

MICHENER ON MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Can students and scholars gain an insight of past marketing activities by studying fictional writings dealing with domestic or foreign markets? Analyzing and describing ten of James A. Michener's fourteen novels, it would appear that much might be gained in this manner of recreating scenes from the past in a more interesting way than some presentations in textbooks.

INTRODUCTION

To understand present-day marketing activities, it is helpful to understand those of the past. Students and scholars themselves can only actively span a marketing period of thirty to forty years at the most. To learn of the past, records and writings must be studied. Formal records range from ancient clay tablets to accounting ledgers and company diaries. Writing may be fictional narratives or non-fictional accounts which can include markets and marketing functions.

It might be argued that the non-fictional works may be more accurate in their descriptions than the fictional ones. On the other hand, present-day authors of historical novels usually have engaged in careful research before writing and it is quite possible that their product is more engagingly presented than non-fiction. Another problem is that marketing functions often were not enunciated in earlier writings, non-fictional or fictional. Bearing in mind these points, this paper examines the novels of James A. Michener.

Although the title of this research is "Michener on Marketing", it could have been "Michener on Business" as, in his writings, there can be found ample material on the other two business functions -- production and finance. For purposes of this workshop, the paper is limited to marketing only. On a front fly-sheet in one of his works (Michener 1953), fourteen are listed as fiction and five as non-fiction. Of the fourteen, four contain little, if any marketing references. These are The Bridges at Toka-Ri (1953), The Drifters (1971), Space (1982), and Poland (1983). (Throughout the text, after the title of the work is given in standard reference form at the beginning of its subdivision, only page notations are given to avoid unnecessary repetition of the author's name and year of publication.)

Discussions of each of the remaining ten novels are presented in chronological order. Only some of the marketing references can be given because of space limitations. At least three of the books should be read in their entirety. Since one cannot include lengthy quotations without copyright difficulties, only page references can be given. A self-documented presentation, *i.e.* one with accompanying matter from the novel, would provide a better basis for determining the value of such works to gather a view of past marketing activities. One attempt of a paper such as this is to give an impression of the dramatic flavor of such presentations as compared with the somber works of history,

archeology, and geopolitics. Besides Michener, there are other writers worthy of similar attention. For example, James Clavell with his series on Hong Kong and Japan (Clavell 1966, 1975, 1981) or Robert S. Elegant (Elegant 1977, 1980, 1983) on China could be studied.

It could be that undergraduate and graduate marketing seminars might be based upon fictional works by Michener and other writers who present a fresh view of marketing and its importance in everyday life.

TALES OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Michener's first book, Tales of the South Pacific (1947), was a group of stories which served as a basis of the musical, "South Pacific", a box-office hit which made many Americans aware of the author. The sequence in the presentation of incidents is not the same as in the play and continuity comes about in terms of characters' names and the setting for the tales. Bloody Mary, the Tokinese woman who lived in Bali-hai with her daughter, Liat, had a retail operation on the beach where she sold or bartered native artifacts, actual or simulated, and bootleg liquor to Navy personnel. At one time, her inventory might include sea shells, mother-of-pearl, toy outrigger canoes, bows and arrows, hookahs, Japanese flags, Australian bracelets, and grass skirts. The grass skirts were so popular that the Seabees made them for Bloody Mary who provided yellow coloring by stealing atrabine pills from medical supplies. Perhaps the most genuine article was a shrunken human head that went for \$20 to \$50 (pp. 158-159).

Cable, the Marine Lieutenant, who fell in love with Liat, was amazed at the great amount of fruit the girls on Bali-hai would give for a short length of red cloth. He also found such cloth attractive to the scantily-clad men of Vanicoro who would trade human heads for it (pp. 180, 192-194). Getting boars' tusks that were made into bracelets was not possible at the native market of Espiritu Santo. As well as chickens, eggs, watermelons from American seeds, eight kinds of bananas, papayas, pineapples, war clubs, and toy canoes, junk from cast-off military installation was available there. To get a boar's tusk bracelet, it was necessary to be invited to a ceremony at which honored guests received a tusk wrenched from a sacred pig. After that, the tusk, now polished into a bracelet, might command a high price (pp. 234-241).

Many of the large plantation owners, often French and bachelors, came to the island as traders. Even after they became planters, they still did some trading, particularly in the importation of European goods such as furniture, china, and rugs. Surplus crops were exported to other islands and Australia. DeBecque, who finally won Nellie Forbush, had, within his octagon house, a warehouse and a store and often hosted a visiting trader from Europe or Australia (p. 112).

This first book of Michener's provides examples of barter markets and the beginning of import-export trade.

THE FIRES OF SPRING

The Fires of Spring (Michener 1949) deals with the growth of a boy who is raised in a poorhouse where his aunt works. Later, he works in an amusement park, attends a small college, works on the Chautauqua circuit, edits somewhat pornographic pulp magazines, and marries a Quaker girl just before World War II.

Befriended at college by a Russian mathematics professor, David is taken by him to Leary's, the famous bookstore in Philadelphia (p. 190). He moves to New York after finishing college to work for Clay Publications located on Lafayette Street, an area that contains warehouses for uptown stores (p. 359). Mom Beckett, his landlady, dislikes writers and insist women like men in wholesaling, especially furniture or food, as they think big and can get things at half-price (p. 375). David barely survives the Great Depression and the story ends as Hitler withdraws from the League of Nations.

RETURN TO PARADISE

In Return to Paradise (Michener 1950), Michener first presents an essay on the geography, politics, and people of nine Pacific areas. Each is followed by a story based in the particular area. Marketing incidents were taken from these fictional parts only.

On the atoll of Matareva, Mr. Morgan, an American veteran, lives on a government pension, cashing his monthly checks with passing traders (p.29). McGurn, an official United States observer on Fiji, had a Boston ancestor who traded a shipload of trinkets for a cargo of sandalwood which he was going to sell in China but he was captured and tortured by the Fijians. After returning to Boston, he wrote a book which included "pertinent observations on the state of our trade with China and the East" (pp. 141-142). A contrast is presented between the sedate Morris Hedstrom South Seas Store and the noisier market conducted by the Fijians, Indians, Chinese, and half-castes. The opportunistic Indian traders and their pervasiveness in the marketing complex is shown by a discussion of the life of Ramcheck Devidas Billimarioa (pp. 149, 159-162).

SAYONARA

Sayonara (Michener 1953b), deals with the personal problems of the U.S. Army men in the occupation of Japan. The hold of the pachinko parlor over the middle class Japanese men is contrasted with the flower shop selling solitary sprays and with the sex shop (pp. 146-147). Takarazuka, the resort set up by the railroad to provide an objective for its excursion trains from Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe, is described at length. Its beautiful girls, providing a lavish show, are not to be disturbed, a policy which provides a major theme to the plot (pp. 64-66, 155-157). The story almost closes on the melodies of the bells of the noodle vendors' carts as their owners move through the night on the streets of Osaka (p. 194).

HAWAII

Prior to Hawaii (Michener 1959), the pattern followed by Michener was that of the short story writer. Beginning with this book, he presented a large sweep of history in an almost encyclopedic manner. In contrast to earlier works, which ran little more than two hundred pages, the later volumes approach one thousand pages. Hence, there is more material presented concerning more people and there may be proportionately more about marketing.

At the beginning, the islands of Hawaii had virtually nothing to sustain life, let alone a good living (pp. 13-14), so the book deals with the peoples who came there and what they brought, or later imported, to make Hawaii as it is today. Even the first wave from Bora Bora had to bring with them on their twenty-four

hundred mile trip all the necessary food, seed, and tools for their new beginnings and even had to return successively for re-supply (pp. 63-66, 97-98, 112-117).

One thousand years later, when the first missionaries went to Hawaii, they were provided with lists of household objects that each couple should take with them to provide the simple amenities for maintaining New England concepts of house-keeping (p. 139). En route, they met with a whaler. That industry and its risks were studied by John Whipple (as he did other industries later) (pp. 197-203). Landing at Lahaina on Maui, the captain of their ship traded it for a load of sandalwood owned by the ruling family as was everything else on the island (pp. 209, 226-227).

Janders, the ship's captain, stayed in Lahaina and set up a ships' chandlery in which he was joined by Abraham Hewlett, originally a missionary, forming what became later J & W (John Whipple, the doctor), one of the powerful American companies on the islands (pp. 288-289; 428). Besides growing sugar, J&W set up the largest store and financed others. Another important firm as Hoxworth and Hale (again a ship's captain and a missionary family member).

In 1865, Hoxworth brought three hundred Chinese to serve as farm laborers, particularly in growing sugar (pp. 395-442). John Whipple bought Kee Mu Ki and his apparent wife, Nyuk Tsin, for house servants. Nyuk Tsin (Wu Chow's Auntie) on the death of Mun Ki, became the matriarchal head of the Kee family, the most influential of the Chinese groups. To obtain capital, Nyuk Tsin peddled vegetables she grew (p. 432); did laundry for Chinese bachelors (p. 450); grew and sold pineapples on land obtained from Whipple (p. 518); and grew taro to make poi to sell to Hawaiians (at first, not successfully) (pp. 450-453). Mun Ki became a lottery operator (p. 433) as well as a houseman.

The Chinese laborers, after they had served their contract term, did not return to China as expected, but, instead, established small shops in towns (pp. 439-441).

Sugar was needed by the United States and it was predicted by many that annexation would take place (p. 459, 463). To offset the lack of farm hands, Janders and Whipple imported 1,850 Japanese farmers. Among these was Kamejiro Sagagawa, whose family eventually produced many leaders in Honolulu. While the Chinese accumulated land through leases and gold through savings, the Japanese constantly supported the government at home in Japan through cash donations. In 1900, when Chinatown had to be burned down because of the infestation of rats, the Chinese were able to buy land they had only been able to lease previously and establish stores, restaurants, and small businesses or control who could lease and occupy choice sites (pp. 584-598).

Kamejiro, like Wu Chow's Auntie, put his hand to anything for additional income. Working on one of Whipple Hoxworth's plantations, he provided hot baths for Japanese laborers; financed others to bring brides in from Japan; and established a barber shop with Japanese girl barbers (pp. 615, 646-647, 710). Whip Hoxworth, though the family black sheep, imported orange trees, coffee beans, varieties of pineapples, and flowers (pp. 537, 623-33) and established irrigation systems and artesian wells.

Hawaii became the center of a four-sided struggle--the missionary families, the Chinese, the Japanese, and the almost unnoticed group of Hawaiians themselves. After World War II, all, but particularly the first and perhaps financially strongest alliance, worked hard to keep out supermarkets from the mainland and fruit processors (p. 855). Through time, intermarriage and interlocking

financial interests, there has appeared what Michener refers to as the "Golden Men", not a matter of coloration, but a state of mind in which ideas meet on an equal footing to cross fertilize and bear new fruit (p. 937).

Hawaii is rich in facts and ideas about business including marketing. The islands move as a geographical entity from a simple direct agricultural economy to a complex international one.

CARAVANS

Laid basically in Afghanistan before 1960, Caravans (Michener, 1963), provides views of the bazaar in Kabul with its mixture of goods from India, Turkey, Russia, and the United States (pp. 18, 20-21); the shops of ancient Ghanzi (pp. 107-8); and the little bazaar town of Musa Darul which had not only melons, meats, shoes, and other necessities (p. 293) but also automobile parts from the tale teller's Jeep that had been left in the desert (the seller claimed they had come from Russia) (pp. 294-295).

The great fair at Qabir had served as meeting place for over a thousand years for all of the people of Central Asia. Although the emphasis in the book is on horse trading, all the caravans brought the goods they had made or obtained at fairs. Besides horses, important items were guns, daggers and knives, sheep, and wool. Seventy to eighty thousand came in some cases over a thousand miles from India, Afghanistan, Turkey, Russia, and China (pp. 359-377).

During the fair, all feuds were lifted and, during it, sanctuary was provided for those who were criminals or fugitives from governments. This custom is similar to that prescribed at markets that are adjacent or part of a religious area.

Caravans is one of Michener's more fast-paced, glittering novels, and can be read rapidly and enjoyably.

THE SOURCE

Makor, a mythical tell located in northern Israel, is thought to go back to 9800 B.C.E. (Before the Christian Era) when it became the permanent dwelling of a nomadic family because of its well and its growing grain. It is the location of The Source (Michener 1965). By 2202 B.C.E., it had become a small agricultural town of 700 people who could trade their surplus produce for goods from passing caravans: lumber from Tyre; fabrics from Damascus; dried fish from Crete and Cyprus; and obsidian knives from Egypt (p. 101). Trade was started with Akko on the Mediterranean (p. 138). Around 960 B.C.E., King David had established his well-knit kingdom through which the major caravan routes passed. Makor's shops were filled with high quality items as well as the ordinary trade goods from the regular caravans from Tyre, Sidon, and Damascus. Although a Hebrew town, the shopkeepers were Phoenicians and Canaanites and the Hebrews tended their sheep and their crops (pp. 203-205). By 606 B.C.E., Makor had dwindled as a result of the Hebrews supporting Babylon and only two shops with local items remained (p. 278). Ptolemais, near ancient Akka, was established by 167 B.C.E. and its jewelry made from Asian silver and African gold was known in Spain (p. 342-343).

At the beginning of the Christian Era, it was written in Proverbs, extolling the virtues of a good wife that "she makes sure that her merchandise is good" (p. 418-419). By 326 C.E., Makor was known for its production of groats, made from purchased wheat. The cereal was sold to the residents of Ptolemais. Due to the rise and fall of the price of finished groats, this transaction involved considerable risk (p. 429). The spread of Islam westward affected Makor's profitable trade in relics, particularly those of St. Mary Magdalene who supposedly lived there. Dyed goods accumulated and could not be sold (p. 428, 511, 519).

The Crusades re-established Makor in 1096 C.E.; caravans resumed their ways. Even though in Arab hands, Damascus was a trade terminal for both towns needed the trade (p. 578). The Second Crusade disrupted trade, particularly that going from Damascus to Europe and goods being brought from Genoa to Acre (p. 606).

Around 1453 C.E., Constantinople provided Europe with rich goods from China and India; Portuguese navigators were reaching Asia by going around Africa; and Spain was bringing goods from the wealth of the Aztecs and Incas (p. 637). On the gaunt remains of the tell, Safed was built in the 1500s. It had a few shops and each year a small caravan came from Damscus with shoddy goods. There was no substantial trade. In 1525, Safed was transformed into a manufacturing city of 60,000 and a renowned trading center and the spiritual capital of the Jews. Its growth was due to the camel and the spinning wheel. On the trade route to Constantinople, Safed served to protect caravans and as a stopping point for merchants. The Jews escaping Spain brought the spinning wheel and produced an excellent wool cloth, dyeing it according to the ancient methods (p. 688). Its prosperity lasted ninety years.

Although The Source mainly concerns modern times in Israel and the religious strife between different groups, it does contain valuable insights into early trade in this area where man's faiths have played an important role in its history.

CENTENNIAL

As indicated in the discussion regarding Hawaii above, Centennial (Michener 1974) deserves to be considered completely. Centered around the Colorado town bearing that name, the book moves from prehistoric times before man up to 1973. Trading begins with the Indians who trapped beaver and hunted buffalo, finding French woodsmen who sold or bartered belts or skins to St. Louis or Bear Lake in Oregon. It progresses through hunting and trading to dry land farming (later to be irrigated), to cattle, stock shows, and butchering, to sugar beet growing, to sheep raising (with the fight between cattlemen and the sheep-growers), and finally to the petroleum industry. Centennial had, of course, its general store whose contents changed through the years and which dealt with Greeley, Venneford, and Cheyenne.

Although not located in the West, there is a good description of market days in Lampeter, Pennsylvania, the town of origin of the Zendt family, one of the important groups in the book (p. 253-262).

Centennial should be treated as a whole. It might be possible to particularize passages dealing with each marketing development but they would be too numerous to present in a limited paper.

CHESAPEAKE

Again, Chesapeake (Michener 1978), like Centennial, should be read completely to get a view of the importance of marketing in an economy such as was present in the upper part of Chesapeake Bay. The area's development is followed from the mid-1500's to 1978. The importance of the river's natural resources -- oysters, fish, turtles, geese, herons, and ospreys -- is stressed as are the vocations related to obtaining them -- hunting, fishing, storing (with salt production necessary), and ship-building and shipping.

Another important cash crop was tobacco grown on the large plantations. Curing tobacco was necessary and the ships were needed to take it to foreign ports, particularly in England. The return voyage, often not direct, provided staples for the few stores or plantations.

Four diverse groups are followed throughout time -- the Indians, the watermen, the tobacco growers, and the blacks. The whites were sharply divided between the Catholics and Protestants with many of these being Quakers. Five families -- Steeds, Turlocks, Paxmores, Caters, and Cavenneys -- provide the bulk of the characters and much of the story concerns not only their livelihood but also their intermingling. The scenes are laid in four locales -- the river, the island, the marshes, and the high ground.

To show the detail presented in the book, only one incident is cited here: In the early 1700's, London fashion houses sent fourteen-inch high articulated dolls dressed in the latest fashion so that the backwater women would know the latest designs and materials to be used. Books were too expensive and magazines were deficient in producing good illustrations, so these dolls served as models to be followed so that the Chesapeake women could feel up to date (p. 261).

Chesapeake, in its entirety, contains a wealth of marketing detail and shows the interplay between the various activities and their mutual interdependence.

THE COVENANT

The Covenant (Michener 1980) covers South Africa from 13,000 B.C. to 1980. The early nomadic hunters lived off the land and their long line of offspring did so until early in this century (p. 3-25). In 1453, Prince Henry the Navigator, envisioned the riches of Africa, particularly the gold of Ophir (pp. 26-27, 31-32). This would lead to India, China, and Japan. The Africans by 1454 were engaged in barter for salt and gold, offering iron used to tip weapons, copper woven into cloth; earthenware pots, and even whole rhinoceros horns believed to be an aphrodisiac and wanted by the Chinese (pp. 29,31,33,36-37, 43). These caused problems in transporting for they must be kept whole (p. 38). The town of Zimbabwe was a teeming market place with a network of producers and traders (p. 43). Arabs brought trade goods from Sofala, a port town that led to China (pp. 47, 55). They gave carved metal disks from Nepal for the rhino horns (p. 48). Five hundred years later an archaeologist reported that one of those could not have come to Zimbabwe in the 1390-1450 period but undoubtedly had been lost by an English explorer later (p. 48).

Vasco da Gama landed near the Cape of Good Hope in 1497 and went up the Indian Ocean. The Portugese established Malacca in 1511 to control traffic to the Spice Islands (p. 63). Around 1600, the Portugese, the English (East India Company - the John Company) and the Dutch (United East India Company) all fought for control

of the seas (pp. 64-65) but none wanted the Cape (p. 67). An English vessel, Acorn, arrived in 1637 and the Hottentots offered sheep for iron and brass (p. 69). One of them went with the ship to Sofala and learned of the spice trade (p. 70). To maintain their trading rights, the Dutch laid seige to Malacca in 1640 (pp. 74-77). A former ship's surgeon who had become too independent a merchant-trader was sent to the Cape to establish a replenishment and recuperation point for Dutch ships (pp. 107-108). Many French Huguenots, fleeing persecution, went to Hollard. One of these was sent to the Cape to grow grapes and produce wine.

Starting in 1700, many Dutch became trekboers -- wandering graziers -- who traveled back and forth, becoming friends of the Bushmen. By hunting and selling some of their sheep and cattle, they were able to obtain salt, grain, and housewares as needed. Some settled first below the Orange River and later went north. They were controlled by the Lords XVII in Amsterdam and given no encouragement to expand or become a democratic society (pp. 217-270).

The English had settled at the Cape and were late-comers but, but the early 1800s, Grahamstown was a typical English market town to which the Boers came to trade (p. 359). Indicative of the penetration of English goods is the incident of the Zulu leader who believed that if ones hair did not turn white one would not die and who sent everywhere to get Rowland's Macasser Oil (p. 397). By 1834, Cape Town was both a chaotic seaport and a commercial center with goods from England, Ceylon, Java, and China (p. 438).

Rhodes established his diamond mines of Kimberly, near the city of Zimbabwe, in the 1870's, a tightly controlled industry that produced much wealth for a few at a great cost to Kaffir workmen. Rhodesia was established which became the present-day state of Zimbabwe (pp. 519-563). Diamond prospectors, tightly supervised by the government, were operating in the Orange Free State by 1937 (p. 790) and they could sell only to license diamond dealers (pp. 788-850).

Although The Covenant provides a background and explanation of the present problems in South Africam, it also contains valuable marketing insights, but perhaps not in the same proportions as Hawaii, Centennial, and Chesapeake.

CONCLUSIONS

Of the ten novels by Michener that are discussed, three that deal with various sections of the United States -- Hawaii, Centennial (the western plains), and Chesapeake -- might well be read completely. It is difficult in all three to separate that which is marketing from the entire plot. Tales of the South Pacific, Return to Paradise (South Pacific), Sayonara (Japan), Caravans (Afghanistan), The Source (Israel), and The Covenant (South Africa) provide insights into foreign markets. Michener's novels provide marketing backgrounds in domestic, foreign, and international trade. Six of them ranged in time from prehistory to the present day.

Michener is a careful writer who supervises capable researchers and actively participates in getting information himself. "Critics have claimed that his popularity rests upon his didactic ability to spoon-feed readers a multitude of lessons about the world in a serviceable and pleasureable way" (Herman, 1980).

To any reader, Michener's style should appeal; it is exhilarating and moves rapidly after an introduction that starts in prehistoric times. His characters provide interesting profiles of persons important to the plot, many of whom are engaged in some form of trading.

Graduate students might well work over portions of his works in more detailed fashion than is possible to present here. His writing, and those of others using the same narrative style, might serve as a basis for independent studies or a core for some type of seminar for seniors and committed graduate researchers. Faculty members might well be able to use incidents from Michener's works to illustrate points in regard to nearly all marketing activities. The freshness of expression and the fast moving plot will repay any marketing scholar.

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