



Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business

Roland Marchand

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Over the course of the twentieth century the popular perception of America's giant corporations has undergone an astonishing change. Condemned as dangerous leviathans in the century's first decades, by 1945 major corporations had become respected, even revered, institutions. Roland Marchand's lavishly illustrated and carefully researched book tells how large companies such as AT&T and U.S. Steel created their own "souls" in order to reassure consumers and politicians that bigness posed no threat to democracy or American values.

Marchand traces this important transformation in the culture of capitalism by offering a series of case studies of such corporate giants as General Motors, General Electric, Metropolitan Life Insurance, and Du Pont Chemicals. Marchand examines the rhetorical and visual imagery developed by corporate leaders to win public approval and build their own internal corporate culture. In the "golden era" of the 1920s, companies boasted of their business statesmanship, but in the Depression years many of them turned in desperation to forms of public relations that strongly defended the capitalist system. During World War II public relations gained new prominence within corporate management as major companies linked themselves with Main-Street, small-town America. By the war's end, the corporation's image as a "good neighbor" had largely replaced that of the "soulless giant." American big business had succeeded in wrapping increasingly complex economic relationships in the comforting aura of familiarity.

Marchand, author of the widely acclaimed *Advertising the American Dream* (1985), provides an elegant and convincing account of the origins and effects of the corporate imagery so ubiquitous in our world today.

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