

*Sowing the American Dream: How Consumer Culture Took Root in the Rural Midwest.* By David Blanke. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000. Pp. xiii, 282. Tables, appendices, notes, index. Clothbound, \$59.95; paperbound, \$21.95.)

American farmers have typically been regarded as producers, but in this ambitious book David Blanke emphasizes their activities and attitudes as consumers. The two roles, of course, are not mutually exclusive. Blanke argues that in the nineteenth century, as midwestern farmers became increasingly sophisticated about marketing and agricultural science, they necessarily became consumers as well. Market efficiency and success required the careful evaluation and purchase of reapers and threshers; stoves and sewing machines similarly improved productivity for farm women.

Blanke claims that rural midwesterners developed a distinctive consumer ideology and particular purchasing strategies to secure these personal economic advantages while promoting traditional community values. And when currency contraction and depression after the Civil War squeezed commercial farmers, they tried to protect their personal and communal interests by attacking the distribution system of local retailers and regional middlemen, though without recognizing the risks and responsibilities the latter had assumed. Drawing from the practice of farmers' clubs that dealt directly with agents, rural midwesterners developed purchasing cooperatives that operated through the Patrons of Husbandry. Blanke relies greatly on the Indiana state Grange in developing his argument that their purchasing agencies implemented the rural consumer ideology of making business more responsive to consumer demand, reforming the distribution system to eliminate market inefficiencies, using "open and democratic consumer institutions" (p. 95) to protect traditional values, and linking individual consumption to community benefits. Collective orders led both to communal solidarity and lower prices, eliminating the middleman and improving personal finances.

Blanke stresses the rural roots of this demand-based consumer ideology by demonstrating that townspeople favored their traditional, supply-based control and shows through an extensive if crude analysis of newspaper advertising that urban merchants initially had little interest in rural consumption. But the popular Grange purchasing agencies were undercut by the organization's national leadership: they preferred the Rochdale cooperative model, which promised a narrower distribution of benefits. Leadership errors, Blanke argues, as much as the inadequate capitalization or lack of business experience cited by other scholars explain the failure of the Grange co-ops.

To satisfy their demands for low prices and easy access, rural consumers now turned to mail-order houses. Montgomery Ward, the "Store of All the People," responded first, appealing directly to the

Grange in 1872. Blanke argues that Ward's catalogs prompted rural consumerism by presenting their merchandise as responses to consumer demand, emphasizing accessibility, information, and quality, and promising fair prices with a money-back guarantee as a social compact with consumers. But Sears's catalogs soon completed the commercialization of rural consumerism by using advertising to create, not meet, consumer demands and by severing individual needs from community benefits.

There is much to admire in this well-researched book, which finds new meanings in familiar developments. But it is a sprawling study, with many extended discussions of less than crucial topics, and the writing is marred by repetitiousness and grammatical errors. Moreover, consumerism appears as an all-inclusive concept that applies to nearly any action or attitude and is often described with grandiose terms that are more asserted than demonstrated. Still, this book raises important questions and deserves attention.

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*Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic.* By Joanne B. Freeman. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001. Pp. xxiv, 376. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

The Founding Fathers have enjoyed increased attention in recent years, and Joanne B. Freeman continues this trend with her examination of the "culture of honor" under which these men functioned. Freeman argues that in the absence of organized political parties, a code of honor "formed the very infrastructure of national politics, providing a governing logic and weapons of war" (p. xviii). Underlying her interpretation of the significance of this code is the premise that personal reputation was the basis for political influence.

To reveal the framework supporting the culture of honor, Freeman examines the writings of John Adams, Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and others. She finds that a complex, unwritten code of honor, with its own vocabulary and a hierarchy of offenses and corresponding responses, was clearly understood by the Founding Fathers. Under Freeman's scrutiny, the line between personal and public writings often disappears. When Pennsylvania senator William Maclay kept a journal, it was not just a personal record for his own contemplation but primarily a "deliberately crafted political tool" (p. 18). Thomas Jefferson's *Anas*, a scrapbook of private conversations, and John Adams's letters published in the *Boston Patriot*, beginning in 1809, were likewise political devices. Journals, correspondence, memoirs, newspaper essays, pamphlets, broadsides, gossip, and social events were manipulated for partisan purposes, and Freeman convincingly demonstrates how individual Founding