

## Consumer Capitalism, the Environment, and Environmentalism

96<sup>th</sup> Minisymposium of the Centre for Environmental History  
13<sup>th</sup> Rachel Carson Center Lecture

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### Abstract:

By the 1960s, environmentalism arose to counter the ecological impact of consumer capitalism, yet was also a product of it.

The United States began to transition from coal-based industrial capitalism to petroleum-based corporate-dominated consumer capitalism in the 1920s. Rising income, installment plans, and modern advertising encouraged consumption. Movies, radio, and mass market publications effectively created a massive propaganda network for consumerist values. Individualism, consumption, and self-gratification overwhelmed such traditional values as community, productive industriousness, sobriety, and self-denial.

Consumerism triumphed after 1945. Large corporations and concentrations of capital slowly grew enormously powerful. Televisions, the Internet, and smartphones now promote consumer values constantly and ubiquitously.

Environmentalism reflects consumer values by presenting environmental issues as problems of individual responsibility or conscious consumption.

### SAVE THE DATE:

16. 1. 2020: *Maria Buck „Umweltbewegungen“*