required youngsters and other customers to
follow certain set procedures. Often, businesspeople asked child listeners to send in a box top or some other proof of purchase from a specific product to obtain an item. In this way, programmers and advertisers encouraged brand recognition.

Processing and shipping necessarily follow the filing of each order, and the frustration young consumers felt during this portion of the ordering process constituted a different shared aspect of the experience. Premium sales exposed young consumers, and indirectly their parents, to the frustrations of delayed gratification. O’Brien has vividly recalled the agony of waiting caused:

Premiums were true wonders of their time; entrancing, alluring, providing one singularly excruciating experience: the weeks upon weeks it took for the premium to arrive. For small boys and girls, the waiting was almost unendurable. Perhaps for their parents, forced to listen to the daily whines of ‘When’s it gonna come’? it actually was.¹³³

Eventually, the toy arrived, and when the premium did, youngsters participated in yet a third series of experiences instructive of the culture. Invariably, children showed the new toys to their fellows and became, in effect, agents of merchandisers and programmers. O’Brien has recalled the enjoyable feelings these exhibitions generated in one owner. "Before school, during lunch hour, after school, on weekends, it would be shown at all opportunities . . .," he wrote. "Who could resist wowing the gang with one’s very
own Buck Rogers Solar Scouts Spaceship Commander Badge?" As youngsters exhibited their treasured premiums, other children learned different, somewhat painful consumer cognitions. While certain youngsters experienced the pleasures ownership engendered, other children suffered the discomfort of being without. "When the premium finally did arrive," O'Brien continued, "it was immediately shown to the less fortunate: those who had never gotten around to ordering, or who listened to the wrong show, or--the worst--had yet to receive theirs."134

If programmers and advertisers benefited from the publicity premiums engendered, radio toys of all kinds also generated substantial profits at a time of critical need. Although Sinclair questioned the dependability of the premium business, he admitted that premium sales represented a sizeable market. "The premium trade offers a certain outlet," he admitted. "Premium buying runs into large figures . . . ."135 Different writers noted the returns other radio toys earned makers. Commenting on radio and comic strip character Buck Rogers, for example, a Toys and Novelties writer reported that licensed merchandise brought certain businesspeople unprecedented returns. "Last year many sales records were set by Buck Rogers merchandise," the reporter observed, "and 1935 gives promise of surpassing last year's achievements."136
As they had during the previous decade, and particularly in the last half of the 1930's, children, often film stars, continued to play an important role in toy marketing and design as licensed subjects. Between 1932 and 1939, for example, Shirley Temple appeared in twenty-seven feature films. Axe has noted that by endorsing dolls and other products, the young actress created an entire industry dedicated to the manufacture of merchandise carrying the youngster's recommendation and often bearing her likeness.  

In 1934, businesspeople at the Ideal Novelty & Toy Co. negotiated a licensing agreement with Fox Film Corp. executives to produce the first Shirley Temple dolls. Over time, several official permutations followed. The dolls set a number of precedents. Eventually, for example, the new toy proved more successful than any other celebrity doll ever produced. No doubt largely as a result, however, makers more often pirated or imitated the toy than had ever been the case previously. 

During the same period, the Canadian-born Dionne quintuplets, until then the only known set of identical quintuplets to survive more than a short time, inspired a tremendous range of dolls bearing their likenesses. Like Shirley Temple, "The Quints" generated a host of officially licensed toys and also a wide range of unofficial dolls. While only dollmaker Madam Alexander enjoyed the official Dionne copyright, other makers, both domestic and foreign,
released dolls of their own unmistakably modeled after the five babies, but euphemistically named. In 1936, for example, businesspeople at the Transogram Company, Inc. released "America’s 5 Sweethearts," a boxed set of five very similar bisque dolls.\textsuperscript{140}

During 1934, as a result of the efforts of toy manufacturers and other members of the industry, as well as because of more general economic improvements, the industry began to show signs of fiscal recovery. For the first time since 1929, the number of domestic establishments manufacturing playthings increased, from 285 such firms in 1933 to 384 in 1935.\textsuperscript{141} Partly as a result, during the same period, the dollar volume of manufactured playthings also improved substantially, the first increase since 1929.\textsuperscript{142} At the same time, distribution figures testified to a similar improvement in retail toy sales.\textsuperscript{143} Based upon contemporary production increases, a \textit{Toys and Novelties} analyst concluded that businesspeople had indeed passed the nadir of the depression. "The accompanying chart and figures show in a striking way the encouraging signs of returning life to the toy trade," the writer observed. "To see convincing proof that the low point has been passed should make us all resolve to keep up the good work, striving to reach and eventually surpass the high levels once attained in this vital industry."\textsuperscript{144}
Analysts credited licensing at least in part for the fiscal resurgence. Reflecting, late in the decade, a *Toys and Novelties* writer commented on the financial support all sorts of licensed characters had supplied struggling firms. "In times of depression they have been the one bright spot on the merchandising calendar--" the analyst observed, "mighty have been their exploits in keeping factories out of the red in hard times and in keeping the cash register singing merrily in the stores."145

Even after business began to improve, however, as manufacturers persisted in their efforts to raise sales, they often continued to rely upon toy licensing. "Noteworthy also among the exhibits was the increasing use of the names of movie stars, cartoon characters, radio headliners, or celebrities in any field," wrote Darrell Bartee, a *Toys and Novelties* observer at the Toy Fair in New York in 1935. "This year, this tendency was conspicuous, and many firms are staking millions on the value of its appeal." The trend, the writer also observed, showed no signs of abating. "The names of Shirley Temple, Tom Mix, Jackie Cooper, Jimmie Durante, all the Walt Disney characters, Buck Rogers, Popeye, Skippy, Dizzy and Daffy Dean, Uncle Remus, and others all had received some new treatment at the hand of some toy maker," he continued. "Plans are under way, according to gossip of the trade, for many more hook-ups with stars of the screen and radio."146
Several factors help to explain the popularity of licensed playthings among consumers of all ages on one level and manufacturers on another. Writers commented on the publicity these characters engendered, but attributed adult sales to more than notoriety. Instead, analysts determined that the pure and virtuous nature of most licensed characters appealed strongly to adult consumers buying playthings for their children. License promotor Fred Wish, for example, ascribed the success of "Skippy," a popular cartoon property, to just such qualities. "Credit for this he attributes to the fact that the characters, as a group, are natural and wholesome," the interviewer reported. "Skippy . . . appeals to little folks because he is all boy, and to parents because of his naive 'niceness.'"\textsuperscript{147}

Children embraced the same characters and coveted licensed items for other reasons, however. Radio, film, and cartoon celebrities promised comedic fun, vicarious adventure, or both. This aspect of their nature, observers noted, helped to explain their broad youth appeal. "Buck Rogers--and his companion, Wilma Deering--broadcast throughout the United States and Canada on the Columbia chain," observed a Toys and Novelties writer, for example, in 1935, "[was] providing a daily scientific thrill adventure, enthusing youngsters, winning parental applause because of the adventure's wholesome type."\textsuperscript{148}
In the appeal licensed playthings held for both parents and children, then, businesspeople discovered at least a partial solution to merchandising difficulties resulting from the duality of the toy market, but licensed playthings also changed toy making and marketing in other important ways. As previously explained, during the early 1920’s, fiscal problems convinced manufacturers of the impracticality of attempting to create demand. As manufacturers continued successfully to use licensing to merchandise toys and other items, however, developments changed the way at least one marketing analyst understood the relationship between businesspeople in the toy industry and their market.

In 1938, George T. Bristol, writing in the influential business periodical, Dun’s Review, maintained that businesspeople could indeed create demand, and he used as his example Disney’s release of Snow White, in 1938, his first full-length effort. Despite an economic downturn during 1937, Kamen’s successful merchandising convinced Bristol that makers had underestimated their ability to shape the market.149

By the late 1930’s, under Kamen, merchandising had become a integral part of the Disney film distribution and publicity process, and not some afterthought. In fact, Disney merchandising followed an identifiable routine. To an extent, the writer explained, Snow White merchandising
benefitted from ongoing Disney publicity efforts. But experts began merchandising geared to the film specifically a year before Disney actually released Snow White. Negotiators first approached fashion designers who catered to affluent retail customers. Cartier jewelers, for example, produced a particularly extravagant item: a gem-studded, solid gold charm bracelet bearing likenesses of the dwarfs. "Thus," Bristol concluded, "Snow White as a fashion influence was marked first for the carriage trade."^150

Having approached makers of more exclusive merchandise, Kamen next contacted manufacturers of more widely distributed, day-to-day items: General Foods, Kroger, Armour, Seiberling Latex Products, Owens-Illinois, RCA-Victor, and other makers. "Next on the agenda were cooperative efforts with manufacturers--" Bristol explained, "more of the package designing and missionary work already perfected--and publication of a schedule of the picture's release starts in cities all across the country." The latter enabled retailers to synchronize advertising and other merchandising as effectively as possible with the demand by the film caused. "Here is fashion merchandising to a third power," Bristol observed. Not only has Snow White been a pre-destined fashion, but added to that merchants know in advance when its peak will hit their city."^151

The effectiveness of Kamen's merchandising efforts constituted a marketing revelation for Bristol. As we have
seen, many marketing analysts long believed that businesspeople could not hope to create markets. Since 1932, Bristol determined, developments had proven otherwise:

... the little people of make-believe have become giant exceptions to this earlier conclusions [sic]. Like advertising, they make use of screen, radio, and newspaper. And using these media, they undoubtedly do create fashion. There was little, for example, which was haphazard in the creation of the Snow White vogue.152

While other makers relied heavily upon licensing to increase sales during the depression, different producers depended more upon continuing improvements in mass production and distribution to maintain satisfactory profits. Businesspeople and other analysts generally acknowledged Louis Marx, "the Henry Ford of the toy industry," owner of the Marx Toy Company, as a leader in this regard.153 While backward in some very important respects, in other ways, the system Marx employed to produce and then distribute playthings marked the culmination of an era of toy industry merchandising and manufacturing innovations.

Marx made merchandising an integral part of toy design and the manufacturing process to a greater degree than most other makers of his time. Like some of his successful contemporaries, he sometimes incorporated licensed characters into his designs. More often, however, Marx developed toys to sell at the lowest possible retail prices.
In so doing, he regularly undersold his competitors. Marx sought economy through design, but he also relied upon mass production to reduce costs further. Like toy soldier makers, Marx then distributed his toys through dime stores and other large chains and relied upon volume to earn substantial profits. In this way, Marx made his playthings affordable to a wide range of consumers, notably all sorts of children themselves.

Marx’s toy career began in 1912 at age sixteen, when he started work as an office boy for Ferdinand Strauss, an important toy manufacturer at the time (mentioned above in chapters IV and V). From this lowly position, Marx rose quickly. Within four years, he became manager of the Strauss factory in East Rutherford, New Jersey. While there, Marx successfully altered an old Strauss plaything, a horn that sounded "Mamma, Papa" when in use, by turning the toy into a party favor in the shape of a carnation. In this way, Marx pioneered a tactic that he would often employ in the future: the redesign of old playthings to create new and inexpensive toys, often at a substantial cost savings. When the innovation sold well, Strauss promoted Marx again, this time to a directorship. In this capacity, however, Strauss and Marx eventually came into conflict. At the time, Strauss not only manufactured playthings but also operated four retail toy stores. When he asked his directors about the advisability of retaining these outlets, Marx alone
suggested that Strauss dispose of his stores and concentrate on large scale production. Instead of taking his advice, Strauss fired Marx.\textsuperscript{155}

Although no longer employed by Strauss, Marx remained a part of the toy industry and continued profitably to redesign toys for mass distribution. As a salesperson for a manufacturer of wooden products, Marx redeveloped a line of playthings and increased unit sales from 15,000 to 1,500,000 toys in only two years. At the same time, Louis and his brother, David went into business for themselves. Together they specialized in the redesign of ten-cent merchandise to reduce costs. Because the brothers controlled no manufacturing facilities of their own, however, they had to arrange with other makers to produce the actual toys.\textsuperscript{156}

By 1921, Louis and David Marx acquired their first factory, and together they began to manufacture toys themselves. When Strauss declared bankruptcy, the brothers purchased dies for two of his toys, "Zippo," a climbing monkey, and the "Coon Jigger," a dancing black minstrel. In typical Marx fashion, the young toymaker improved upon these aging Strauss designs and made substantial profits. By producing larger models of these venerable playthings and then adding bright colors, Marx sold eight million of each. As a result, by 1922, Louis Marx had become a millionaire. The experience also convinced Marx that there really were no new toy ideas, only older concepts redesigned.\textsuperscript{157}
While Marx secured additional production facilities during the 1930’s, his merchandising strategy remained constant: the large-scale manufacture and volume distribution of inexpensive playthings at minimal cost. Eventually, Marx controlled three plants: two in Pennsylvania—one at Erie and the other at Girard—and one in West Virginia at Glendale. At first, aspects of the production process remained rather informal. Richard Carver, a member of the Marx Research and Design department, recalled, for example, the casual nature of the tooling process:

One toolmaker would get one part and another toolmaker a different part, but in the end these parts were supposed to match. ... one toolmaker would shout over to the other, ‘How big are you making your lugs?’ The other would say, ‘I’m making them 1/4" wide.’ The first would reply, ‘All right, I’ll make the slots big enough so they’ll fit.’

But during the late 1930’s, Marx systematized toy development and production more fully, and his efforts further reduced costs at several stages of the manufacturing process.

As he had in the past, Marx continued to reduce expenses through efficient toy design. Employees, Marx included, devised cost-effective playthings in two different ways. Some toys began as entirely new ideas. In fact, Marx expected his designers to develop new playthings as a matter
of policy. In this regard, Marx sometimes developed original toys himself.\footnote{159}

But Marx also continued to reduce costs much as he had in the past, by redesigning other toys. Years later, a Marx draftsman recalled that corporate designers actually created few playthings spontaneously. At the Erie plant, workers institutionalized the redesign process. There employees set aside one room, dubbed the "morgue," where they stored hundreds of old playthings manufactured by Marx and other producers. Hoping to be inspired, designers, including Marx, would often visit the facility. In other instances, contemporary toy trends or advertisements in industrial publications served a similar purpose.\footnote{160}

Designers sometimes suggested that Marx modify one of the playthings to cut costs. By simplifying toy mechanisms, for example, designers sometimes lowered the cost of manufacturing certain playthings and developed a more durable toy in the process. At other times, employees eliminated certain details, and this also reduced expenses. If Marx himself approved of the "new" toy, he would then manufacture the item. By 1935, for example, Marx had released the "Moon Mullins Hand Car," a toy similar to the Mickey Mouse version but at a considerable price advantage. Retailers charged 25 cents for the simpler Marx toy, 75 cents less than they did for the Lionel car.\footnote{161}
Because designers sometimes reworked playthings produced by other makers, certain manufacturers accused Marx of product piracy and questioned his ethics. Years later, however, Marx continued to dismiss these accusations. "When they copy you, it’s piracy," he quipped. "When you copy them, it’s competition."\textsuperscript{162}

Factory innovations and organizational changes offered Marx other ways to increase efficiency and reduce costs. During 1936, he moved the Erie plant to a new location. In an effort to develop greater self-sufficiency, speed production, and cut costs, Marx modernized manufacturing on several levels there in particular. Eventually, the new factory included die casting and lithography departments. Marx also installed lithography equipment at the Glendale facility. As discussed previously, during the 1920's, manufacturers of pedal cars, relatively expensive playthings, had already employed modern factory methods to manufacture their toys efficiently. At his Erie plant, Marx adapted the moving assembly-line to the production of much cheaper playthings destined for a much wider market.\textsuperscript{163}

Marx’s organization and manufacturing methods offered several distinct advantages over competitors. As intended, the system enabled him to cut costs and undersell other makers, but Marx also benefited in other ways. Observers noted that Marx controlled a private firm so centrally managed that he himself or another executive made most
important marketing and production decisions. This truncated hierarchy enabled Marx to make and then implement decisions more quickly than managers forced to negotiate in more complicated business organizations. This structure also often enabled Marx to react more quickly to market changes than most of his competitors could and take maximum advantage of his renowned market sense. Having made a decision, superior production facilities also allowed Marx more rapidly than other makers to bring ideas to fruition. While inferior facilities forced smaller manufacturers to delay production until subcontractors provided tooling, lithography, or castings, Marx did not have to wait, since he controlled the equipment necessary to meet these needs himself. The industry as a whole—with conspicuous early exceptions such as Converse—clearly was slow to take advantage of vertical integration that had occurred so effectively in other industries.

If in many respects Marx employed modern manufacturing techniques, paradoxically to a large extent, Marx proved very old fashioned in terms of certain aspects of marketing. Clearly, Marx understood the importance of mass distribution, since he merchandised most of his toys through large mass marketing establishment, especially major chain stores. But while most important producers now generally recognized the significance of media promotion, after 1930 Marx virtually ignored both consumer and trade advertising.
Anxious to keep costs to a bare minimum, Marx believed that most advertising represented an unnecessary expense. Indeed, as late as 1955, Marx spent a mere $312 on advertising. Instead, Marx relied upon personal connections to market toys. A former employee hypothesized that perhaps Marx did not have to advertise, since he already sold all that he could manufacture. In any event, as we shall see, after the war, television revolutionized toy making and selling, especially through advertising. When this happened, Marx changed his policy reluctantly, and his slowness produced unfortunate results.

If Marx in particular prospered during the 1930’s, federal statistics testified to the success of industry-wide recovery efforts by mid-decade. The number of firms manufacturing playthings in the United States increased between 1933 and 1935, from 285 such establishments to 384. During the same period, statisticians recorded a rise in the value of playthings that toy makers produced, from $37,222,000 to $52,156,000. Despite a decline in the number of establishments making toys between 1935 and 1937, to 344 firms, the value of products producers manufactured continued to rise to $63,856,000.

Conclusion

The years from late 1920’s through the 1930’s constituted a period of major importance for the industry as
well as the consumer culture. On one level, toy manufacturers and sellers made tremendous strides towards creating and exploiting their market. The mass media provided toy makers and sellers with an iconography shared by large segments of the culture. In this regard, children, often film stars, continued to play a significant role in the culture. They were, in fact, part of this iconography. Through licensing, makers employed the images of these youngsters, as well as other prevailing images, to merchandise their playthings. These new merchandising techniques proved so successful that businesspeople concluded that they could in fact create demand, a realization that would, as we shall see, revolutionize toy marketing after the Second World War.

As businesspeople came to understand their ability to shape consumer demand, toymakers and sellers continued to contribute to a more unified culture of consumption. Through toys, youngsters from different backgrounds shared more broadly in a host of consumer experiences. As allowances became more common, for example, many children became consumers in their own right. Earlier, dime stores had been working-class institutions. Now middle and working-class youngsters alike frequented Woolworth’s, Grants, and similar establishments to buy toys. In so doing, they shared a particular consumer experience.
Licensed toys brought other homogenizing experiences. Through comic strips, radio programs, and motion pictures, youngsters and adults joined national and even international "consumption communities," communities brought into being and maintained, as Daniel Boorstin has determined, by the goods and services individuals consumed together with the manner in which they did so. Because the goods often bore a celebrity image, as well as a brand name, licensed playthings by their very nature reinforced this unifying aspect of the mass media. Whether shoppers bought inexpensive licensed items at a dime store or more expensive merchandise at a department store, consumers shared in the same iconography. On another level, the experience of shopping for licensed playthings constituted a different common aspect of the culture. The purchase of goods for the sake of radio premiums, for example, represented one such unique experience.

During World War II, both youngsters and adults continued to share in the culture, but material shortages and other manufacturing difficulties disrupted toy production. Makers had trouble simply filling existing orders, and a wartime seller's market soon replaced the buyer's market characteristic of the depression. Under such circumstances, manufacturing difficulties temporarily took precedence over marketing concerns, even over creating toy fashions.
NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

1On working-class youngsters as consumers, see David Nasaw, Children of the City: At Work and At Play (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 117-120.


4Lynd and Lynd, Middletown, 131.

5Pass, The Damned and the Beautiful, 54, 63-64, 86-87.

6Slosson, The Great Crusade and After, 147.

7Slosson, The Great Crusade and After, 147.


10On the rise of a new middle class of organization experts, see Wiebe, The Search for Order, 111-132. On the extent to which parents read child-rearing literature during the 1920’s and 1930’s, see Pass, The Damned and the Beautiful, 87.


13Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity: 1920-1940 (Berkeley: University of California


15Toys and Novelties, June 1926, 35. On the history of the air rifle, see "The Manufacture of Air Rifles," Toys and Novelties, August 1926, 84.

16Toys and Novelties, October 1926, 34.

17Toys and Novelties, June 1926, 35.

18The Saturday Evening Post, 20 November 1926, 185.


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21The Saturday Evening Post, 11 December 1926, 193.

22The Saturday Evening Post, 20 November 1926, 185.


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25White, "Experiences of a Department Store Santa Claus," 90, 93.

26Crocker, "Some Christmas Ideas to Pass on to Retailers," 98.

27"Take Home a Toy," Toys and Novelties, July 1926, 61.


29"Continuation or Accessory Toy Business," Toys and Novelties, January 1926, 260. On toy accessories, see also, "Accessory Toys from the Buyer's Viewpoint," Toys and Novelties, January 1926, 265.

30Quoted in "Continuation or Accessory Toy Business," 260.

31"Continuation or Accessory Toy Business," 260.

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33Pass, The Damned and the Beautiful, 87.

34Wolfenstein, "Fun Morality," 168.

35"Martin's Toy Shop Keeps Business Good All Year," Toys and Novelties, January 1926, 297.

36"Why Do Some Toys Live Long While Others Die Young?" 69.

37Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 95.

38"Do Toys Reflect Fashion Trends? 'Yes,' Says Leo Cohn, 'With Dolls the Only Exception,'" Toy World, November 1927, 32.


40Clary, "Public Events That Affect Toy Demand," 348.

41Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 97-98.

42John E. McCrady, as told to Roy Dickinson, "We Didn't Ask Jackie Coogan for a Testimonial," Printers' Ink, 25 April 1929, 26.

43McCrady, as told to Dickinson, "We Didn't Ask Jackie Coogan for a Testimonial," 25, 28.

44McCrady, as told to Dickinson, "We Didn't Ask Jackie Coogan for a Testimonial," 28.

45Soule, Prosperity Decade, 291-292.

46"One Third of the Population Are of Toy Age," Toys and Novelties, May 1929, 67.

47Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1933, 718.


51"Toy Orders Run Behind," The New York Times, 11 May 1930, 6; Ron Hollander, All Aboard!: The Story of Joshua Lionel Cowen &


53 "It’s the Heart Strings Against the Purse Strings This Christmas," Toy World, November 1931, 23.


55 Ron Hollander, All Aboard! 128.

56 Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1933, 718.


58 "Sid Says . . . .," Toys and Novelties, October 1933, 37.


60 "Sid Says . . . .," Toys and Novelties, 37.


64 "Sid Says . . . . Doll Strike Ends . . . .," Toys and Novelties, November 1933, 23.


67 "Let's Hold a Preliminary Powwow," Toys and Novelties, October 1933, 34.

Schutumpf, World Trade in Toys, 8.

Schutumpf, World Trade in Toys, 4-5, 9.


Brownlee, Dynamics of Ascent, 295.

"Estimated 10% Gain for Sales of Toys," The New York Times, 7 December, 1933, 42.


O’Brien, Collecting Toy Soldiers, 2-3.


If aspects of Barclay miniatures proved attractive, however, other unique fashion aspects proved less engaging. On one level, Barclay figures were poorly proportioned and posed. Indeed, O’Brien has described them as child-like in appearance. The soldiers the designers sculpted stood stiffly with feet close together, and so Barclay miniatures also seldom suggested action. On another level, certain details also diminished the appeal of the miniatures. For some unknown reason, until 1937, workers always painted the eyes on Barclay figures as if the miniatures were peering to one side, a feature perhaps endearing to some patrons, but annoying to others. O’Brien, The Story of American Toys, 120-121.

83 Quoted in O’Brien, *Collecting Toy Soldiers*, 3. Early on, toy sales to another dime store chain also increased Barclay profits. O’Brien has noted that workers shipped orders to Kresge’s from the inception of the firm. See *Collecting Toy Soldiers*, 3.


92 Miriam Hansen has revealed a different, earlier connection between toys, films, and the consumer culture. Hansen found that in at least one instance, a toy, the Teddy bear, inspired a film with a message of consumption. See, "Adventures of Goldilocks: Spectatorship, Consumerism and Public Life," *Camera Obscura* 22 (1990), 51-71.


100 Heide and Gilman, *Cartoon Collectables*, 100, 102.
105 Quoted in Mosely, *Disney's World*, 151.
109 "Mickey Mouse' is Eight Years Old," *The Literary Digest*, 3 October 1936, 19.
114 See, for example, Mann, "Mickey Mouse's Financial Career," 717-721.
Heide and Gilman, *Cartoon Collectables*, 113-114.


"Mickey Mouse’ is Eight Years Old," 19.

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Bristol, "Snow White ... Inanimate Characters Become a New Force in Merchandising," 15.

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Hollander, *All Aboard!* 138-139.

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132Susan Strasser relates the history of premiums, including toys in *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 101-102, 164-178; on premiums directed at children in particular, see 166-167.


138"Ideal Launches Shirley Temple Doll," *Toys and Novelties*, October 1934, 86.


142"Toys on Upward Grade," *Toys and Novelties*, June 1935, 47.


144"Toys on Upward Grade," 47.


156"The Little King," 96.

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169 Boorstin, The Americans, 89.
TOYS, CHILDREN, AND THE TOY INDUSTRY
IN A CULTURE OF CONSUMPTION, 1890-1991

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*****

The Ohio State University

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Dissertation Committee:                   Approved by

J.C. Burnham                     Adviser
M.G. Blackford                  Department of History
S.M. Hartmann
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CHAPTER VII: THE ERA OF ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT, 1941-1947

World War II temporarily redressed the struggle between toy customers and marketers in favor of businesspeople. A sellers’ market existed for the entire war, in part because manufacturers never successfully produced enough toys to meet demand. After the war, shoppers could afford to be choosier, but during the conflict, shortages virtually forced consumers to accept whatever goods businesspeople offered.

As toymakers struggled with a host of unprecedented war-related difficulties, significant industrial changes developed. Businesspeople instituted changes of great significance to the postwar toy industry and consumer culture. On one level, the situation attracted hundreds of innovative entrepreneurs to the industry. On another level, wartime circumstances led both newcomers and more established businesspeople to experiment with new production techniques and materials, notably plastic.

For the most part, production problems overshadowed marketing difficulties, but the war also caused distributors
their share of problems. In answer to these difficulties, progressive sellers experimented with more fully developed self-service. This innovation, in turn, necessitated developments in advertising, packaging, and store design. Moreover, after the war, distributors retained many of their wartime merchandising techniques.

Mobilizing for War

The first stage of the industry's wartime development actually began before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Indeed, in many respects, the changes that followed America's entry into the war were less a matter of type than degree. Even before December 7, 1941, manufacturers experienced material shortages and enjoyed a decline in foreign competition. Some producers also began manufacturing military equipment. Despite these developments, however, most toymakers, distributors, and consumers reacted to international developments with ambivalence.

As early as 1939, World War II influenced developments within the toy industry. Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, and toy lines reflected greater interest in war items by the annual Toy Fair in late October of the same year. "The toy industry reacts instantly to fluctuations in American interests and pastimes . . . ," observed a Business Week correspondent in November, continuing, "Manufacturers report
'a moderate increase in national defense items’ as a result of the war.”¹

Other, less noticeable, effects upon the industry also foreshadowed important changes to come. Even during the first year of the war, hostilities disrupted international trade in playthings. Analysts in this early stage minimized the impact of the situation, noting that by 1939, foreign manufacturers controlled a relatively small portion of the domestic market. "At their annual preview of Christmas toys, held last week and this under the auspices of the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A., Inc., members of the trade showed that there will be no such dearth as in 1914, when almost half the total supply was shut off by war blockades," concluded the Business Week writer. "For the past ten years less than 5% of the playthings sold in this country have been imported . . . . Imported toys from Germany, Japan, and Czechoslovakia have sold chiefly in the lower-priced markets since the last war, and have represented an almost negligible percentage of the dollar volume of the trade."²

At the same time, the war began to affect the availability of raw materials, but these first shortages also did little to disrupt production or increase price. "Manufacturers anticipate a slight rise in retail prices as a result of the mounting cost of raw materials," the Business Week toy fair reporter continued, "but point out
that the price range for playthings is so wide that this will probably not be noticed by the consumer."  

International events continued to affect toy manufacturing during 1940 and 1941, and the disruption increased, although most industry activities still remained relatively unaffected. Occasionally, however, the war influenced production substantially, particularly as some important toymakers began manufacturing defense equipment. At the A. C. Gilbert Company, for example, where employees made Erector sets, American Flyer electric trains, and other playthings and small appliances, management began converting facilities for defense work. "Although . . . flare work was the first sizable war work we did as a prime contractor," recalled A. C. Gilbert in his 1954 autobiography, "we had foreseen the possibility of our being drawn into the conflict as far back as 1940, and had surveyed the plant to determine what type of war work we could go into best." Planning soon gave way to actual production. A major maker of weapons engaged the A. C. Gilbert Company as a sub-contractor, and Gilbert employees began to manufacture Browning Machine Gun parts at the main plant.  

While Gilbert manufactured machine gun parts, Gilbert's chief competitor, Lionel, the well-known maker of electric trains, also converted some facilities to military production. During the First World War, Lionel manufactured
compasses. Now employees once again produced navigational instruments.5

Even as some toymakers shifted to military production, some, but not all, manufacturers and retailers braced for more stringent material shortages. Wartime contingencies threatened non-ferrous metals first, and by early 1941, toymakers found supplies inadequate for their needs. Certain manufacturers showed real concern over the situation. "Many members of the trade are genuinely worried about the aluminum shortage," observed a Business Week correspondent assigned to cover the thirty-ninth annual Toy Fair in New York City, in March, 1941. "Because of its light weight, aluminum is at a premium for use in mechanical toys, Lilliputian cooking utensils, and doll-house dishes."6 The possibility of future shortages also upset certain members of the industry. "[W]hat really scares the toy manufacturers," the same journalist continued, "is the possibility of something happening to the rubber supply."7

Despite certain limitations, most raw materials remained relatively plentiful during 1941, and so manufacturers met impending shortages with cautious optimism or indifference. "Government priorities may affect production of playthings sooner or later," observed one writer for Modern Plastics in July, 1941, six months before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, "but the theme of ‘toys as usual’ for as long as possible still prevails throughout the toy industry."8
Shortages were, after all, limited to a few materials, and this fact particularly contributed to businesspeople’s complacency. "Rising lumber prices haven’t caused much trouble," concluded the Business Week reporter assigned to the toy show, "principally because the grades used in lines like doll furniture and building blocks differed from those required for army construction." 9

Toymakers had begun to experiment with alternative materials by 1941, but many toymakers did so because new technology intrigued them, not to counter impending shortages. "No exception to the general squeeze on non-ferrous metals, the industry showed more plastic and partly plastic toys than it ever had before," reported an analyst for Modern Plastics, who had also attended the 1941 Toy Fair. "Emphasis on the use of plastics was not stressed as a possible last resort, since most producers indicated they had covered their raw materials to ‘a reasonable extent,’ but rather because of their inherent qualities." 10

The subject matter of playthings produced for 1941 also reflected the degree to which many manufacturers continued to remain relatively impervious to ominous international developments. Toymakers miniaturized the latest war equipment, but military toys still represented a relatively small segment of all playthings produced for 1941. "Surprisingly, items classified as ‘national defense’ accounted for only between 1% and 2% of this figure," a
reporter noted in Business Week. "This in spite of the fact that the latest models of battleships, airplanes, etc., are duplicated in miniature almost as soon as they’re off the production line."¹¹

Consumer ambivalence, the sort John Morton Blum has already identified among Americans after December 7, appeared in toy markets even before Pearl Harbor and paralleled toymakers’ mixed strategies; certainly fashion was not fully controlling the market for toys.¹²

"Manufacturers are well stocked," concluded the Business Week writer, "but they’re careful not to over-produce on defense lines—there was a rumored surplus of toy soldiers last year." Instead, consumers preferred toy staples: dolls, mechanical toys, games, wheel goods, and electric trains. Toymakers, therefore, fleshed out toy lines with these playthings. "Although changing tastes and interests are quickly reflected in toy sales and practically any item you can name is duplicated in miniature somewhere," observed the same Business Week analyst, "the time-tested lines are still the back-bone of the toy business."¹³

As consumers sought playthings reminiscent of a more peaceful world, the Roosevelt administration began preparing the nation for war. Still, toy analysts noted one positive aspect in these ominous developments: military spending would improve the market. The toy industry, this observer recognized, would share in the financial benefits of a
burgeoning military industrial complex. "The government's defense program will go forward with increasing intensity perhaps for two years," predicted a crude Keynesian Toys and Novelties editorialist in the March, 1941, issue. "With vast new money in circulation because of this program, the country is in for prosperous times, and Your Scribe believes that the toy industry will experience good business, and that your program should be based on that premise."\(^{14}\)

Even the Pearl Harbor bombing did not completely tarnish the business optimism many toymakers and consumers felt. As in other consumer areas, the attack had little immediate effect upon the availability of playthings or buyer behavior, and so formal declarations of war did little to disrupt the 1941 Christmas shopping season. Many toymakers, distributors, and shoppers faced the first weeks of hostilities with the same ambivalence with which they had passed the last weeks of peace. "THE CHRISTMAS SEASON of 1941 was just as jolly as formerly despite the Japanese aggression . . ., for good old Saint Nick had his bag well filled with toys which had been produced early in the year," concluded one Toys and Novelties editorialist in early 1942. "As for this year—no one can predict at this time what the toy supply will be, although it is assumed that business will wriggle through, the same as it is doing in England."\(^{15}\)
Shortages and Restrictions

As the editorialist predicted, after December 7, most toymakers continued to produce playthings; nevertheless, manufacturers encountered greater business restrictions after America declared war on Japan than they had previously. Circumstances required more manufacturers to convert to war production than had earlier been the case. All toymakers struggled with material shortages and price limitations. At the same time, toy manufacturers and retailers lost valuable employees to military service.

Through the end of 1941 and on into the first half of 1942, shortages and restrictions on raw materials became substantially more acute. And as predicted, one shortage began within weeks of the bombing: open hostilities with Japan cut off toymakers and other manufacturers from East Asian rubber sources for the duration. Later government restrictions had a still more far-reaching effect upon supplies of other raw material. "On March 31 the War Production Board invaded Santa Claus' workshop," reported a Toys and Novelties analyst in May, 1942, "issuing an order (L-81) that will stop production after June 30 of certain toys and games made of metal, critical plastics and other materials necessary to the war effort." The order prohibited the manufacture of toys containing by weight more than 7% of certain "critical materials": iron, steel, zinc, or rayon. L-81 also entirely prohibited in toy production
the use of bright colors, steel alloy, chromium plating, copper, antimony, tin, cork, silk, urea, and phenolic plastics.17

At first, War Production Board officials minimized the consequences of L-81 for the toy industry. In so doing, however, they hinted at how far reaching their actual impact would be. In May, 1942, an industry journalist reported the observations of one WPB official from the Consumers’ Durable Goods Branch: "Mr. Moore thought that of the more than 600 important companies engaged in the manufacture of toys and games," the correspondent reported, "less than half would be seriously affected by the order because of inability to shift from one material to another."18 Without meaning to, Moore’s observations suggested the probability that L-81 might seriously affect as many as 50% of the most important makers of playthings and less seriously affect most other toy manufacturers. That is in fact what happened.

In some instances, L-81 simply ended or greatly disrupted the production of certain playthings for the duration. "Electric trains and other metal toys can not be produced after June 30 because they use war materials," the reporter for Toys and Novelties stated flatly, as he or she explained the precepts of L-81.19 Similarly, L-81 greatly affected the manufacture of wheel goods, some of the most popular of all toys then produced, since toymakers constructed most of these playthings from metal.
Velocipedes, tricycles, play cars, doll carriages and carts, wagons, and automobiles all but vanished from retailers' shelves.20

If after June 30, 1942, L-81 virtually eliminated the manufacture of certain toys, the order also greatly affected the design of many other playthings. Authorities allowed toymakers enough metal to hold playthings together but required manufacturers to make toys from wood and other non-critical materials. L-81 also changed the color, and so the style, of many of the toys manufactured after June 30, 1941. Authorities permitted manufacturers to use only a few drab colors in quantity: domestic earth colors, ultramarine blue, carbon black, lampblack, boneblack, titanium dioxide, and lithopone.21 Officials did allow manufacturers to use a few brightly colored paints for stripes, bands, or other details.22 But most brightly painted playthings disappeared from manufacturers' lines and, consequently, from retail shelves.

In 1942, while many toymakers struggled with the limitations of L-81, more toymakers than had earlier been the case converted all or part of their facilities to war production. "Manufacturers wept not over their lost toys, however," reported one analyst in 1942, referring to shortages and restrictions, "but plunged right into war production, [and] are doing over $50,000,000 worth already." Indeed, by 1942, the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A., Inc.,
the industry’s principle trade association, found toymakers producing over 500 different items for the war effort. Where workers had earlier turned out playthings, employees now produced parachutes, gas masks, arm splints, electric motors, munitions, and a host of other items for the war effort.\textsuperscript{23}

Toymakers did not divert all production, however. Despite the wide array of defense equipment manufactured by domestic toymakers, pollsters at the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A. found most production concentrated in relatively few firms in specific segments of the industry. Exact findings varied. Those published in the November 28, 1942, issue of Business Week revealed that out of 400 firms polled, only 20 factories were engaged solely in the production of equipment for the war effort. Forty manufacturers produced less than $100,000 worth of goods, while 30 firms produced less than $50,000.\textsuperscript{24} Data published six months later, in the May 1, 1943, issue of a competing journal, Sales Management, but originating from the same source, the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A., indicated an increase in the number of firms devoted to war production alone. An analyst for the journal observed that manufacturers had now completely converted 30 toy factories to the production of military equipment.\textsuperscript{25} But few additional firms converted to full war production over the next two years. In the October 7, 1944, issue of Business
Week, another analyst reported findings similar to those reported by the *Sales Management* writer. He or she noted that "only about 30 firms got into war production on a large scale."  

Regardless of exact figures, war production clearly concentrated in one part of the industry. Manufacturers of metal toys made the largest single contribution to military production, because they could adapt their nonprecision metal-working equipment, such as punch presses and stamping machines, to war work.  

By late 1942, these manufacturers were producing 80% of all military equipment produced by the toy industry.  

War products of course varied from manufacturer to manufacturer, depending upon the adaptability of available facilities. Beginning in May, 1942, at the Lionel Corporation, for example, workers produced not only precision instruments, compasses, binnacles, azimuth circles, and taffrail logs, but wind transmitters, emergency oil lamps, and battle lookouts for the Navy and Merchant Marine.  

At the American National Company of Toledo, Ohio, management had abandoned production of metal pedal cars to make hospital equipment and wheel chairs.  

Other manufacturers of metal toys produced munitions. At the Unique Arts Mfg. Co., Inc., for example, toymakers shifted from mechanical toys to ordnance production. In a 1945 institutional advertisement in *Toys and Novelties*,
Unique management proudly announced their firm's contribution to the war effort: 100 million grenades, precision fuses for anti-aircraft guns, and "many of the fire bombs reddening the skies over Japan."\textsuperscript{31} Workers at The Murray Ohio Mfg. Co. also turned to ordnance manufacturing during the war. Employees there supplied the Army and Navy with aircraft bombs as well as other equipment.\textsuperscript{32}

If the manufacturers of metal toys made perhaps the greatest material contribution to the war effort, other toymakers also produced much needed equipment for the military. Manufacturers of rubber toys, for example, contributed heavily to the war effort. "The plants of the Eagle Rubber Company [of Ashland, Ohio] are entirely occupied in the production of life saving and other rubber equipment for our Armed Forces," management announced to the industry in a \textit{Toys and Novelties} institutional advertisement published in 1945. "It has been the policy of this company since December 7th, 1941, to devote all its energies and its organization to the production of rubber equipment that would be helpful to our government in working toward a final victory over our enemies at the earliest possible moment."\textsuperscript{33} Over the course of the war, Eagle employees made ponchos,
rubber boats, life belts, waterproof radio cases, and other equipment.\textsuperscript{34}

While rubber toy producers at Eagle and other firms made flotation equipment, the makers of other sorts of toys participated in the development and manufacture of one of the most secret projects of the war. Working in conjunction with researchers at Johns Hopkins University, engineers at the Long Island-based Ideal Novelty & Toy Company helped to develop the Variable Time Fuse or Proximity Fuse. "This project was known as Project A and was an extremely 'hush-hush' item," revealed a \textit{Toys and Novelties} correspondent soon after the war. "It was second in importance only to the 'Manhattan District,' the code phrase for the atomic bomb." The fuse proved valuable soon after officials issued the new armament to fighting units. Early in the operational history of the weapon, anti-aircraft gunners using proximity fuses manufactured in part by Ideal employees downed 132 Japanese planes over a single battleship.\textsuperscript{35}

A study conducted by the Toy Manufactures Association indicated that "the industry made important parts of practically every machine and material used in the war."\textsuperscript{36} "We played a small but vital part in [the war], big for our kind of business," recalled A. C. Gilbert, inventor of the Erector set, of his own firm's efforts.\textsuperscript{37} All told, seventeen toy manufacturers won Army-Navy or Maritime
awards, many of them with additional stars. Between 1943 and 1945, for example, the A. C. Gilbert Company alone garnered four Army-Navy "E" Awards. Officials awarded Gilbert's peacetime competitor, Lionel, a 4-Star Maritime "M." Many other firms received letters of commendation.

Toymakers who converted something less than all of their production facilities to military production also claimed that they helped win the war in other ways. Red Cross workers and military personnel in different service branches, for example, utilized both commercially available toys and specially designed playthings to provide soldiers with recreation to build morale and as occupational therapy for the wounded.

If playthings did in fact contribute to the war effort, however, advertising experts sometimes inflated the help toys gave. In a 1945 Fisher-Price institutional advertisement, for example, a copywriter went so far as to credit one toy with restoring a soldier's will to live. "He was ill, his best girl had married someone else, and the nurses and gray ladies were worried about his condition," reported Mrs. T. McCurdy Marsh, camp committee chairperson at an unidentified camp hospital, in a letter reprinted in the advertisement. Fortunately, someone sent the G.I. in the next bed a Fisher-Price "Pluto" toy. Seeing the toy's antics, the wounded soldier in question began laughing and
commenced his recovery. "His turn for the better started from that moment," reported Mrs. McCurdy.43

In another case of hyperbole, one industry spokesperson concluded that domestic playthings had begun winning the war long before December 7, 1941. Writing in the October-November 1945 issue, H. Lee Treadwell, Toys and Novelties general manager, insisted that the toy industry contributed more to pre-training the 12,000,000 men and women of American's armed forces than any other single industry in the country. "The mechanical training that was available to these boys before they became soldiers, through such items as 'Erector sets,' 'Lionel trains,' Microscope sets, air rifles, and mechanical toys of all descriptions down through the years," wrote Treadwell, "played a true psychological part in giving them background of knowledge before they entered the service." Similarly, he noted, women who played with an "F. & B." doll or a "Doctor and Nurse Kit," or a sewing kit, or some other toy as girls were helped to qualify for their part in the war effort as members of WAC, WAVE, SPAR, or the Army and Navy Nurses' Corp.44

During the war, industry spokespeople also insisted that playthings continued to provide important service to the nation on the home front. Toymakers, they observed, employed 135,000 workers. More importantly, playthings contributed mightily to the happiness and healthy development of American youngsters. For these reasons,
toys, analysts insisted, were national necessities. "Toys do not fall within the category of 'luxuries' for the reason that their need is imperative for the well-being of the child," insisted one such Toys and Novelties writer in June, 1942. Playthings guaranteed children high morale, reasoned another booster, and high spirits ensured good juvenile health. "About 40,000,000 children under 16 years of age depend upon these factories for the toys they need; and to these children toys are just as important as shoes or smoking tobacco to adults," insisted one editorialist in the January, 1942, issue of Toys and Novelties. "The contented child is usually a healthy one, but he knows no contentment if he is derived of the tools of play."47

But if, as toymakers and retailers insisted, playthings played an indispensable role on the home front, by 1942, toys were, nonetheless, becoming more and more difficult to obtain. "The American Toy Fair of 1942 was unique in that the manufacturers, although faced with the greatest demand for toys in the history of this $1,000,000,000, exclusively American industry, were unable to take advantage of demand," lamented a Toys and Novelties correspondent sent to cover the 1942 American Toy Fair. Circumstances cut deeply into productivity. "Manufacturers were present with exhibits, of course--to the tune of some 460--but many of them, especially those whose plants are large enough to be useful in the production of war materials, as well as those whose
products are made of scarce materials, had little or nothing to sell," reported the same Toys and Novelties writer. "Most of these came in order to meet customers, and to do what they could to satisfy them."48

The war emergency therefore presented toy distributors as well as manufacturers with supply problems. Dime store merchants in particular had trouble finding stock. By March, 1942, material shortages and conversion to war work had cut deeply into the availability of all sorts of playthings. Attendants at the 1942 American Toy Fair demonstrated the desperation many distributors felt. Anxiously seeking merchandise, almost as many buyers registered for the Fair in the first day as had registered during the whole first week in 1941. Unfortunately, many distributors found much less to buy than they had a year earlier.49

As materials became scarcer, they also grew more costly. Toy prices reflected these increases, and chain store buyers found playthings priced to retail for a nickel, dime, or quarter especially difficult to find. As they had when dealing with other wartime shortages and difficulties, industry journalists tried to put as positive a face on the situation as possible. "In looking through chain stores today, we find merchandise marked 7 cents, 12 cents, 23 cents or 29 cents," reported a Toys and Novelties editorialist in a 1942 issue, "and it is assumed that the
public will pay the new prices at least as cheerfully as they pay the two and three cent sales tax."\textsuperscript{50}

Now, as industry analysts at the Toy Fair looked to the future, they predicted a substantial reduction in retail toy sales of all kinds as a result of wartime conditions. "It was stated," a correspondent reported, "that toy production this year will be reduced from 20 to 30 per cent, which will mean a retail toy business of about $200,000,000 as compared with $240,000,000, in 1941."\textsuperscript{51} By the end of the third year of the war, then, a substantial unmet toy demand awaited enterprising businesspeople.

Toy Entrepreneurship and the War

Entrepreneurial activity increased during 1943, as enterprising businesspeople moved to satisfy demand for toys, and this influx marked the next stage of the toy industry's wartime development. All across the nation, numerous new toy concerns flourished, and their founders pioneered innovative production and merchandising techniques, with profound consequences for both the postwar toy industry and the culture.

As shortages of factory-made playthings grew more severe, consumer demand for toys also increased, especially in war industry areas. Factors external to production levels brought about this change. The war fueled
consumption in general, but the war especially increased demand for playthings, and this pattern of consumer behavior continued after the war. 52

A number of factors explain the increase in wartime toy demand. On one level, more consumers than before the war now had the means to purchase playthings. War workers in general had incomes unknown since before the Great Depression. Economic hardship had forced many Americans to postpone the purchase of all sorts of consumer goods, including playthings. Now these same consumers sought to gratify their long-delayed wants and needs.

On another level, however, work force demographics also changed with important implications for toy sales. During the war, more women, particularly married women, than had earlier been the case took jobs in industry and earned money with which they might purchase children's toys, among other things. If these working women now had the means to make toy purchases, at the same time, many also had a reason to buy playthings. As Susan Hartmann has shown, young mothers with children made up an important segment of the women who joined the work force. Indeed, between 1940 and 1944, the percentage of working women with children under 10 years of age increased from 7.8 percent to 12.1 percent, as over 500,000 such women took jobs. 53

Maternal guilt may also have contributed to increased toy sales to working women. Hartmann has already noted that
throughout the war, women with children endured widespread moral disapproval when they chose to work outside of the home.\textsuperscript{54} These working women, some contemporary observers believed, bought toys for their children to ease feelings of guilt. "To compensate for [their] absence from the home, women workers have been showering their children with playthings throughout the year," a \textit{Newsweek} journalist insisted late in 1942. "Many stores report regular weekly visits of helmeted, overalled women who seem anxious to spend big money."\textsuperscript{55}

Whatever the exact rationale, with greater discretionary buying now possible, war workers in particular lavished playthings upon their children when they could find toys for sale. By the second week in October, 1943, Portland, Oregon, shipyard workers had begun "scare buying . . . Christmas toys." "We put the stuff out on the counter," lamented one Portland department store manager, "and before we can go back for more it's gone." Farther south, toy retailers experienced similar sales increases. "Southern California stores report that never before have parents shown such generosity in gift buying for children," advised another \textit{Newsweek} correspondent. "War workers have gone on doll-buying sprees, often buying a dozen or more for one child." Not to be outdone by their Western counterparts, Detroit parents, many of whom built tanks and other military vehicles in local plants, helped their local retailers set
all-time sales records for playthings. "High-priced toys went first, with doll prices ranging into fabulous figures, and now people are buying everything in sight, including cardboard toys and wooden wagons which were poor sellers last year," reported another Newsweek journalist. "By Dec. 1 buyers expect to have little left but games."56

And yet even as the demand for playthings increased during 1943, toys grew scarcer. Scrap drives consumed metal pedal cars and other playthings already in circulation.57 At the same time, the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A. reported a 40% drop in the value of playthings produced, from $115,000,000 in 1942 to roughly $70,000,000 in 1943. "The toy shortage this year is described in the trade as the 'worst on record,'" reported journalist Harvey E. Runner in the May 14, 1943, edition of the New York Herald Tribune. "It is spread widely over nearly all divisions of the industry, with the exception of manufacturers of games, makers of paper products and publishers of toy books."58

As toy manufacturers failed to meet demand, consumers turned to other sources for their toys. At the urging of journalists, government officials, and a host of experts and pundits, parents and other adults made playthings in an effort to alleviate shortages. In popular periodicals, writers commonly published articles instructing parents and other adults in the rudiments of toy fabrication using non-essential household materials. "Scraps of wood, a few
brads, screws, bits of tubing and paint are about all you need to make these interesting wooden toys," advised one author in a typical how-to article in the November, 1942, issue of Popular Mechanics Magazine.59

Stopgap measures did relatively little to satisfy the immense domestic demand for playthings. During 1943 in answer to the need for toys, entrepreneurial activity increased, and this change marked the next stage of the industry’s wartime development. Small toy concerns soon flourished all across the nation, and, as we shall see, entrepreneurs who founded toy firms during the war pioneered innovative production and marketing techniques with profound consequences for both the postwar toy industry and consumer culture.

If during the war strong demand together with toy shortages suggested lucrative business opportunities, other factors combined to form a hospitable entrepreneurial environment. First, the war virtually eliminated foreign competition. Like their American counterparts, during the war emergency, Allied and Axis toymakers shifted from civilian production to the manufacture of military equipment. "Most toy manufacturers have long since converted to war work," a Newsweek correspondent in Great Britain reported in the November 22, 1942, issue, "and the available supply is only 15 per cent of prewar years."60 Near the end of the war, another writer found that German
toymakers had been engaged in similar work. "Following Hitler," reported a war correspondent for the North American Newspaper Alliance, who visited the center of German toy manufacturing in 1945, "Nuremberg and its toy industry relinquished the city's 200-year tradition of producing for the happiness of children and turned to the manufacture of machine-gun clips."61

Naturally, converted factories were military targets. American Manufacturers learned about damage to factories in Great Britain.62 At the same time, the bombing of German and Japanese plants wrecked machinery required to produce toys. "The toy factories are rubble . . . .," reported the Nuremberg visitor. "The city where it used to be Christmas all year around is mourning in its own ashes." Indeed, at the largest toy factory in the city, one manager considered the fate of his plant, eight different fires, an example of his factory's good fortune. Other toymakers, he noted, suffered much greater destruction.63

Patriotism also disrupted the sale of imported playthings. Even before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, consumers purchased toys manufactured in Axis countries only with great reluctance. As early as April, 1941, a writer for Modern Plastics noted an "inclination on the part of the American public to purchase Japanese goods which amounted to a practical embargo" resulting from "Japan's declared allegiance to the Axis."64 Shopper preferences continued
unchanged throughout the war. In October, 1944, a journalist in Sales Management observed, with wry understatement, that "German toys [are] not so popular."65

Other factors also limited domestic competition and encouraged entrepreneurial growth. The Office of Price Administration, or OPA, regulations, for example, unintentionally fostered new business development. In an effort to control inflation, OPA officials utilized 1942 production costs to set wartime price ceilings. Unfortunately, this decision meant that OPA analysts had no basis upon which to establish prices for newer firms not yet producing toys in 1942. In such instances, administrators instead based price levels upon higher, wartime production costs.66 At first, many businesspeople routinely ignored OPA price ceilings, since officials found themselves too busy pricing other, more necessary, goods to regulate playthings. "OPA had to concentrate in 1943 on food, clothes and furniture," explained R. H. Greenwell, OPA business specialist, quoted in The New York Times in October, 1944. "This year we have the time and energy to put into toys."67

Particularly after 1943, then, newer producers could charge more than established competitors for playthings of similar quality. "The substitution of wood for wire and metal has upped costs but the OPA will not permit higher ceiling prices," observed a journalist in Newsweek in
November, 1943. "Hundreds of fly-by-night manufacturers
have sprung up to take advantage of this shackle; starting
from scratch they can name their own price."68 This
tempting situation convinced numerous enterprising people to
join the toy industry and charge extravagant prices. "As a
result there is a flood of expensively priced but flimsy
cardboard articles on the market," reported the Newsweek
writer; "a toy buyer for a large Chicago department store
said he had been offered cardboard games at a wholesale
price of $1.59 which he would have been ashamed to retail at
50 cents."69 In this way, newcomers benefitted most from
the increased demand for toys.

The limited availability of materials for the production
of certain playthings did not necessarily discourage the
growth of the toy industry during the war. Unlike
manufacturers of other products, manufacturers could make
many playthings from available materials, and this fact
attracted many businesspeople to the toy industry.70

Cast-off materials offered entrepreneurs one
possibility.71 In many instances, scrap lumber proved
especially useful to toymakers. In September, 1943, in
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for example, two businessmen, B. G.
Mesberg, then manager of a furniture manufacturer’s sales
office, and his brother-in-law, William Podell, a shoe store
manager, struck upon the idea of manufacturing playthings
from the wood scrap produced by furniture factories and sash
and door mills. Podell designed a wooden jeep, and the two entrepreneurs put the toy into production. The plaything proved successful, and the two businessmen expanded their catalog. Just 23 months after going into business, according to a journalist for the Milwaukee Journal, the two had built up a quarter-of-a-million-dollar-a-year toy business.72

On rarer occasions, enterprising toymakers even found usable metal scrap available. In the September 23, 1944, issue of Business Week, for example, a writer reported on the conversion of 37,000 surplus metal disks—obsolete military radio parts—to 18,500 yo-yos. "Conversion meant drilling a hole through the center of the disks, then fastening two of them together with a bolt," the writer explained. "With that done, a string was added, making a crude but workable yo yo."73

The availability of ersatz materials, particularly cardboard and plastic, offered entrepreneurs yet another option. Cardboard proved important as a versatile, stop-gap material, but plastics proved more important to the future of the industry.74 At first, despite restrictions, certain plastics remained relatively plentiful, and so some would-be toymakers turned to this material to manufacture playthings. But if toymakers found plastic available, they also learned that the material offered distinct challenges and problems.
Plastic, manufacturers discovered, was a relatively expensive material to use. In particular, makers found good molds costly to produce. Poorly designed molds played a major role in toy design failure and increased manufacturers' expenses still further. "A careful survey of the British and American toy trades has shown me that about one-half of the toys which have appeared in plastics have been either useless or unsatisfactory--" reported British toymaker Hilary F. Page in 1945 in the industrial journal, Plastics, "not because plastics, in general, are not suitable for them, but because the moulds have been wrongly designed, or the wrong type of material was used." 75

As American toymakers attempted to counter high mold costs, they created other problems. Seeking to maximize mold use, increase productivity, and cut expenses, plastic toy manufacturers shortened mold time. Unfortunately, this procedure often had an adverse effect upon product quality. Plastic toys warped, cracked, broke, or dulled as a result. As virgin plastic became harder to obtain, manufacturers turned to all kinds of plastic scrap, and this practice compounded earlier problems. "As a rule, the 'life' is gone out of plastic scrap," Larry Hahn, a manufacturer of plastic injection machines, explained later. "It loses certain elements and properties in being re-worked, and often tends to become brittle." 76
Initially, however, manufacturing errors had little negative effect upon overall plastic toy sales. On one level, consumers were so anxious to purchase any sort of playthings that they willingly overlooked drawbacks characteristic of certain wartime plastic toys. "The companies who supplied the plastic toy substitutes," Hahn explained, "stepped into sight of a volume market with little or no sales effort when metal and rubber toys were suddenly cut off by the war, and the usual facilities converted to war items."\textsuperscript{77} On another level, journalists stressed the wonders science and technology would bring after the war, and so synthetic materials captured the public imagination. In this way, the very fact that manufacturers made certain toys from plastic contributed to their sale.\textsuperscript{78} Taken together, these factors contributed greatly to entrepreneurial success. Indeed according to Hahn, during the war, some manufacturers of plastic playthings made "spectacular profits."\textsuperscript{79}

The backgrounds of newcomers to the toy industry varied as much as the materials they used, especially since wartime toy entrepreneurs required little capital to begin production. In general, however, wartime entrepreneurs fell into two classes.

On one level, wartime conditions encouraged individuals with little or no business experience to enter the toy business. A \textit{Newsweek} reporter discovered New Yorker Anna
Spalla, a Riker’s Island Hospital nurse, for example, manufacturing "caricature figures," wooden dolls. Rejecting "sugar and spice and everything nice" as materials, Spalla instead made her playthings from "bits of rags, slivers of wood, medicine phials, and just plain odds and ends, stuck together, carved with a jackknife and turned on a lathe."

At first, she worked out of her Brooklyn apartment, but by June, 1943, sales were so good that Spalla moved her business to a rented studio. Despite national publicity and some expansion, however, Spalla’s success remained relatively limited and short term. Her operation did little to shape the future of the toy industry.

But after the war, other small-scale concerns founded at about the same time became prominent companies and wielded much greater influence. Their impact upon the industry and the consumer culture far outstripped nurse Spalla’s. While she carved dolls on the East Coast, for example, Ruth and Elliot Handler began manufacturing wooden toys, doll furniture, in a converted California garage on the West Coast. In so doing, the Handlers founded the Mattel Toy Company that eventually became one of the world’s largest toy manufacturers.

As relative amateurs now took up toymaking, another significant group, more experienced businesspeople, also joined the toy industry after the war emergency disrupted their peacetime work. Some proved especially significant,
since they shaped the toy industry and the consumer culture. In a 1943 issue of Sales Management, an analyst noted that wartime shortages led numerous manufacturers of merchandising displays in particular to join the industry. "One bright spot in the industry's picture," the writer noted, "is the influx of new blood, particularly in companies which previously manufactured such selling aids as display materials, premiums, promotional items, signs, paper products and related material."82

The new merchandising experts shaped their adopted industry in two distinct and important ways. First, as the Sales Management analyst noted, the merchandisers "improved the financial structure of the industry." Unlike many other concerns new to the industry, the merchandisers brought with them much-needed capital. Given the large number of amateur operators on shoe-string budgets rushing to join the industry, analysts cheered this influx of more financially stable business concerns.83

Second, unlike management at many older toy firms, the new toy merchandisers brought with them not only a knowledge of merchandising, but also the inclination to advertise and otherwise publicize playthings. As indicated in chapter VI, earlier businesspeople, most notably Louis Marx, had been much less willing to promote toys. In many instances, management regarded extensive advertising as an extravagance. Not so the newcomers. "Some of the old-
timers used to have a board meeting to decide on using a full-page advertisement," a Toys and Novelties advertising representative observed, "but these newcomers use inserts--four, six, and sevn [sic] eight pages, and think nothing of it." If the newcomers willingly used print advertisements to sell toys, they readily applied other promotional means to toy selling, too. "At least three dozen such producers have entered the toy field," the observer wrote of the new merchandisers, "utilizing their ingenuity to provide items attuned to current needs and utilizing their sales background to furnish helpful selling aids."\textsuperscript{84}

The merchandisers' decision to join the toy industry proved particularly timely. Even as these entrepreneurs took up the toy business, as we shall see, advertising and merchandising once again became increasingly necessary: toy retailers had begun shifting from personal selling to self-service retailing, and this change necessitated additional publicity.

**Toy Merchandising and Distribution**

Even as entrepreneurs adept at merchandising joined the toy industry, more established manufacturers and retailers also grew increasingly interested in advertising and merchandising. By late 1943, businesspeople, not just consumers, had already begun thinking about postwar selling. One aspect of this new realization involved a renewed
interest in more effective and efficient merchandising and distribution. This new emphasis on retailing characterized the next stage in the wartime development of the toy industry.

Targeting both manufacturers engaged solely in war work and toymakers forced to curtail civilian production, industry journalists dismissed production cutbacks as a reason to end publicity efforts. "The fact that there is a war on does not justify any manufacturer (or retailer either) in eliminating his advertising," insisted a Toys and Novelties editorialist in 1943. "He may not have anything to sell at this time—or he may be obliged to confine himself to those dealers who have been in the habit of buying from him; but there is always 'news' about every business that can be advertised, and this should be done." Treadwell agreed, but he insisted that toymakers did have something to sell. "Though he may be oversold on his product, or have nothing to sell at this time," Treadwell insisted, "he most assuredly can never be 'oversold' on his trade-name!"

Indeed, he and other (very possibly interested) analysts reasoned that wartime conditions made extensive advertising necessary, not superfluous.86

Boosters presented a twofold rationale. They took one from the general program of wartime institutional advertising: writers urged businesspeople to advertise in order to maintain pre-war domestic markets. Wartime
negligence, they insisted, might undo years of consumer
loyalty carefully developed through expensive prewar
merchandising. "The public, dealer and consumer alike, is
quick to forget those who are not in the limelight, so that
where advertising is discontinued at the moment, it may be
necessary for many concerns to re-enter the market at the
close of the war as a newcomer, and to start it again to re-
establish their products in public favor and public demand,"
observed one editorialist. "This of course is a far more
costly proposition than to keep the 'business' alive pending
the close of the war." 87

Entrepreneurial activity in particular, boosters argued,
necessitated institutional advertising. Advertising
abstinence, they insisted, abandoned established markets to
enterprising newcomers. "Moreover, the absence of
advertising in the case of a given product is to open the
doors to new competition that may secure a firm foothold now
which it will retain in the post-war period," the
editorialist continued. "You remember the old adage: 'When
the cat's away, the mice will play!'" 88

Their second rationale was that patriotism and the war
effort required businesspeople to continue advertising. 89
"[A]s liason officer between business and government, the
[Commerce] Department has continually reminded both of the
necessity advertising--not only as a means of maintaining
markets, but as a mighty force for social good," Treadwell
observed. "It is evident in the eyes of government that advertising has a rightful role in wartime and that it is filling the role successfully." By including "Victory messages," publicity for war bonds drives and other announcements, in their advertisements, he maintained, businessmen contributed mightily to the war effort.  

Many toymakers followed the advice of government officials, journalists, and others and did indeed advertise during the war. "You may have noticed," a Toys and Novelties editorialist reported, "that the number of old-time, major toy companies using advertising at this time is increasing, even though they have been out of production a year or two years."  

Toy industry institutional advertising followed a pattern similar to those used for most other consumer goods. A 1945 institutional advertisement for the Unique Arts Mfg. Co., Inc., a mechanical toymaker turned ordinance manufacturer, exemplified the wartime advertising strategy and tactics employed by many toymakers. Seeking on one level to explain their inability to supply distributors with merchandise, copywriters cited the contribution Unique Arts made to the war effort. "Since Africa, following through to France and right up to V.E. Day, the Merry Juggler has been a participant in every beachhead established," management proudly announced, "This he will continue to do until victory there insures freedom for all." To strengthen their
point, a management armed the firm's trademark, a clown called "the Merry Juggler," for war. A graphic artist drew the clown festooned with ammunition pouches and brandishing a Thompson submachine gun.93

But on another level, advertisers promised the same high quality toys after the war as had been available before the conflict. "In the not to distant future," the same advertiser continued, "the Unique Pioneers will again make safe, mechanical toys with all the care of yore, neatly turned corners and no sharp edges, modernized, amusing, colorful; and built for safety."94

After the improvising and temporizing of the war years, by 1945, the marketing and distribution of playthings differed greatly from that in existence earlier. Distributors' merchandising efforts especially shifted. Wartime business conditions caused distributors in many fields to develop self-service retailing further, and this relatively new selling style led, in turn, to new retail store design and in addition necessitated greater emphasis upon packaging, display, and print advertising. And after the war, these new marketing and distribution methods played a major role in determining the design and subject matter of many of the toys manufacturers produced.

As noted in chapters III and IV, certain toy retailers used self-service merchandising long before the Second World War began. Dime store merchants relied almost exclusively
upon self-service to sell toys and other items. But during the First World War, other retailers, including some department store managers, also turned to self-service. In the department stores of the inter-war years, however, a clerk, usually on commission, had still promoted each of the toys in the store himself, hoping to convince the customer to buy.

The war prevented toys and other items from being sold as they had been earlier, however, as salesmanship declined because of the conflict. To begin with, a wartime labor shortage robbed retailers of experienced sales help. Then higher industrial wages lured both male and female salespeople away from the salesfloor. At the same time, other employees joined the armed forces. As early as September, 1943, a Toys and Novelties editorialist reported a shift to self-service retailing because of the labor shortage.

On another level, the seller’s market that developed during the war made salesmanship less necessary, and so personal selling atrophied. Even when distributors could find clerks, salesmanship proved substandard. "Personal selling and serving . . .," bemoaned a writer in 1944, "have fallen to their lowest ebb." Indeed, by early 1943, the situation had decayed to such an extent that careless salespeople regularly insulted shoppers. "Employes [sic], often inexperienced and inefficient, and usually over-
worked," observed a writer in *Toys and Novelties* in 1944, "display an independence of feeling expressed by such classic remarks as--'Well, don't you know there's a war on?' or, 'Lady, I've only got two hands.'" Angry consumers left retail establishments determined to shop elsewhere after the war, and managers feared for future sales. "[E]qually prevalent are the mutterings of irritated customers--" observed the same analyst, "'[J]ust wait until the war is over. Then I'll never trade in this store!"97

A new emphasis on the importance of distribution to the well-being of the American economy paralleled the decline of salesmanship. Federal officials and business analysts warned that unless businesspeople found some way to distribute more goods than before the war, widespread unemployment might return with peace. Eric A. Johnston, president of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, seconded Richmond's statement, predicting that manufacturing industries could not employ the same number of individuals being employed during the war and that the biggest opportunities for employment would be found in the field of trade, finance, service, and "miscellaneous" jobs.98

Hoping now to sell more goods despite the problems associated with earlier selling methods, distributors turned increasingly to self-service. "Many retail stores throughout the country have experimented with 'Self-Serve Selling,'" observed a *Toys and Novelties* writer in December,
1944, "and it is the consensus . . . that it can be successfully applied in many lines of merchandise." At Wiebolt’s department store in Chicago, for example, managers used the toy department to experiment with self-service. They christened their department the "Toyteria" and enjoyed appreciable results.

As retailers at Wiebolt’s and elsewhere tried self-service, however, some distributors found older facilities relatively ill-suited to the new selling. Store construction, fixtures, and organization, they found, conspired to keep customers from visual as well as tactile merchandise contact. As self-service grew increasingly pervasive and peace seemed closer at hand, then, retailers began planning postwar store renovation and construction with self-service in mind. "We do not have proper confidence in the final victory, or in the future of our great country," insisted a self-service advocate in 1944, "if we do not post-war plan now!"

In order to expedite the new selling, interior designers and businesspeople proposed both interior and exterior store alterations. The Times Square Corporation "Store of the Future," developed by New York architect and interior designer Adolph Brukin and Times Square Stores Corporation President George Seedman epitomized these design changes. While not exclusively a toy store, the "Store of the Future" did contain a toy department, and the toy department
functioned as part of a larger selling scheme. Store strategy hinged upon the concept of the entire establishment as a single integrated selling unit. Every aspect of store design worked together to focus customer attention upon store merchandise in as direct a manner as possible. In most instances, consumer goods themselves would then close the sale. "Not merely a flight of fancy in store design," reported an enthusiastic visitor to the establishment in 1946, "but a soundly engineered machine for selling, is the new Times Square store in Astoria, Long Island, across the river from teeming Manhattan in New York City." 102

Brukin and Seedman designed the exterior of the Times Square Store to expose passersby to merchandise even while shoppers were still on the street. In this way, the exterior became an integral part of the interior. Seedman and Brunkin first set the actual storefront back four feet from the normal building line. At the same time, a massive overhang, supported by concrete pillars, extended several feet from the storefront, forming a covered walkway. The unusual position of the new front of the store drew customer attention, while the canopy protected pedestrians from the elements and reduced window glare. Taking full advantage of the latter, Seedman and Brunkin next lined the front of the store with one hundred and twenty feet of full-length plate glass. The glass provided shoppers with an unobstructed view of the store interior from ceiling to floor, and so too
the merchandise. Finally, the two planners selected a neutral color scheme to complement display merchandise of any shade to best advantage. The overall effect enabled the merchandise to draw customers into the store successfully. 103 "This great breadth exposes a panorama of color and merchandise that magnetizes all street traffic," noted an industrial journalist in 1947. "An especially inviting view of automotive, toys and housewares department[s] is available from this vantage." 104

Planners continued their merchandising strategy inside the "Store of the Future." Brukin and Seedman designed the interior to promote the merchandise. Planners carefully juxtaposed complementary departments, so that goods in one section might help sell items in another. Then Brukin and Seedman connected departments using extra-wide isles to encourage browsing and facilitate impulse buying. Finally, hoping literally to show store merchandise in its best light, Brukin and Seedman incorporated skylights into the store design, while at night, fluorescents provided other illumination. "The store interior is a shopping paradise," bubbled one Toys and Novelties correspondent in 1947. "Its high white ceiling, lined with radiant fluorescents, and its wide aisles, give the customer a luxurious feeling of space and relaxation." 105

Within each department, planners chose open counters, reminiscent of dime store merchandising, and wall fixtures
designed to bring customers into physical contact with the stock.\textsuperscript{106} Faced with such carefully planned merchandising, concluded a Toys and Novelties visitor, consumers were almost powerless not to make a purchase. "Counter after counter is so warmly attractive that almost all of them demand and receive each customer[sic] inspection," observed the Toys and Novelties visitor, "Unobstructed aisle sight lines and over-the-counter visors lead to dynamic wall displays whose irresistible drawing power pull customer traffic through the store."\textsuperscript{107}

The shift to self-service paralleled a new awareness of other merchandising tools, notably toy packaging. With certain commonly used packaging materials, notably tin and rubber, in short supply, manufacturers turned increasingly to cardboard cartons, and this fact spurred developments within the folding box industry.\textsuperscript{108} But these cartons were only product containers, and not necessarily selling tools. At the same time, however, progressive analysts and merchandisers within the toy industry grew increasingly interested in the selling power of effective packaging. "We have heard for several years prior to the war, the need for better packaging, but the writer feels that perhaps the proper term would be 'correct' packaging, for the reason that if items that must be pushed are presented on the toy counters correctly packaged, they will sell far better . . . ," Treadwell observed soon after the war, in
the January, 1946, issue of *Toys and Novelties*. "It has been found by the results of many surveys that the toy item correctly packaged is a definite silent salesman that helps move merchandise from the counter to the consumer."\(^{109}\)

As retailers planned for postwar selling, shoppers dreamt of peacetime consumption. Toy preferences recorded by journalists during 1944 indicated that consumers were anxious to begin the postwar era. As early as October 31, a reporter for *New York Times* noticed the trend. "Tractors already are replacing Sherman tanks, at least in the city's toy departments," the writer observed. "Spokesmen for the toy industry declared yesterday that in this year's Christmas stock, . . . the trend is definitely away from war toys."\(^{110}\) Instead, shoppers demanded playthings modelling a more peaceful age. "Reconversion fever has apparently spread to the back lot," reported another journalist. "Children, toymakers estimated last week, have lost interest in war toys." Youngsters sought instead "the old-fashioned kind" of playthings, dolls, stuffed animals, and airplanes in civilian colors, not toy soldiers.\(^{111}\) Increasingly, consumer demand for toys of destruction was giving way to those of construction. "While military toys and games are still in demand," observed a *Toys and Novelties* editorialist in December, 1944, "the trend is inclined to veer toward replicas of domestic articles, such as farm equipment, railroads, airplanes, and construction kits."\(^{112}\)
Like consumers, producers grew even more anxious to implement reconversion plans and return to civilian production. "[W]e have been giving considerable thought to the possibilities of developing new toy items and novelties using other materials in combination with aluminum," reported G. C. Kubitz, of the Aluminum Goods Mfg. Co., of Manitowoc, Wisconsin, manufacturers of "Miro" aluminum toys. "We are looking forward with great anticipation to that day when established toy lines are again available to the youth of America."\textsuperscript{113}

As manufacturers made their plans, many remained optimistic about the shift. They could, these toymakers believed, change to civilian production relatively quickly and with little difficulty. "We . . . have plans to extend our toy line to a considerable extent and hope to be able to offer some very interesting items right after the war is ended," reported James H. Debs of the Chicago Metallic Mfg. Co. "As our conversion problems should be relatively simple, we should be in production very soon after permission is given."\textsuperscript{114} Reconversion, however, proved more difficult than Mr. Debs and other manufacturers anticipated.

Reconversion

Reconversion marked the final stage of the industry's wartime development. Federal officials instituted national reconversion plans only hours after the Japanese surrender.
"The government’s master reconversion plan was given to the nation only 14 hours after President Truman announced Japan’s capitulation," reported a *Toys and Novelties* writer in September, 1945. "It immediately became a bible for business, commerce and industry--at least for the immediate future." The scheme directly affected the toy industry. Authorities terminated military contracts and thus freed toymakers from war work. At the same time, officials ended OPA price ceilings on inexpensive playthings. Finally, authorities eased material restrictions, but retained limits on lumber, tin, rubber, and textiles, for example, so as to distribute scarce materials equitably.\(^\text{115}\)

Freed in most instances from war work, more established firms instituted their own reconversion plans. To an extent, complexity of toy design dictated the speed of the initial shift. At the Sun Rubber Company in Barberton, Ohio, makers of rubber toys, workers produced military equipment until the Japanese surrender. As the federal government formally cancelled war contracts, however, general manager, T. W. Smith, Jr., instituted plans carefully devised months earlier. In an effort to produce playthings in quantity as quickly as possible, Sun made easily manufactured toys first. Management postponed production of more intricate playthings, such as jointed dolls needing assembly, until later.\(^\text{116}\) At other firms, where the plant produced highly complex toys, initial
reconversion took longer. Lionel management, for example, did not officially return their electric trains to the market until noon on November 15, 1946.  

But as I have indicated, the industry was never the same. As they shifted to civilian production, toymakers adapted wartime technology to the manufacture of playthings. Occasionally, makers utilized machinery and techniques already in use to make military equipment, and this also sped the shift. During the war, for example, Lionel’s chief competitor, A. C. Gilbert, makers of American Flyer electric trains, manufacturered control valve motors for the Gruman Hellcat navy fighter plane. Afterwards, Gilbert employees utilized the same motors to power postwar electric trains.  

Management at Maguire Industries, Inc. adjusted gunmaking techniques and equipment to the manufacture of playthings. During the war, Maguire workers made Thompson submachine guns. Afterwards, they produced full-size toy replicas of the same weapon "so real that from four feet they can’t be told from the original gun." Because youngsters craved realism, the advertiser reasoned, the exacting nature of Maguire products would contribute to rapid turnover. He or she went on the reveal the secret behind the toy’s success. "No toy gun on the market today, in our opinion, can begin to approach these new fast movers in quality, appearance and just plain sellability!" insisted
a Maguire copywriter in 1945. "And why not? These guns are authentic, real, life-size models made in the same plant, by the same people, by the same company that has been turning out the original Thompson Sub-Machine Gun all through World War II."\(^{119}\)

In at least one instance, a manufacturer even adapted unsuccessful wartime technology to plaything design. In 1945, while conducting a synthetic rubber experiment at General Electric, engineer James Wright, mixed boric acid with silicone oil. As synthetic rubber, the resulting material proved a failure. Indeed, most people believed the stuff to be entirely useless. But Peter Hodgson, a marketing professional already involved in the toy industry, recognized the play potential inherent in "Silly Putty," as he later named this new plaything. "There has never been a more accidental toy," wrote Marvin Kaye, former senior editor of the trade journal, *Toys*. "Maybe it had to be. Who could have sat down and deliberately designed a piece of pink goo that stretches like taffy, shatters when struck sharply with a hammer, picks up newsprint and photos in color, molds like clay, flows like molasses, and--when rolled into a ball--bounces like mad?"\(^{120}\)

Even as experienced toymakers began the shift to civilian production, new entrepreneurs continued to join the toy industry, just as they had during the war. Management at firms organized to produce military equipment now turned
to the business of manufacturing playthings. In 1940, for example, entrepreneurs formed the Doepke Manufacturing Company to produce tank tracks and cartridge cases. But by the beginning of 1946, Doepke workers were manufacturing toys, and by April of that same year, the Doepke line included a host of working scale trucks, concrete mixers, bucket loaders, and other construction equipment.  

As veterans returned from military service, they also expressed interest in the toy industry. "The number of veterans who visit the Association office, indicating an interest in 'going into the toy business,' has been surprisingly large," admitted an Association spokesperson in the fall of 1945. "The trade journals and individual manufacturers also report a large number of inquiries."  

A Toys and Novelties editorialist writing at the same time confirmed these observations. Having interviewed many veterans, the writer determined that a substantial number planned to become retailers, wholesalers, or manufacturers of playthings. "Many of the men in service, and particularly the overseas veterans, in their spare time between battles have [given] some thought to what their probable vocation would be when they returned to the good old U.S.A. . . .," he or she explained. "Many have saved a few thousand dollars and are determined to enter the toy or other types of business . . . ."
Moreover as the war drew to a close, both more established toymakers and newcomers to the industry had reason to be optimistic about future sales. A seller's market continued to exist not only at home but all over the world.

As related earlier, hostilities destroyed the ability of many foreign toymakers to produce playthings. In this way, the war both eliminated foreign competition from the domestic market and opened foreign markets to American-made toys. Indeed, in many instances, foreign toymakers remained unable to supply home markets with playthings. A shortage of toys "prevails in practically every country that has felt the rigors of war and the limitations thereof," concluded a Toys and Novelties editorialist at the end of 1945, "and it is no foregone conclusion that, at least within the next five-year period, the American toy industry represents to the civilized peoples of the world the one available 'Toy Mart,' or the Well, from which can be secured the toys and novelties from which children at the tender ages build correct subconscious interpretations and spend so many happy hours in pleasant, harmonious play."124

Even as the war destroyed the ability of overseas manufacturers to make playthings, servicepeople and other Americans had used and distributed American-made toys overseas and thus effectively advertised these playthings the world over. "There is an old adage that reads, 'Some
Good Comes from Everything," observed another Toys and Novelties editorialist, "and unquestionably, because of the war, the story of American toys has been carried completely around the world."125

Meanwhile, at home, pent-up Depression-era and wartime demand and a "baby-boom" presented toymakers with an unprecedented market for playthings. The birth rate increased substantially during the war. Wartime prosperity, the Selective Service Act, from which fathers were at first exempt, and other factors contributed to an increase in the birth rate.126 "With more than five million extra children added to the toy-population of the country as a result of the high birth rate during wartime years, as compared with the average of the preceding peacetime years," observed an industry journalist early in 1946, "Santa Claus had some trouble at Christmas time supplying specific requests."127 Indeed as late as early 1947, the demand for toys continued far to exceed supply. "The immediate problem . . . is production," concluded an analyst as late as February, 1947. "When to the pent-up demand are added the requirements of the market created by the appeal of the new toy lines, the chief concern of the industry is not the maintenance of its volume but the production of enough toys to keep dealers in stock."128

At first, however, circumstances prevented some toymakers, particularly those who managed more established
toy firms, from taking full advantage of the seller’s market, and so their optimism turned to frustration. Despite the best efforts of both federal and business planners to facilitate the reconversion, a variety of difficulties slowed manufacturers’ efforts to return to civilian production. The makers of metal toys, had the greatest difficulty returning to full civilian production. In this way, reconversion problems temporarily neutralized the new toymakers’ most powerful competitors and continued to foster fresh entrepreneurial development.

On one level, material shortages, especially metal shortages, continued to plague the industry, preventing certain more established firms from producing toys in quantity. "Reconversion plans, formulated during war production, are now speeding the return to manufacture of peace time products," announced management at Hedstrom Union Company, makers of wheel toys and baby carriages, in an institutional advertisement in the October-November, 1945, issue of Toys and Novelties, "but material supply and other factors beyond our control will largely govern timing of supply and volume."¹²⁹

On another level, OPA regulations, too, continued inadvertently to aid newer firms. Still faced with OPA price ceilings, certain more established toymakers decided to keep their toys off the market. "Some manufacturers have been holding back, waiting for price relief from 1942
levels, which they say is imperative before any approach can be made to a normal market," reported John C. Goodall, general manager of The Merchandise Mart. "Many of them can make little or no profit under existing ceilings and therefore lack the incentive for full-scale production." 130 A contemporary journalist drew a similar conclusion:

Not long ago we made a survey of manufacturers throughout the Eastern section of the United States and found that they were all eager to get back on normal peacetime production--and making good progress--but that, in many instances, they were hamstrung in their efforts to produce merchandise of a post-war character... in many instances, because of the ceiling prices allocated by the OPA, they are unable to produce merchandise as the base level required. Invariably their present costs of materials and workmanship are entirely out of line! 131

If, as some more established toymakers claimed, OPA regulations limited production, as during the war, the same regulations enabled newer firms to sell playthings at highly inflated prices and so ensured those entrepreneurs large profits. "Just today I was asked to look at a steel toy which had been shown before to other buyers in this city," recalled an exasperated toy buyer. "It was being offered to retail for $9 to $10. Upon checking my previous records, I found that we bought a similar item from an old-line manufacturer in 1941 at $2.10." 132

One might expect high prices to dissuade consumers from buying toys manufactured by entrepreneurs, but this was not the case. Even when some shoppers could find lower-priced
playthings, they willingly paid more, since they equated expense with quality. During the 1946 Christmas shopping season, Bloomingdale's toy buyer watched shoppers carefully examine tricycles only to pass up lower-priced items in favor of higher-priced wheel goods of equal quality. 133

While OPA regulations hamstrung manufacturers' reconversion efforts, labor difficulties, a problem during the war, also interfered. Toymakers and retailers commented on the shortage before the actual Japanese surrender. "Labor has remained a problem, though eased to some extent," observed Goodall in the September, 1945, issue of Toys and Novelties. "Many workers released from war plants are waiting, hoping to match their high wartime wages rather than return to prewar jobs in toy factories." 134 A spokesperson for the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A. drew very similar conclusions, noting that "even though the labor supply has been increased, some employees are unwilling to go back to work at labor rates manufacturers can afford to pay . . . ." 135

Long after VJ Day, labor problems continued to affect the manufacture of playthings. "[L]ots of our workers will be spending Christmas in Tokyo or Berlin," reported a roller skate manufacturer in December, 1945. "The best we can hope for is a few skates by the spring of 1947." 136 Even after workers returned from service overseas, other labor problems disrupted toymaking. Makers of metal, particularly steel
playthings, had an especially difficult time producing toys. "Because of strikes in steel, coal, and transportation," observed a Toys and Novelties editorialist in the July, 1946, issue, "it is hardly possible for metal toys to be made and delivered in any sizeable quantities this season." 137

As older firms struggled to return to full civilian production, the environment that new entrepreneurs found so nurturing began to decay, and competition, domestic and foreign, increased. Deregulation freed more established producers somewhat from earlier constraints. Federal officials revoked WPB order L-81 and thus theoretically made metals and other preferred materials available once again to toymakers. As metal playthings became more available, both consumers and distributors at least temporarily rejected plastic toys, the material of choice used by many newcomers to the industry. Shoppers, retailers discovered, had come to equate plastic toys with inferior wartime substitutes. 138 Then, in February, 1946, federal officials ended OPA regulations for all playthings except certain wheel goods. And then while domestic competitors increased production, a few foreign makers began shipping toys to the United States. As just one sign of the increase in competition, by January, 1946, the life-span of manufactured playthings had decreased noticeably, setting the stage for the return of manipulated fashion. "Time was when in the toy industry,
the life of a toy was considered to be at least ten or twelve years," lamented H. Lee Treadwell in 1946, "but changing conditions in the manufacturing field, as well as the vagaries of consumer preference, have more or less entirely dislocated the length of time in the life of a toy."139

On one level, the shortened life span for toys meant a continuous demand for new playthings, and this contributed to high sales. "This, of course, has, to a large degree, had a beneficial effect on manufacturing and selling of toys and kindred items, since the glamour of the new toy and its appeal from a point of interest soon wears off and it is more or less discarded," Treadwell continued. "The youngster then is actually in the market for a new plaything."140

But on another level, the diminished life span of most playthings pointed to a postwar toy market in which conditions continually required makers to create and then market new toy ideas in order to remain competitive. Despite the demand for playthings, then, as protection dissipated and competition increased, at some point around 1947, the sellers' market vanished and a buyers' market returned. At this point, advertising and other merchandising took on greater importance. Such a volatile and unpredictable market offered individual producers only a little security. While there were great profits to be made,
there were also great pitfalls for makers to avoid. As early as October, 1945, analysts at the Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A. predicted that the postwar toy industry would be a highly competitive and risky business and noted the potential for individual corporate disaster: "Competition will be extremely keen and the mortality rate high . . .," wrote one such observer. "It is expected that there will be keen competition and that although there will be opportunity, as in other industries, no one should enter the industry with any misconceptions as to the difficulties to be faced."141

Statistics compiled by federal officials substantiated predictions made by toy analysts. Census data indicated a sizeable increase in the number of makers producing playthings against which any individual producer would have to vie. In 1939, census takers counted 821 establishments where workers made playthings.142 In 1947, however, officials found instead 2,198 such firms producing toys.143

Conclusion

Changes set in motion during World War II ensured businessmen a larger market and greater control of that market after the war than had been the case before the outbreak of hostilities. The experiences of the industry in wartime were certainly exceptional. Manufacturers and distributors both enjoyed a seller's market. Makers also
endured material and labor shortages, experimented with plastic and other new materials, and witnessed an unprecedented influx of entrepreneurial competition. At the same time, retailers endured labor and stock shortages and experimented with self-service and other merchandising methods.

If many of these experiences were at first relatively unique, many later became the norm. Wartime developments gave rise to corporations, institutions, techniques, and materials retained and perfected after VJ Day. Alone, these developments provided members of the industry with a high degree of market control. But at the same time, a highly competitive environment, largely a result of wartime entrepreneurial development, fostered additional innovation, particularly in the area of marketing. Then businessmen, as we shall see, finally discovered television.
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14"Welcome to the 1941 Toy Fair," Toys and Novelties, March 1941, 124.
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20Runner, "Toy Stocks 50% Under 1942 as Christmas Nears," 42.

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CHAPTER VIII: THE TOY INDUSTRY IN THE AGE OF TELEVISION, 1948 TO THE PRESENT

After World War II, toy makers and sellers altered marketing strategies and tactics in response to changes in the population and technological developments. A major demographic shift, a "baby boom," substantially increased demand for playthings. At the same time, television and plastic changed the marketing and manufacturing of playthings and greatly affected domestic toy design. In this way, businesspeople's socializing efforts increased both in terms of the sheer number of young people involved, but also in terms of the effectiveness of new marketing methods employed.

Manufacturers and distributors operated in a newly emerging business context defined by new selling techniques and technologies. As we have seen, increasingly from the circumstances of war, toy merchandising had changed: manufacturers utilized advertising to stimulate postwar consumption, and at the same time, more and more retailers shifted to self-service, and the importance of the salesman
declined. As a result, many toymakers adopted "pre-selling"—the selling of goods to customers before they had even entered the store—as an increasingly important aspect of their marketing strategy. Meanwhile, plastic, a material only then coming into vogue, offered toy manufacturers unprecedented design flexibility. Using the same basic material, for example, toymakers could now produce safe and economical intricate, and detailed—even transparent—playthings.¹

When television first arrived, manufacturers conceived of the new medium solely as an advertising medium. But television programming soon inspired the subject matter of domestic playthings. Using plastic and other materials, toymakers miniaturized television characters and props as they had done cartoon and movie characters. Eventually, television also changed the toy design process. Hoping to adjust to the peculiar demands of television advertising, businessmen instituted research and development, or "R&D" departments, where toy designers subordinated the technological possibilities of plastic to marketing. Through R&D-designed playthings, entrepreneurs both consciously and unconsciously shaped young consumer cognitions and attitudes. In so doing, they helped more than ever to sustain the culture.
The Postwar Toy-Buying Public

After 1947, the market for playthings continued to expand considerably. As mentioned above, starting during the war, a baby boom swelled toy demand. Parents at every level of society contributed to the demographic shift by having on average not one and a fraction, but three children. Affluence, coupled with an acquisitiveness endorsed by many members of the society, intensified the willingness of individuals to purchase a wide array of consumer goods. At the same time, marketing and merchandising developments, especially the use of the new and powerful advertising medium, television, fueled toy purchasing in particular.

Changes in income and occupational status constituted the first social changes to affect the market for playthings. In 1955, the Toy Manufacturers of America financed a study of the toy buying public. The survey revealed that these factors, rather than age, had the greatest bearing on the number of children for whom adults purchased toys. World War II greatly affected careers and income levels, and after the war, other factors continued to fuel expectations. Demand remained strong for blue collar workers, especially unskilled labors, so much so, in fact, that positions went unfilled. Under these circumstances, workers looked forward to higher wages than before the war. "People have become accustomed to new conditions, new wage
scales, new ways of being treated," insisted Maurice O'Connell of the CIO in 1945. The G.I. Bill of Rights enabled many individuals who had been employed by others before the war to open their own businesses or to become professionals.\textsuperscript{5} Others took new jobs in corporate hierarchies.

The TMA study indicated that either a semi-skilled worker (28\% of all toy buyers surveyed) or manager and professional (21\% of all buyers surveyed) earning between $4,000 and $6,999 annually headed most toy-buying families. More often than not, individuals between the ages of 39 and 44 purchased playthings (45\% of those surveyed). A substantial proportion of toy buyers also ranged in age from 18 to 29 (27\%).\textsuperscript{6}

Other financial developments constituted a second social change that further increased the buying power of the individuals described above, while at the same time making savings less imperative. The proliferation of installment plans, finance agencies, credit cards, and charge accounts made many Americans more willing to spend what they had on a wide variety of consumer goods, including playthings. Meanwhile unemployment compensation, social security, and other welfare benefits remained from the 1930’s ensuring at least a modicum of protection from economic hardship.

A third social development, the fact that domesticity received new emphasis after the war, also affected toy
sales. Easy credit, larger incomes and advertiser-stimulated demand contributed to this change. Many women became virtual full-time consumers and purchased more advertised items, including toys. The emphasis on domesticity contributed to a "baby boom" during the postwar years. Having delayed starting families during the Great Depression and Second World War, American couples reversed this trend. Between 1945 to 1955, the number of children born per year rose 50%. Because toy buyers usually purchased playthings for their own children, members of the toy industry faced an unprecedented demand for their products. In 1955, researchers for the TMA found that women bought 98% of all toys purchased.

By 1955, if not earlier, the model toy buying family had much to be optimistic about. Father most likely worked at a job paying him more than he had earned before the war, and the family had a measure of financial security. In many instances, families could afford things only dreamt of before, perhaps even a home in the suburbs. Improvements in everyday life seemed just ahead. Historian Eric F. Goldman, a contemporary of these developments, observed: "A good many did not smile at the feature-page stories which predicted that the average American would work twenty-five hours a week, return to a dinner cooked by the flick of a single button, educate his children through the finest
authorities televised into a sun-heated livingroom, and take
his vacation a continent away."  

The Influence of Television Upon Toy Design

If after the war circumstances suggested that a highly lucrative toy market already existed, initially, toy manufacturers were little aware of their ability to formulate consumer knowledge and perceptions using television. Then, in 1948, toymakers first discovered the selling power of television, when entrepreneurs at the Unique Arts Manufacturing Company chose to air a short toy advertisement on Howdy Doody, at that time the nation’s most popular children’s program. When record-breaking sales followed, other toymakers began to advertise on television, and Unique’s success proved to be typical rather than unusual.

Toy manufacturers found television to be a more powerful means of advertising than any used by the industry before. Utilizing television, advertisers brought directly into the home, to youngsters unable to read earlier print ads, a carefully crafted message of consumption. Harder to ignore than those in other advertising mediums, television ads seemed to address young viewers personally, almost as if a salesperson were actually present in the home, as an industry commentator noted in 1962. In this way, television further blurred distinctions between consumer
institutions, the toy store or the toy department, and the home.

Having discovered television as an advertising medium, manufacturers adapted earlier design techniques and toy ideas to a new era of playthings. Prior to the influence of television upon design, toymakers relied on a less-than-predictable combination of "luck" and "know-how" to create new toys. But since virtually any plaything shown on television sold, toymakers found little reason to alter the development process. At first, therefore, television had a conservative influence upon the toy design process, despite the possibilities in plastic. While analyzing contemporary toy design tactics in *Toys and Novelties* in 1958, Arnold Arnold, a less than nostalgic yet highly successful industrial engineer, noted that "The largest majority of manufacturers [still] depended on a by-guess and by-gosh method, hoping that somewhere around September or October of each year enough 'screwballs' will drift off the streets and into their offices with ideas."

Following the same policy of miniaturization employed in the past, some toymakers turned to licensed names to sell playthings on television. In 1947, toy producers licensed the first of many television characters: the marionette, Howdy Doody. Eventually, manufacturers even licensed products that appeared or would appeared in television commercials. In 1949, businesspeople at Ideal released the
Toni doll, a highly successful toy named for a major manufacturer of hair-care products. Thereafter Bristol-Myers, Pillsbury, Congoleum-Narvin, and other firms supplied their products or packaging to toymakers at cost. In addition, these corporations often paid for toy artwork.¹⁷

By miniaturizing consumer goods and utilizing the new medium of tv, the makers of such products sought with at least some success to influence the behavior of a new generation of shoppers. Consumer analysts conducting research in 1963 confirmed that many young adults then using Pond's products were in fact first introduced to the Pond's line through toys.¹⁸

If during the late 1940's and early 1950's most playthings that businesspeople advertised on television, including many licensed toys, seemed to sell well, toy entrepreneurs still noticed that some playthings sold better than others. As periodic, identifiable trends dominated the toy market, television brought innovations in both the product and process of toy design.

More often than not, analysts noticed that a television character, if not several similar personalities, defined each toy trend. Of the seven major toy trends manufacturers developed between 1948 and 1968 principally for boys, toymakers based six on media characters, and five of those six on television characters.¹⁹ In this way, manufacturers
continued to expose young consumers to the concept of changing fashion.

In 1950, for example, a Western trend championed by Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, and other television characters dominated toy manufacturing. By July, Bill Boyd, the actor who portrayed Hopalong Cassidy, had eight-five licensees. These producers marketed in turn one hundred and forty items amounting to roughly $40,000,000 worth of business. By November, one hundred and eight licensed manufacturers were turning out "Hoppy" products at the rate of $70,000,000 a year. The Ideal Toy and Novelty Company released a 2 1/4-foot-high Hopalong Cassidy doll, retailing for $10; a 23-inch-high model of the same doll at $8; a Topper rocking horse for $12, or $20 with 23-inch Hoppy doll; and an authentic, handpainted, plastic Hopalong Cassidy and horse for a dollar. Manufacturers also released a line of playthings bearing Gene Autry’s name. Kenton’s New Engraved Gene Autry Repeater Cap Pistols reached retail shelves in early 1950. Managers at Terri Lee, Inc. issued their Gene Autry doll several months later. Made of durable Tenite plastic, the 16-inch tall miniature came attired in satin shirt, neckerchief, tight pants, high-heeled boots, and a cowboy hat. Over time, a line of Lone Ranger playthings joined other Western toys on American toy counters. The Victory Manufacturing Company, for example, released a Lone Ranger Telescope and Lone Ranger Camera.20
Despite the continued success of the Western trend in toys, as early as November, 1950, a writer for *Time* noted juvenile interest in a new toy trend. Some youngsters, the journalist observed, seemed "in an uneasy state of transition from cowboy to interplanetary traveler." In actuality, the Western and Space trends were related. Mike Moser, the creator of *Space Patrol*, freely admitted that when he originated his space opera, he envisioned a futuristic Western that would condition viewers to the marvels of the future. By 1952, a space trend, influenced by actual technology but more importantly based upon television characters, had come to play an important role in toy marketing and merchandising.

Beginning in June, 1949, with the network premier of Dumont’s *Captain Video*, television executives began broadcasting the first *tv* space operas. As the story went, Captain Video, a private citizen, used his fists and scientific genius to battle injustice and crime throughout the universe. Frequently, a 15-year-old sidekick, "The Ranger," together with other members of a vast network of *Video Rangers*, would aid captain Video in his efforts. In aggregate, three hundred villains appeared on the show, each out to destroy Video, conquer the universe, or bring some other havoc. One character, however, Dr. Pauli, a mad scientist reminiscent of the Nazi film badmen of the 1940’s, reappeared frequently as Video’s worst enemy. Despite an
high level of scientific knowledge, evil Pauli always fell victim to Video’s abilities and gadgetry. 24

During the 1950’s, other space operas joined Captain Video on the air. In 1950, for example, Tom Corbett and the other members of the Space Cadets began their battle to "safeguard the freedom of space, protect the liberties of the planets’ and defend the cause of peace throughout the universe." Like Video, the cadets utilized a wide range of strange devices to carry out their missions. Members of the also fought for "interplanetary justice . . . in the wild vast reaches of space." As other writers had done, script writers armed the members of the Space Patrol with their own assortment of space gear. 25

As had the Western heroes, the space adventurers lent their names to a wide array of playthings. There was, for example, The Official Space Patrol Helmet manufactured by Beemark Plastics. Made of rugged clear, shatterproof plastic with the marking "Space Patrol Commander" across the front, the toy included inflatable double astral jet tanks and retailed for $4.49. The Lido Toy Company brought out a complete line of Captain Video playthings, including Rocket Ships, Atomic Carriers, Rocket Bombs, Troop transports, and a variety of spacemen supposedly from a number of different planets.

Even as television inspired science fiction toys, manufacturers miniaturized actual technology. These
playthings constituted another aspect of the space trend. As early as June, 1946, Marvin Wolf of Chicago had invented the first atomic bomb toy. Using the toy, a one-and-a-half volt dry-cell battery, and an enlarged version of the cap used in toy pistols, a child could recreate the explosion and mushroom cloud of an atomic blast in miniature. Later, better known manufacturers also produced science and technology playthings. Industrial giant General Electric, for example, released seven rudimentary electronics kits, marking the firm’s first move into the toy field. The company’s new line ranged from a basic transistor lab for $9.95 to a $39.95 advanced electronics set. The American Society of Metals collaborated with the Science Materials Center on a new metallurgical kit. The set included one hundred samples with which youngsters could draw wire, wind springs, and perform tests on each.

The success of Western and space toys further encouraged manufacturers to produce television-inspired playthings. Toys bearing successfully licensed television names, designers noted, virtually advertised themselves. "It now appears for several years to come the Western influence will eliminate the old problem of an item’s failure to click," reported an industrial analyst in Toys and Novelties in 1950. "If the necessary ingredients of quality are there, all a toy needs promotionally is a Western name to be a sure-fire seller."
Because a single licensed plaything usually constituted part of a series of related items, licensed toys also advertised each other. Sets of technological gadgets defined the most profitable licensed television characters: six-shooters and a sheriff’s star, characterized the television cowboy, just as a ray gun and space helmet defined the space hero. By miniaturizing these accoutrements, a toy manufacturer might utilize a single personality as the conceptual basis for a whole series of playthings. Because each youngster required several pieces of equipment, if he or she were most accurately to emulate his or her television idol, licensed characters readily encouraged "follow-up selling."

In these circumstances of changing fashion and gadgetry, technological demands in turn affected manufacturers, since television exposure made new playthings obsolete in only one or two years, as opposed to three or four or more. Demand for viable toy ideas, therefore, increased.28 It was, then, to meet the consistent need for successful new playthings that during the late 1940’s and early 1950’s manufacturers institutionalized the first research and development departments within their organizations. "The kids may not know it," predicted a marketing analyst in the March 17, 1962, issue of Advertising Age, "but the total marketing concept is about to move into the toy industry, and hence, of course, into the nursery."29
Rather than "waiting for lightning to strike" as had earlier toy designers, research and development engineers sought to create successful toys systematically. These were the playthings generated by "R&D." While earlier toy inventors first visualized innovative toy ideas and then tried to engineer them, research and development engineers determined what could be made out of what was available. Then researchers applied this information to the child. Increasingly, plant production capabilities, readily available materials, particularly plastics, and especially marketing considerations now determined what sorts of toys manufacturers produced. To a large extent, then, television, not the needs of children, influenced design decisions. "If they'd had tv when the Teddy Bear came in," claimed Charles Marx, advertising head at Louis Marx and Co., Inc. in 1961, "it would never have been a classic."31 "Nowadays," concluded an Advertising Age business analyst during the same period, "Toys are Designed for (1) Tv; (2) Kids."32

In extreme instances, television influenced the development of "promotional toys" designed not to entertain or teach, but merely to sell. "Promotional toys could be considered the junk food of the toy world," wrote Sydney Stern and Ted Schoenhaus. "They are not necessarily constructive, and in some cases parents consider them harmful (sexist, violent, expensive for what there is,
exploitively advertised)." During the 1961 Christmas shopping season, especially, a Newsweek journalist reported a major influx of these items. "Ingenious, slick, and often short-lived, promotional toys are the gimmicky items the industry is pushing this year with $20 million worth of spot TV ads," he or she concluded. In many ways, "Garloo," in the words of the Newsweek reporter, "a nauseous-green, battery-operated doll monster that stalks about, picking up things here and putting them down over there" manufactured by Louis Marx & Co., typified the promotional toys of the era. But if Garloo's stage presence was great, he still had to function as a toy, and unfortunately his play value was limited. As a result, many early promotional toys like Garloo were in fact marketing fiascos.

In less dramatic instances, television substantially shaped the design of other playthings. Two of the most popular toy lines of the late 1950's and early 1960's, Mattel's plastic teen fashion doll, Barbie, and Hasbro's plastic "action figure," G.I. Joe, exemplified the influence of R&D marketing concerns upon toy design. Manufacturers created each toy to be colorful, easily posed, and thus readily demonstrated and dramatic, and so manufacturers successfully advertised Barbie and G.I. Joe on television. Developed as marketing concepts, never simply playthings unto themselves, Barbie and G.I. Joe each begat numerous interrelated accessories and thus encouraged ample follow-up
buying. By 1963, the Mattel Barbie line, encompassing three-hundred outfits for Barbie and her boyfriend, Ken, retailed for roughly $800.

If Barbie and G.I. Joe typified the impact of R&D upon toy design, each also exemplified the socializing function of many television era playthings. As manufacturers encouraged consumption by creating substantial lines of interrelated playthings, toymakers obscured the distinction between acquisition and play. Consumption itself, youngsters discovered, could be both fun and exciting. "You don’t need everything at once to enjoy the pleasure that comes with collecting G.I. Joe equipment," entrepreneurs at Hasbro advised their young customers early in 1960’s in a pamphlet included with each G.I. Joe. "In other words, start small and grow big--and have a happy time doing it."

If manufacturers taught boys and girls to consume, they also taught each to consume differently. The subject matter of toys intended for boys changed between 1945 and 1959, while toys intended for girls changed little. Until the development of fashion dolls starting with Barbie, most toys aimed at girls centered around baby dolls and miniature housekeeping items for most of the period. For the most part, girls were excluded from the toy categories discussed above. On one level, the fact that few major female Western or space stars could be found for licensing inhibited the production of certain toys for little girls. Those few
characters who were available, Roy Roger’s wife Dale Evans, for example, often played a role subordinate to the male lead. On another level, most toymakers felt that a woman’s place was in the home and these perception influenced toy design. "Let’s face it," remarked L. Quinlan, Jr., president of A. C. Gilbert, "A little girl’s future problems are men, and she should be taught how to face and fight them." In light of this observation, he concluded that the best and most profitable thing to do was to teach girls how to be good housewives and mothers.39 Cowboy pistols, rocket ships, and chemistry sets would not fill the bill, manufacturers believed, although one manufacturer tried to adapt the chemistry set to the needs of girls by issuing one with which girls could make perfume.40

As businesspeople employed television advertising, licensing, and other techniques to teach children to consume, by the end of the 1960’s, major manufacturers also began to segment the toy market in new ways with important implications for consumer culture. As indicated in earlier chapters, well before World War II, toy manufacturers and distributors had divided the toy market using age, gender, and other designations. During the late 1960’s, however, major manufacturers began to design toys with African-American consumers, as well as special interest groups, specifically in mind. "[T]here have been some important and welcome breakthroughs, primarily because manufacturers are
discovering that there is a great untapped market for black-oriented toys," an *Ebony* writer concluded in late 1968. "That an 'integrated' toy market may help Negro children develop a sense of identity and racial pride is a fringe concern to businessmen but of major importance to parents sensitive to positive black consciousness." As they sought more fully to tap neglected speciality markets, therefore, businesspeople drew members of various subcultures into the dominant culture of consumption.

Conclusion

Promotional toys, not the Teddy bear, then, exemplified the growing influence of production and marketing considerations upon toy design. Despite the fact that American youngsters sought toys that were fun to play with, as well as the many design possibilities offered by plastic, R&D policy decisions, forged in answer to the unique demands of television advertising, largely dictated the nature of many television-era playthings. In this way, production and marketing decisions also inherently shaped the socialization process. Even in the 1980's, through toys--through technology--manufacturers continued to socialize youngsters into the imagining and obsolescence of the culture of consumption. But that is not the end of the story.

If television had a significant impact upon toy design, later toymakers in turn shaped children's television,
rendering still more indistinct the difference between toy design and manufacturing, advertising, entertainment, and play. While formerly toymakers licensed television characters and then turned them into toys, in the early 1980's, manufacturers developed children's television programs to market playthings. "It's the tail wagging the dog . . . ," concluded Judy Price, CBS vice-president of children's programs and daytime specials, in TV Guide in 1987: "[T]he merchandising is put first and the show is designed to sell it."42 Toys, in the form of animated cartoons, now starred in their own Saturday morning children's shows. In 1987, reported an analyst for the National Coalition on Television Violence, toy manufacturers who hoped to market various playthings funded 80% of all children's television programs.43

In the late 1980's, manufacturers anticipated a new generation of playthings that actually would enable youngsters to interact with specially produced children's programming. By aiming mock weapons at their television screens, youngsters might "destroy" cartoon characters and vehicles.44 Once again, toy technology would encourage consumption, for only a special Mattel toy would enable viewers to play.

Through toys themselves, then, youngsters learned new consumer behavior and consumer attitudes, both directly and indirectly. Subjects miniaturized by toymakers exemplified
the consumer ethic. As the foundations of their toy lines, designers at Mattel and Hasbro, for example, each selected socio-economic mainstays of the consumer culture--Barbie, a style-conscious teenage female consumer heroine, and G.I. Joe, an icon of the military industrial complex. Thus by example and through imitation, many youngsters imbibed an ethic of consumption.

But toymakers also instituted consumer training and encouraged consumption in other ways. By linking toy design to television programing through licensing, manufacturers and advertisers instructed young people in the rewards of style and fashion; acquisition, children learned, brought prestige. Manufacturers and advertisers also taught youngsters that consumption could gratify on different levels. Toys might entertain, but consumption of a marketing message could also be fun. In fact, in the case of licensed playthings, toy and advertisement were often virtually one and the same. And as youngsters collected accessories for their favorite toys, play and consumption became further indistinguishable. As they had discovered in stores prior to 1945, while at home watching television children learned that consumption could both gratify and entertain.
NOTES TO CHAPTER VIII


3On the history of commercial television, see, for example, Erik Barnouw, Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of Television (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).


8Opinion Research Corporation, Toy Purchase Habits of U.S. Families, 10.


Elliot Handler, "You Find a Hole . . . And You Fill It," *Toys and Novelties*, 1 December 1965, 30.


In 1957, Sputnik I triggered the only toy trend not directly associated with a media personality. The fad was, however, closely related to the earlier demand for science fiction toys inspired by television. In 1967, the 20th Century Fox film, *Dr. Dolittle*, inspired the only trend based upon a media character not a television personality. On postwar domestic toy trends, see Lawrence F. Greenfield, "Toys, the Toy Industry, and the Socialization of the Young: A History of the American Toy Industry, 1945-1970" (M.A. thesis, The Ohio State University, 1982), 62-105.

On the Western trend in toys, see also, for example, "Why?" *The New Yorker*, 11 March 1950, 22; and John Cooper, "'Cowboys' Take Over," *Toys and Novelties*, July 1950, 87-88.


On the trend in space toys, see "'Space Fever' Hits Small Fry,* *Toys and Novelties*, May 1952, 159.


29"Nowadays Toys Are Designed for (1) TV; (2) Kids," Advertising Age, 12 March 1962, 4.

30Arnold Arnold, "How to Invent a New Toy," 119; "Nowadays Toys are Designed for (1) TV; (2) Kids," 4.


32"Nowadays Toys are Designed for (1) TV; (2) Kids," 4.


36In 1959, Ruth Handler, vice-president and later president of the Mattel, Inc., devised the teen fashion doll while watching her daughter, Barbara, at play. Handler noticed that the young girl preferred teenage dolls with their fashionable clothes and other accessories to more juvenile figurines. Since most teenage dolls then on the market were merely paper cut-outs, Ruth Handler suggested to her husband, Mattel co-founder Elliot Handler, that a teen fashion doll might make a viable addition to the Mattel toy line. See, Marvin Kaye, A Toy Is Born (New York: Stein and Day, 1973), 83. In 1963, while hoping to persuade businessmen at Hasbro to produce a miniature of "The Lieutenant," an NBC television character, a licensing agent first suggested the G.I. Joe action figure concept. See Kaye, A Toy Is Born, 90.


CONCLUSION

The history of the toy industry reveals a great deal about the history of marketing, as well as the role of children in the development of the culture of consumption. Over time, by appealing largely to youngsters and through children to parents, toy makers and sellers increasingly shaped toy demand. As businesspeople influenced their market, they often affected the culture inadvertently. In this respect, children also played a significant role in the process. As customers themselves, youngsters developed the cognitions and behaviors associated with consumption. Then, as businesspeople’s agents, children played a key role in expanding the culture by encouraging others to consume.

Stages in the Development of Toy Marketing

Richard Tedlow has already identified the historic stages through which businesspeople developed their marketing strategies: fragmentation, unification, and segmentation.1 While Tedlow’s chronology remains largely applicable to the marketing of playthings, events proceeded
somewhat differently in the toy industry. Before World War I, even as mass marketers sought to unify the demand for toys, marketers had segmented demand by age and gender. After largely unifying the market for playthings, manufacturers attempted again to segment the market during the 1960’s using different parameters.

Before the turn of the century, however, and to some extent after, the toy market remained fragmented. Traditional merchants operating small shops catered to the toy needs of local consumers. As such, they developed little volume. Faced with relatively few sales, businessespeople depended upon high margins and personal consumer loyalty to earn adequate returns on the toys they sold.

Eventually, however, toymakers and sellers developed a more unified market for playthings. Beginning before the turn of the century, businessespeople controlling new mass marketing establishments—department stores, mail order concerns, and dime store chains—began to distribute toys. While most department store owners continued to cater to local and regional consumers primarily, mail order and dime store entrepreneurs operated on a much grander geographic scale. Unlike department store sellers, they catered instead to a national demand for playthings. National advertisers, first in print, and then much later using radio and television, continued the development of a unified toy
market. Operating on low margin and depending upon volume sales to generate a sufficient profit, mass distributors flourished. In so doing, they also contributed to the demise of the traditional toy shop.

After World War II, the toy market exhibited aspects of the sort of segmentation that Tedlow has described. Beginning in the mid-1950’s, for example, toy entrepreneurs established several national toy chain stores, such as Toys-R-Us, high-volume retail outlets where businesspeople sold playthings at discount. Later, during the second half of the 1960’s and 1970’s especially, toy makers designed some playthings to appeal especially to African-Americans or other consumer groups. While certain toy chains remained profitable, manufacturers continued to produce playthings for the broadest market possible. For the most part, therefore, the toy market remained more unified than segmented.

The Effect of Toy Marketing on the Consumer Culture

As toy makers and sellers restructured the market for toys, businesspeople also contributed unknowingly, but substantially, to a shift from a producer culture to a culture of consumptions. Toymakers and sellers never intended to restructure the culture. Businesspeople actually pursued more modest goals: the possibility of increasing profits, not changing the culture, motivated toy
makers and sellers to market toys as they did. Retailers sought merely to ensure store loyalty, and thereby increase sales at a particular store or chain. Similarly, manufacturers endeavored to increase demand for specific products or secure allegiance to a particular product line.

Early in the century, however, despite a certain level of change, a producer ethic continued largely to dominate the culture. In the small, traditional toy shops of the period, merchants continued to rely upon character-based selling to merchandise playthings. On one level, proprietors' retail methods and their shops reflected the values of the dominant culture. At the same time as these shopkeepers conducted their business, they continued to socialize youngsters and other individuals to the ethic of production.

Well before World War I, however, other businesspeople, notably individuals engaged in mass production and distribution, had begun to contribute to the shift from a culture of production to a culture of consumption. Retailers not only taught consumers new ways to shop, but also fresh reasons to do so. Especially at first, however, mass marketing entrepreneurs targeted different, distinct demographic groups with their selling. The first such businesspeople, for example, department store retailers, focused their efforts upon a relatively select clientele, local and regional middle and upper-class urban Americans.
While department store retailers helped to disseminate new consumer cognitions and behaviors, then, alone they socialized a limited number of Americans into the new culture.

Even as department store retailers continued to cater to middle-class shoppers, however, other entrepreneurs targeted different customers and disseminated the culture over a wider geographic area and across a broader demography. If department store retailers sold toys primarily to middle-class Americans, other distributors used catalogues to sell consumer goods to non-urban shoppers. Later, dime store entrepreneurs targeted urban working-class consumers with their selling. The nature of these new distribution outlets required that customers learn new behaviors and different cognitions, key aspects of a consumer ethic. At the same time, because they operated nationally, catalogue and dime store distributors enabled shoppers across the country to share in certain consumer experiences unique to the culture. Significantly, mail order merchandisers also contributed to the pervasiveness of the consumer culture in another way, however. Through their catalogues, distributors brought sellers' messages directly into many American homes, a tactic eventually employed successfully by other mass marketers.

Using new advertising mediums and mass marketing techniques, businesspeople not only increased sales, but
also continued to foster cognitions and behavior characteristic of the culture of consumption. In this way, over time, the consumer culture also became increasingly pervasive and therefore harder to avoid. Businesspeople turned first to print advertising in newspapers and national magazines to market and merchandise various playthings. In so doing, copywriters introduced readers to new images and symbols of consumption—notably portrayals of children and childhood—soon shared by many Americans, and this helped to homogenize the culture. At the same time, the new medium took marketing messages, but also lessons about consumption, directly into most American homes.

Using other new mediums during the 1920's and after, but also by developing licensed playthings, toy manufacturers and distributors made advertising, but also the culture, more pervasive still. During the 1920's, for example, certain businesspeople began to use radio to sell playthings. Like print advertising, radio brought an advertiser's message directly into most American homes, but radio also proved more difficult to ignore that newspaper or magazine copy. At the same time, increasingly, toymakers made images of film stars, but also comic strip and radio personalities, part of the toys they designed. As playthings themselves bore messages of consumption, they reinforced a shared iconography and contributed to the homogenization of the culture. As a result of the changes
outlined above, as Warren Susman and others have indicated, sometime before the Second World War, an ethic of consumption had come to dominate the culture.

Even as they produced toys specifically for members of certain subcultures, however, businesspeople continued to assimilate them into a dominant culture of consumption including gender roles. As they segmented the market, therefore, they continued to unify the culture. Along with the toys themselves, television played a significant role in maintaining the homogenization of the culture. Like print and radio advertising, the pervasiveness of television contributed to the influence of the dominant culture. Distributors and manufacturers advertised playthings on television. Over time, television writers, directors and producers also created a new iconography, national in scope. On television, but also as the subject matter of playthings, businesspeople used these characters and symbols to continue to encouraged consumption. In this way, the new iconography proved culturally unifying, rather than divisive.

The Role of Children in Marketing and the Culture

As early as the first decade of the twentieth century, children had begun to play a highly significant role in toy merchandising and marketing, while at the same time internalizing an ethic of consumption and therefore homogenizing the culture. Businesspeople targeted
youngsters as consumers with their merchandising and marketing, but they also used children as their agents in the selling process. As businesspeople instructed youngsters in the behavior and cognitions of the culture, the same children further socialized their peers and many adults to an ethic of consumption.

The training that businesspeople provided youngsters did not, of course, prove foolproof, and this limitation also affected the development of the culture. Children were not always as cooperative as businesspeople hoped. Indeed, sometimes youngsters failed to learn the cognitions and behavior businesspeople intended. As we have seen, for example, department store entrepreneurs sometimes complained that by engaging in rowdy play, youngsters' disrupted retailers' selling efforts. In other instances,imaginative children discovered uses for playthings manufacturers never intended. When one maker produced a toy steam iron, for example, he or she most likely never expected a child to use the toy on another youngster's hair, and yet during the 1970's, an anthropologist captured just such a scene on film.\(^3\)

Despite the hazards that using children entailed, however, businesspeople eventually recognized the value of consciously incorporating children into the selling process; nonetheless, at the turn of the twentieth century, businesspeople acted unconsciously as a conservative force
in the culture, even after the shift to a culture of consumption began. In the traditional toy shop, merchants perceived children as distinctly less important customers than adult shoppers. As a result, they directed most of their merchandising to adult consumers. Shopkeepers did not exclude children from their stores, however. Youngsters visited frequently in the company of adults and sometimes even made small purchases themselves. As children observed transactions between parents and merchants, or as sellers attended directly to the needs of young customers themselves, businesspeople inadvertently socialized children into a culture of production. In so doing, the merchant not only gained monetarily from the sale but also enjoyed other benefits. Contemporary observers marveled at the intergenerational store loyalty merchants and their shops engendered.

Over time, as toy merchandising and marketing changed, the role of children in the selling process also evolved, with important ramifications for the culture. Department store entrepreneurs faced two problems. Most immediately, businesspeople sought to increase toy sales. At the same time, however, the impersonal nature of the department store left businesspeople searching for some way to secure the sort of intergenerational store loyalty the traditional shopkeeper had enjoyed.
Merchandising involving children, department store entrepreneurs believed, offered at least a partial solution to their problems, but by employing children in their selling, businesspeople also contributed unintentionally to the dissemination of the culture. Hoping to influence adult shoppers indirectly to buy toys, while at the same time building future store loyalty, department store merchandisers appealed to children using fixtures, personality in salesmanship, and other techniques to create a departmental atmosphere suggesting freedom, fun, and respect. Later, businesspeople used children in a more direct manner on the salesfloor to encourage parents to purchase toys. By using youngsters in the selling process, merchandisers inadvertently made these same youngsters agents of a consumer ethic. In this way, children socialized their parents into the culture even as they themselves joined the culture.

Youngsters also helped sellers to increase sales, and incidentally expand the culture, as businesspeople extended their merchandising demographically and geographically. At first, like traditional merchants, mail order entrepreneurs addressed adult toy shoppers, not children, in their catalogues. Eventually, however, mail order sellers, as had department store retailers before them, involved children in the selling process. Catalogue merchants next addressed youngsters themselves as customers, but eventually, they
encouraged children to act as their emissaries to convince parents to buy. As they did so, mail order merchants, like their department store counterparts, inadvertently arranged for youngsters to act as agents of the consumer ethic. Other distributors, dime store entrepreneurs, encouraged working-class children to become consumers in their own right. As we have seen, retailers such as these, especially Woolworth, considered youngsters valuable customers and encouraged their patronage. As children shopped, dime store retailers socialized them into the culture, too.

As businesspeople turned to print advertising to increase sales and the culture grew increasingly pervasive, copywriters followed the pattern department store sellers had devised earlier, as they, too, involved youngsters in their merchandising and marketing. In advertisements before World War I, A. C. Gilbert and other manufacturers and distributors targeted children and helped to socialize young readers into the culture. As other merchandisers had done earlier, copywriters also urged youngsters to bring advertisements to the attention of their parents. Children, therefore, continued to act as agents of the culture.

If in many instances copywriters employed youngsters to sell toys much as other merchandisers had in the past, however, more progressive advertisers soon began to use children as part of new, more manipulative selling techniques, with important ramifications for the
dissemination of the culture. In an effort to sell products by linking them to nonrational manipulators, copywriters employed emotive images of children and childhood in advertisements geared to adults. In this way, youngsters continued to act as socializing agents, but they also became important as part of the iconography of the culture itself. Especially after 1920, businesspeople also employed children’s images to sell toys and other consumer goods. As manufacturers found marketing and production considerations more and more difficult to separate, toy makers infused playthings with images of children, notably those of young stars. By using children to lend toys style, manufacturers increased the value of their products. Through toys bearing their likenesses, but also movies, fan magazines, and other mediums, celebrity youngsters socialized their peers, as well as adult fans, into the culture.

After World War II, children continued to play an important role in toy marketing, as well as the culture. The advent of television in particular assured the continued importance of youngsters in each regard. Through toy commercials and other programming, businesspeople continued not only to increase sales by appealing directly to children. In this way, businesspeople through children continued to contribute to the dominance of the consumer culture.
Child Development and the Consumer Culture

The history of the toy industry explains much about the role of agency and method in the development of the consumer culture. Both elites and non-elites, businesspeople and consumers, played important roles, but toy manufacturers and distributors stimulated the change by socializing children into the newer culture. Youngsters not only affected sales, but also internalized behavior and cognitions characteristic of the culture of consumption.

On one level, businesspeople taught children shopping behavior. Youngsters learned, for example, that they might handle merchandise, under the right circumstances, when visiting department and dime stores. Ordering from mail order distributors required different behavior, and so businesspeople taught children other lessons. Young shoppers learned the rudiments of selecting goods from the catalogue, as well as the intricacies involved in actually placing an order. Similarly, radio announcers later taught young listeners how to obtain premiums, reminding customers to enclose cereal box tops or bottle caps together usually with a dime.

On another level, as merchandisers and marketers taught children how to shop, they encouraged cognitive changes of even greater significance to the culture as a whole. Merchandisers, for example, exposed youngsters to the seeming rewards of consumption. In department stores
especially, but also in dime stores and through mail order catalogues, merchandisers presented a fantasy of power, freedom, respect, and possibilities. In this way, sellers broadened the definition of consumption to encompass the entire shopping experience, not simply the use of purchased products.

As marketers devised fresh selling techniques, often by employing different technologies to encourage youngsters to consume, they taught children other cognitions important to the development of the culture. On the department store salesfloor and through advertising in particular, mass marketers exposed children to the idea of personality. Later, as manufacturers and distributors used fashion to sell playthings, they encouraged children to look to film, radio, and eventually television stars for social and cultural direction. In this way, businesspeople encouraged development of the sort of other directed personality scholars have linked to the culture. By designing and then selling licensed playthings, marketers further blurred the distinction between reality and the fantasy consumption encompassed. Product ownership, advertisers implied, brought children closer to the idols they so hoped to emulate.

As children themselves changed, they played a substantial role in disseminating what they learned and developing the culture. Children themselves made purchases,
and in other instances, they convinced their parents to consume on their behalf. Later, as adults already part of the culture, these same individuals contributed significantly to socialization of their children, a new generation of consumers, into the culture.
NOTES


2On toy chain stores including Toys-R-Us, see Sydney Ladensohn Stern and Ted Schoenhaus, Toyland: The High-Stakes Game of the Toy Industry (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1990), 274-281.

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