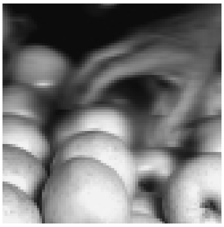

Journal of Consumer Culture

REVIEW ESSAY

Revolutionizing the World of Consumption

A review essay on three popular books

GEORGE RITZER
University of Maryland

Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Name Bullies*. **Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000.**

Robert D. Manning, *Credit Card Nation: The Consequences of America's Addiction to Credit*. **New York: Basic Books, 2000.**

Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. **New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.**

The near-simultaneous publication of these three popular works on consumption (but also on its linkage to production) at the dawn of the new millennium requires academic notice because, if for no other reason, they have attracted such a great deal of public attention. Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2001) has been at or near the top of prominent non-fiction best-seller lists not only in the United States, but also in Great Britain. Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2000) has also sold very well but, beyond that, is already widely cited in the popular press and academic works on consumption. Klein has quickly become a figure of international importance as both a prominent media figure and a leading activist against the excesses and abuses of consumption, production and capitalism in its latest global phase. While not nearly as popular as the others, Robert Manning's *Credit Card Nation*

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(2000) has received far more media attention than is normally the case with works by academic social scientists. The great attention accorded these books augers well for social scientists interested in seeing greater notice given to consumption-related topics and greater concern for consumption-related problems. Another reason for academic interest in these volumes is that they deal with topics that have previously been dealt with by social scientists in more scholarly publications – the fast-food restaurant (Leidner, 1993; Ritzer, 2000), logos (Goldman and Papson, 1998) and credit cards (Ritzer, 1995). Most importantly, these books require our attention because they deal with forces – the fast food restaurant, branding and credit cards – which have already revolutionized consumption in the United States and are having an increasingly profound impact throughout much of the world. While these forces bring with them many important advantages, these volumes focus on, as Schlosser calls it, 'the dark side' of contemporary consumption as well as the changes it has wrought on production.

THE BASIC THEMES

Fast Food Nation is based on the premise that a nation is what it eats and Americans eat a great deal of fast food. On any given day, about a quarter of adult Americans visit a fast-food restaurant; in 2000, Americans spent $110 billion on fast food (more than on higher education or new cars); 3.5 million people work in the fast-food industry (most being paid the minimum wage). What they eat is generally mediocre (although Schlosser likes McDonald's French fries), and is likely to be a health hazard in the short run (e.g. illnesses caused by *e. coli* in the meat) as well as in the long run (high blood pressure, arteriosclerosis, heart disease, stroke related to the high fat and cholesterol levels in much fast food).

The book's greatest contribution is its discussion of what I would call *vertical McDonaldization*. That is, the enormous success and voracious demands of the fast-food industry have caused other industries throughout its supply chain to McDonaldize in order to meet those demands. That is, the McDonaldization of the fast-food industry, and its massive and continuous demand for supplies, virtually requires that its suppliers achieve something approaching the same level of McDonaldization (thereby closely linking changes in consumption and production) in order to meet that demand. Schlosser goes into great detail about how potato growing, the processing of frozen French fries, poultry raising, cattle ranching and meat packing have all grown far more rationalized. While this has led to dramatic increases in production in all of these industries, that growth has not come without costs. Meat and poultry are more likely to be disease-ridden, small producers and ranchers have been driven out of business, and millions of people have been forced to work in low-paying, demeaning, demanding and sometimes outright dangerous jobs. For example, in the meat-packing industry, safe, unionized, secure, manageable and relatively high-paying jobs in firms with once-household names like Swift and Armour have been replaced by unsafe, non-unionized, insecure, unmanageable and relatively low-paying positions with largely anonymous corporations. While some (largely owners, managers and stockholders) have profited enormously from vertical McDonaldization, far more have been forced into a marginal economic existence.

While Schlosser implicitly raises the issue of vertical McDonaldization, he does not bring the discussion 'down' to the level of the individual consumer of fast food (and other McDonaldized products). That is, just as the fast-food restaurant pushes McDonaldization 'upward' to the industries that supply it, it is also the case that it presses it 'downward' on those who consume in McDonaldized settings. It seems likely that we are producing McDonaldized consumers in much the same sense that we are producing a McDonaldized meat-packing industry. The effect of eating so many meals in fast-food restaurants is that such consumers become increasingly efficient, predictable, calculable and oriented toward using non-human rather than human technology. More generally, it is likely that such consumers are characterized by just as much irrationality of rationality as the factory farm producing chickens.

Similarly, it could be argued that the fast-food industry is creating McDonaldized workers both within the restaurants and in the various industries that supply what is needed by their vast needs. Employees in the restaurants have to make do with McJobs and those in related industries are forced to work ever more efficiently and predictably; they need to produce more in less time, and they are confronted by an increasing array of non-human technologies which not only control them, but threaten soon to replace them completely. The irrationalities associated with these rational systems have their strongest impact on those who work in them.

Overall, Schlosser has little to say that is good about the fast-food industry (however, many of the problems he discusses were already well known). Nevertheless, tens of millions of Americans flock to fast-food restaurants each day and it is likely that far more than that number do so in other parts of the world. One would like to think that the enormous international popularity of *Fast Food Nation* will help to change that. However, my guess is that Schlosser is largely preaching to the converted and that the tide of consumers of fast food not only in the United States, but throughout the world, is more likely to swell than shrink. Fast food (and its icons) is too well entrenched in people's thoughts and actions and it fits too well with the changing nature of society (for example, the massive entry of females into the labor force), for it to suffer much from the rantings of contemporary muckrakers (in his critique of work in the industries supplying the fast food industry – see later – Schlosser is reminiscent of, among others, Upton Sinclair and *The Jungle*). One would like it to be different, but I think it unwise to hold our breaths hoping that Eric Schlosser will replace Ronald McDonald as an international icon.

If anything, Naomi Klein is even more unrelentingly critical in *No Logo*. Her subject is brands, branding and the branded world. Among her favorite targets are Nike, McDonald's, Microsoft and Tommy Hilfiger, as well as people (especially Michael Jordan) who have themselves become brands. Her key point is that we (primarily the United States) have gone from an economy dominated by production to one that is dominated by branding. Corporations have discovered that the key to success is the creation and dissemination of a brand and *not* the manufacture of a product. The modern corporation concentrates on its brand and farms out most, if not all, production to subcontractors in less developed parts of the world where workers are paid a small percentage of what counterparts in more developed nations would be paid.

Klein is especially contemptuous of the free enterprise zones throughout the less developed world, which she describes as walled camps with guards to prevent entry by outsiders (especially reporters bent on exposing the abuses found there). Inside these zones one finds flimsy factories which can easily be closed when some other enterprise zone offers even lower wages and taxes (often there are no taxes), or when the populace in their current locale protests or the state demands too much. With low or nonexistent taxes and minuscule wages, the subcontractors in these zones are able to produce goods incredibly cheaply. Thus, a pair of athletic shoes that might ultimately sell for $100 or $150 might cost only $2 to manufacture.

Given these realities, it is clearly in the interest of the brands to produce little or nothing. Nike is well known for this and Klein points out that Tommy Hilfiger manufactures nothing! With minuscule production costs, the brands can spend enormous sums on the creation and dissemination of their logos (good examples of ubiquitous logos are the Nike swoosh and McDonald's golden arches). Furthermore, low production costs allow for greater profitability and this helps to account for the fact that the branded corporations are not only highly profitable but their leaders are paid unconscionable sums of money. Especially egregious is the contrast between the wealth of someone like Phil Knight of Nike and the economic situation of those who labor in development zone factories to produce Nike products. Then there is the case of Michael Jordan whose status as a brand was made by, and helped to make, Nike. Payment to Jordan of perhaps $20 million for a few days of work a year is hard to legitimate (to put it mildly) when it is compared to what enterprise zone workers are paid.

Sociologist Robert Manning is no less critical, although the rhetoric is not quite as extreme, in *Credit Card Nation*. He describes the overall shift in America from industry and thrift to consumption and debt. This is reflected in the enormous growth in the credit-card industry resulting in 158 million cardholders, many with several different types and brands of cards. At the end of 1999, there were almost 248 million Visa cards and 181 million MasterCards in circulation. In early 2000 there was $603 billion in revolving consumer debt; households in which credit-card debt is not paid in full each month are in debt to an average of $11,575. Of course, such a level of debt is costly in many ways, not the least of which is the economic cost associated with the extraordinarily high, even usurious, interest rates associated with such debt.

Manning is particularly concerned with the growing inequality in the cost of credit. The poor often pay the highest rates. Those who are well off are often able to get much lower rates and, in some instances, pay no interest at all or even make money in the form of rebates (e.g. from the airlines in the form of miles eventually leading to free trips) and gifts. The poor are often unable to get 'normal' forms of credit (e.g. credit cards) and are therefore forced to use 'the [even more] credit-gouging world of finance companies, pawnshops, rent-to-own stores, check-cashing outlets, and even loan sharks' (p. 19). Manning offers a long list of specific problems: personal bankruptcy, making payments due on one credit card by borrowing from another, the luring of college and even high-school students into debt with negative effects on them in both the short-run (students better able to afford distractions from studies) and the long-run (debt which continues long after schooling ends), the small businesses that must rely on credit cards (and their high interest rates) for credit, and the elderly who increasingly must make up for declining social programs by going into debt to the credit card companies. As was true of Schlosser and Klein, Manning has little or nothing to say about the positive aspects of credit cards.

IF THEY ARE SO BAD, WHY ARE SO MANY PEOPLE ATTRACTED TO THEM?

Social scientists interested in consumption will be comfortable with these books for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that they share the critical, even moralizing orientation (Miller, 2001), that dominates their work. I have no quarrel with this orientation; indeed I think that at least some good social scientific work should adopt such an approach – a 'debunking' of social myths. And there is no shortage of mythology associated with Nike, McDonald's and Visa which is greatly in need of debunking. However, within the academic literature on consumption a countertrend has emerged which focuses on a variety of positive aspects. Much work on consumption has been criticized for its relentless negativity, the tendency of its authors to adopt a god-like position that only they truly understand what they are observing, and a propensity to take an elitist view toward consumers who continue to consume and enjoy these products as well as adopting a positive, even reverential, view of the corporations which produce them. Academics are taking note of these criticisms and offering more balanced perspectives on consumption-related issues.

No such balance is to be found in these three books. They are determinedly critical and have little to say of a positive nature about brands, fast-food restaurants, or credit cards. In fact, this is one of the things that gives them their power and makes them attractive to a popular readership. A one-sided argument is of far greater force and interest than the more balanced treatments offered by most academics. In fact, a good case could be made that even within academic discourse we need more one-sided work like that found in these books. However, the fact is that such works, by their very nature, leave out many relevant issues, especially the positive side of the things they study. Let me enumerate a few of the arguments that could be made about the positive sides of the phenomena of concern in these books:

- the genius associated with creative branding helped to fuel the economic boom of the 1990s. While not everyone has benefited from this boom, and there is greater inequality than ever before, there is no question that many people are far better off as a result of it.
- branding seems to offer consumers some measure of trust in a marketplace dominated by diversity, complexity, and risk.
- credit cards also played a key role in that economic explosion by allowing consumers access to future income (through what are, in effect, loans against that income in the form of credit-card debt) and the resulting expenditures, many of which would otherwise not have been made, fueled economic growth.
- credit cards allow people to acquire goods and services which otherwise would be unattainable, at least for a time.
- the fast-food restaurant was made necessary by the movement of

women into the labor force and the proliferation of such restaurants, and their clones in many other parts of the service sector have made it possible for many more women to enter the labor force. Were we to shutter all McDonaldized settings, many people (probably primarily women) would be forced back into the home.

- the fast-food restaurants offer consumers meals which are fast, convenient and predictable and which children like to eat.

Of course, this is just a sampling. Much more of a positive nature could and should be said of these phenomena and many other aspects of the consumer world.

WHAT DOES GET AT THE ESSENCE OF THE UNITED STATES?

One of the objectives shared by these books is an effort to define the essence of the United States, or at least its consumer society, as we enter the new millennium. This is made clear in the titles of two of the books which communicate the clear notion that the United States is either a fast-food or a credit-card nation. (There seems to be an outpouring of such books. See, for example, Bradford Wright's [2001] *Comic Book Nation*.) This is less clear in the case of Klein's book, not only because of its title, but also because of the fact that she is a Canadian with more global objectives than the two American authors of the other volumes. Yet, while Klein does bring in examples from other nations, especially Canada, the vast majority of her examples are American and were she from that country, she might have given her book the title, *Branded Nation*. The very titles of these books, real and imagined, lead us to ask: Is the United States the fast-food, the credit-card or the branded nation? The answer, of course, is all *and* none of them. All of these phenomena have their primary roots in the United States. They were either clearly created in the United States (e.g. the modern universal credit card), or the paradigmatic exemplars of each (e.g. McDonald's in the fast-food industry and Coca Cola and Nike among the brands) were American products. Furthermore, all of them have penetrated deeply not only into the society as a whole, but the consciousness of almost all, if not all, Americans. However, the three subjects of these volumes are each so important, and there are so many other contenders (even comic books), that it would be hard to say that any one of them defined the contemporary United States.

However, suppose we were compelled to make a choice among the three as to which one best defines contemporary America and its consumer culture. A case could be made that brands play this role because they encompass fast-food restaurants (Burger King, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, to say nothing of McDonald's) and credit cards (Visa and MasterCard). What everyone involved in the leadership of the fast-food and credit-card industries seeks is the creation of a brand that becomes so widely known and accepted that it seems to guarantee virtually perpetual success. And the leaders of these two industries – especially McDonald's and Visa – have created some of the leading brands in the world. They spend billions of dollars to support, maintain and extend the influence of their brands. Money is spent on the brand rather than on the maintenance of a skilled and committed work force. In fact, such industries prefer a largely unskilled and uncommitted labor force that can be replaced cheaply and easily on a regular basis.

Thus, the brand seems more general than fast food or credit cards. (However, that does not make it the most important of the three. It could be argued that the fast-food restaurant – by changing the way people eat – and the credit card – by encouraging deficit consumption – are both more important.) Neither the fast-food nor the credit-card industry can explain one another and neither can explain branding even though both are dominated by it. However, this raises the question (one that could be raised of Wolf's entire analysis): Is it the brand that is most important? Or is there something else that lies behind the brand (as well as fast-food restaurants and credit cards) that is of far more basic importance. I think there is and that is the nature of contemporary capitalism.

NEW FRONTIERS OF EXPLOITATION

One of the things that the reader of these books emerges with is a much greater sense of the increasing rapaciousness and rampant expansionism of contemporary capitalism. Within the United States, the contemporary move to the right initiated by Ronald Reagan (and now being carried forward by George W. Bush) has, among many other things, freed capitalists of many restraints. For example, as Wolf points out, the Reagan administration initiated a policy of gutting anti-trust regulations and enforcement, thereby setting the stage for the giant mergers of the 1980s and 1990s and the creation of huge conglomerates that are more or less beyond the law. Outside the United States, the demise of Soviet communism and the transformation of at least the economy of China into one that is capitalistic, if not characterized by the worst excesses of capitalism, have eliminated any serious barrier to capitalistic expansion. The wide array of world trade agreements (including NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement) has served a similar end. (While brands, fast food restaurants and credit cards all pre-date these developments, they were swept up in and given great impetus by them.)

Such changes have led, in turn, to many of the developments described by Manning, Schlosser and Wolf, although they are not always clear about the root source of the phenomena they describe. The fast-food restaurant permits new levels of the exploitation of workers. For example, most workers are part time which means that they do not qualify for health insurance, pensions, and so on. As Wolf describes, they can be kept on call and brought into work for a few hours as demand requires and then sent home when the demand slows. And the fast-food restaurant has been in the forefront of transforming customers into unpaid workers, at least for a few seconds or minutes of each visit. During this time they perform tasks (e.g. serving as waitpersons transporting their own food to their table, or as bus persons cleaning up after themselves) that, in the past, employees were paid to handle.

The latter involves a process whereby the fast-food chains have pushed not only McDonaldization, but exploitation, downward to workers and customers. Furthermore, as Schlosser points out, they have also pushed exploitation 'up' to those who supply them with the things they need to do business. Thus, Schlosser depicts the ways in which the requirements of the fast-food restaurant have forced those who raise and produce the food they need to increase their level of exploitation. The best example of this is in the meat-packing industry where the demands of the fast-food industry are responsible, at least in part, for the de-unionization of much of the industry, the hiring of low-paid workers (often illegal immigrants), and the speeding up of the production line to reduce costs (and increase profits). The result is inhuman work in inhumane conditions. Workers are reduced to fast-moving cogs in the assembly-line killing and butchering of animals. They are forced to perform repetitive and physically demanding tasks on animals that may, at least initially, not even be dead. They are often covered in blood and forced to stand in pools of blood. They wield very sharp knives at great speed in close proximity to other workers. The result is an extraordinarily high injury (and even death) rate although many injuries go unreported out of fear of being fired for being injured and unable to perform at peak levels. The jobs are held by non-unionized employees who are often immigrants (many illegal). The result is that they are totally at the whim of a management that is free to hire and fire them at will. Management is also enabled to ignore the horrid working conditions confronted by these powerless employees, or to make them even more horrific.

Some of the same realities are depicted by Wolf, but her strongest examples come from the enterprise zones in less developed nations devoted to the assembly of products sold by the branded corporations. The shifting of work to these zones has not only served to eliminate jobs in the United States and other developed nations, but it has also led to the creation of innumerable jobs which are characterized by appallingly low pay, long hours, and horrid working conditions (For an earlier discussion of sweat shops see Andrew Ross [1997], *No Sweat*.) Although there are exceptions, such conditions would be hard to find in the developed nations, but are readily acquiesced to by less developed nations that see such jobs, and the factories that house them, as initial steps toward industrial development. Of course, as Wolf points out, this development rarely occurs because the factory owners are likely to move on to more promising locales (that is, those which offer even lower wages or longer hours). Thus, conditions in the development zones rival, or even exceed, the exploitative conditions in the West in the early days of the Industrial Revolution which gave rise to both the labor movement and socialism and communism. In fact, they make the conditions in the American meat-packing industry described above seem almost heavenly by comparison. For example, workers in enterprise zone factories might work for pennies an hour, be locked into their workplaces (that very well might be firetraps) for most of a very long workday, or even be slaves to the factory owners.

Manning describes, at least implicitly, another kind of exploitation. The great expansion in credit-card use means that it is no longer enough for people to spend all their savings, and all their current income; they must also spend more and more of their future income by growing increasingly indebted to the credit-card companies. Like workers in the early days of capitalism who were forced to buy their goods on credit from the company store, credit card revolvers 'owe their soul' to the credit-card companies. They are often forced into a position of making payments for years at exorbitant interest rates. Furthermore, it is the exploitation of those who revolve their accounts that permits 'convenience users', those who pay their bills in full each month, to have the use of credit for a limited amount of time (usually about 25 days) at no cost to them. The revolvers pay the bill and the convenience users enjoy free credit. A similar dynamic pushes the credit-card companies to search out new users of cards in various places, but most notably in our colleges and high schools. This is a whole new source of business and involves a group – students – who are highly likely to become revolvers since they often either lack jobs or are employed in low paying jobs (like those in the fast-food industry) which do not pay enough to allow them to extricate themselves from debt. Furthermore, 'hooking' young people on consumer debt early serves to make it more likely that they will develop a lifelong habit of deficit spending.

Thus, the three books taken together depict a new capitalistic world defined by new ways to exploit people and new heights of exploitation. The author of each points the finger of blame at his or her favorite target – brands, fast-food restaurants, credit-card companies. However, all of them fail to see the broader relationships and implications of their work. It is the dynamics of modern capitalism that lie behind the abuses depicted in each of these sectors. In particular, it is the demand of the stockmarket that every firm show a sufficient level of increasing profits from one year to the next. Those that fall short are punished by the markets as the prices of their shares are driven sharply lower by stockholders who will simply sell shares in such companies and buy those of corporations which adhere to the rule of an adequate level of increasing profitability. It is this relentless pressure that forces fast-food restaurants to hire teenagers and offer them low-paying, benefit-less McJobs, brands to relentlessly lower production costs (and thereby increase profits) by constantly searching for lower cost subcontractors in free enterprise zones, and credit-card companies to find more and more revolvers and to lure them ever more deeply into debt.

There is nothing inherently evil about brands, fast-food restaurants and credit cards. What produces evil is the way corporations are forced to manage them in the contemporary capitalist world. Branding could be benign enough if it were not for the fact that the corporations behind the brands had to show ever-increasing profits. However, Wolf does have a point when she argues that the huge amounts of money spent on branding leads to a search for places to cut corners elsewhere, especially in labor costs. Yet, all the money spent on branding and saved in labor costs can be traced to the need to demonstrate increasing profits to the stockmarket. In terms of fast-food restaurants, they need not necessarily employ primarily teenagers, they need not offer them the minimum wage, and they do not need to force them to work in the kind of mindless, repetitive jobs which lead to such high turnover in the industry. They could offer higher paying, more interesting work and, in exchange, they could charge slightly higher prices. Of course, if one chain did so, it would be put at a competitive disadvantage relative to other chains and this is likely to lead to lower profits and lower stock prices (to say nothing of lower levels of compensation for corporate executives). Finally, the credit-card companies do not need to make the bulk of their profits from revolvers, they could charge convenience users a fair fee for their access to short-term credit. Tentative moves have been made in this direction, but the negative reaction from mainly well-heeled convenience users has forced credit companies to backtrack. Charging convenience users fees would serve to make the credit-card industry more equitable – it might even be able to lower interest rates paid by revolvers – but it would lead to the loss of convenience users and have a negative effect on the bottom lines of credit-card companies.

AMERICANIZATION OR GLOBALIZATION?

It is abundantly clear that the United States is not only the primary source of fast-food restaurants, credit cards and brands, but it is also actively and successfully exporting all of them, as well as its consumer culture more generally, to the much of the rest of the (developed) world. While there are almost always adaptations to the local culture, the exportation of these three phenomena can all be seen as part of the process of Americanization.

This leads to the conclusion that globalization theory underplays the role played by the United States in global processes, at least in terms of those that relate to consumption. Reacting against earlier work that focused on Americanization and/or the West (in modernization theory), globalization theorists tend to emphasize the importance of the interaction of many nations and/or of processes which are independent of any specific nation-state. While there is much of merit in this perspective, it greatly underestimates, as is abundantly demonstrated in these three books, the role played by the United States in the global consumer society. Fast-food restaurants have long since departed the confines of the United States and are firmly ensconced in well over 100 nations around the world. McDonald's, the leader in the fast-food industry, now opens more outlets each year overseas than it does in the United States and a majority of its profits come from outside the country. Similar expansionism characterizes the leading credit-card companies – Visa, MasterCard and American Express – which, having successfully hooked millions of Americans on credit and debt, are seeking to do the same to the citizens of many other nations around the world. While credit cards throughout the world may bear the name of local banks (just as they do in the United States), they also almost always carry the name and logo of an American credit-card company (to which part of the profits flow). These first two cases already demonstrate the international presence of American brands – for example, McDonald's and Visa – but many others, such as Nike, CNN and MTV, are also highly visible presences and powerful forces in many parts of the world. Thus, at least in the realm of consumption, a strong case can be made that it would be far better to think in terms of Americanization than globalization.

SHOULD ANYTHING BE DONE? IF SO, WHAT?

Given the range and severity of criticisms offered in these three books, what do they have to say about solving the array of problems described? Manning has little to say on this and Schlosser devotes only a brief chapter to what can be done. Most of it seems far-fetched, e.g. passing laws (the Bush administration?!) making it easier to unionize fast-food workers, and Schlosser himself recognizes that nothing is likely to happen anytime soon. Perhaps his strongest point is that the first step toward change would be for people to stop buying fast food, but this would require a 'paradigm shift' among consumers which leads them to act against one of the most powerful trends in the last 50 years.

Klein has the most to offer here; in fact, over a third of the book is devoted to solutions under the heading (and title of the book) 'no logo'. The broadest implication, clear in such a heading, is that Klein thinks we should eliminate logos, or at least stop buying products which sport logos. Even if we were to assume (ridiculously) that this were to occur, would it solve the problems described by Klein? The answer is an unequivocal 'no' and that answer points up, once again, the fundamental problem in her work. Logo or no logo, the dynamics of contemporary capitalism will continue to push companies both to increase markets and to reduce costs, especially derived from the most powerless components of the production process. Thus, even without logos, companies will find ever more sophisticated ways to sell their products. In fact, it is likely that this 'logo-ed' phase of capitalism will pass on its own into history to take its place alongside other phases of the past such as the one where firms competed on the basis of price. In fact, this phase reminds us of Baran and Sweezy's (1966) famous analysis of capitalism where they chart the historical transition from price to sales competition. The age of the logo can be seen in this context as just a phase (and a technique) in the longer wave of capitalistic sales competition. Because she is a journalist, Klein is either unaware of, or unwilling, to draw on this theoretical resource. Ventures into the arcane world of varieties of neo-Marxian theory would undoubtedly lose many of Klein's readers.

Less extremely, Klein details a wide variety of things that have been done to combat the evils of 'logo capitalism' (this might have been a more accurate and appropriate title for her book). Before mentioning some of the major ones, I should say that I felt that Klein devoted too much attention to these efforts and that it is hard to take many of them as seriously as she does. Given all the information we are provided about her radical days in college, her relative youth, and the fact that she seems to be actively involved in at least some of these movements, it is hard for me (admittedly an old fogy twice her age) to take them as seriously. However, I hasten to add that I hope she's right. I hope this ragged combination of forces and movements does succeed at least in slowing our rush to embrace everything with a logo on it (to say nothing of fast food and credit-card debt).

Klein starts with the 'culture jammers' who rework advertisements so that viewers are forced to reconsider in a more critical way the organization paying for the ad (e.g. turning 'Joe Camel' into 'Joe Chemo' with a few brush strokes or bursts from the spray can). Then there are groups like Reclaim the Streets who seek to turn streets and highways into street theatre designed to wrest public space from commercial control. Klein puts great stock in a series of movements in the 1990s which arose as a result of revelations of involvement in third-world sweatshops by Nike, Kathy Lee Gifford, Disney, Wal-Mart, and others. She makes the very astute point that the magnitude of these reactions is a direct function of the great size, power and arrogance of these cultural icons. Put another way, the brand is the source of their strength, but it is also their Achilles' heel. They are like balloons which inflate quickly, but deflate even more quickly when, for example, their dirty little secrets are aired in public. One such secret, at least in the third world, is how much these products which they produce for pennies cost in the West. Along the same lines are the enormous amounts of money earned by the top executives of the firms behind the brands as well as the cultural icons (e.g. Michael Jordan) that are their public symbols and spokespersons. The other secret, at least to many in the West, is how little third world workers earn and the horrible conditions under which they labor. Public revelations about either secret are likely to lead to great public uproar, and the more powerful the icon, the greater the uproar. In fact, the media are drawn to these revelations about the logo leaders because they translate into higher ratings, more readers, and so on. Klein also makes much of legal action against corporations and her best example is the McLibel trial in which McDonald's won a pyrrhic victory by creating a public relations disaster. She sees the courtroom as an excellent battleground because the corporations are forced to reveal their secrets. The McLibel trial also led to the website, McSpotlight (the internet is a major tool for those opposed to the brand leaders), which has become a major center for communicating about anti-McDonald's (and other brands) activity throughout the world. Then there are the intrusions of brands on to college campuses (Nike's contracts with major athletic departments, Pepsi and Coke bidding to become the exclusive provider of soft drinks on campus) and the negative reactions to this by students (and some faculty) on many campuses. Overall, Klein makes it clear that the brands are driven to ever-greater excesses and these, in turn, lead to larger and more powerful counter-reactions. In Marxian terms, the implication is that the capitalists are once again creating their own gravediggers.

Taking all these things, and others, together, Klein concludes that she now feels that there is something like an international movement here that is capable of dealing with the abuses of the global brands. However, even she is forced to wonder whether she is witnessing a momentary reaction or something that will be of longer term, and perhaps dramatic, consequence. Perhaps the best evidence in support of the latter is the widely publicized public demonstrations which accompany many of the pro-globalization, alphabet soup meetings (e.g. WTO: World Trade Organization, NAFTA) which occur these days. Are these flashes in the pan? Or harbingers of a future revolutionary change? My heart says the latter, but my brain indicates the former. But, as I've said before, it would be a far better world if I am proven wrong and Klein turns out to be right.

Given the journal in which this review essay appears, it is worth underscoring the fact that the major solutions discussed here all fall within the realm of consumption and involve mainly consumers (although it is hoped that those who labor in McJobs in the service sector and in sweat shops throughout the world will be important beneficiaries of any changes that take place). This is a powerful reflection of the fact that the center of developed economies is rapidly shifting from production to consumption and the efforts to deal with problems emanating from them must be based in at least as much, and probably more, in the world of consumption than in the realm of production. Thus, the McLibel group is a much more important force in dealing with the kinds of problems discussed in these books than the labor movement. The center of gravity in the economic world has shifted and the major forces opposing the negative effects produced by it have also undergone a sea change. The next great battles over the excesses of capitalism (including those that exist in production) will be fought out mainly in the realm of consumption, but they will be waged amid a sea of people who derive many of their greatest satisfactions from consumption. Is it likely that large numbers of these people will be won over by the anti-consumption forces? It is on the answer to that question that the future of capitalism currently rides.

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George Ritzer is Distinguished University Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Maryland. His most recent publication is a two-volume set of his collected works – *Explorations in the Sociology of Consumption: Fast Food, Credit Cards and Casinos* and *Explorations in Social Theory: From Metatheorizing to Rationalization* (Sage, 2001). Ritzer's current work is on the 'landscapes of consumption'. *Address*: Department of Sociology at the University of Maryland-College Park, College Park, MD 20742, USA. [email: ritzer@socy.umd.edu]