

# History of Consumption in the United States

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper provides a brief introduction to American consumption history informed by concepts drawn from the consumer culture theory literature. The narrative follows three cultural threads: 1) the assigning of meaning to possessions and consumption, 2) the gendering of consumption thought and behavior, and 3) the delivery of anti-consumption rhetoric and consumer resistance and regulation. These concepts are deployed to bring coherence and new insights to the historical account.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The periodization scheme consists of four broadly defined eras: the colonial and early federal (national) years, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the 20<sup>th</sup> century to 1945, and the postwar period to the present. This history is largely based on secondary works including books, chapters, and journals articles in American social history, as well as historical research published in the fields of marketing and consumer behavior.

**Research limitation/implications** – This paper is by necessity superficial. Many additional topics could be discussed and those that are could be covered in much greater detail.

**Keywords:** Consumption history, U.S. consumption, meaning of possessions, gender of consumption, anti-consumption and consumer resistance

**Paper Type:** Research Paper

**The full paper will appear as a chapter in the upcoming "Routledge Companion to Marketing History". The Companion's publisher has required that the chapter not be published elsewhere. Therefore, only an abstract can be included in the CHARM 2015 Proceedings.**