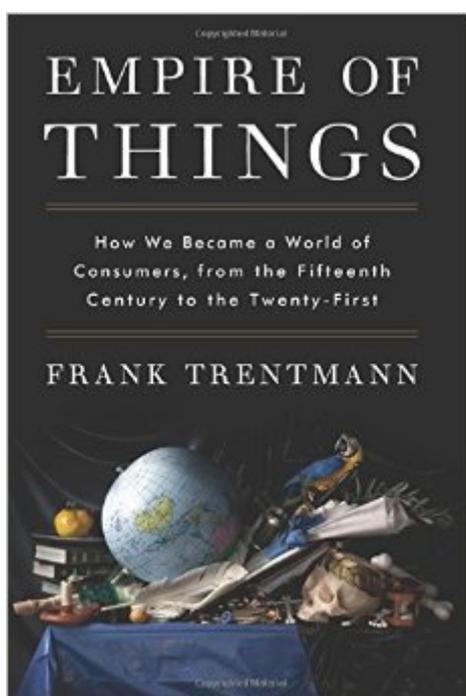


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# Empire Of Things: How We Became A World Of Consumers, From The Fifteenth Century To The Twenty-First



## Synopsis

“*Empire of Things*” isn’t just an insightful and surprisingly entertaining read, but a crucial one. NPR’s “What we consume has become a central—perhaps the central—feature of modern life. Our economies live or die by spending, we increasingly define ourselves by our possessions, and this ever-richer lifestyle has had an extraordinary impact on our planet. How have we come to live with so much stuff, and how has this changed the course of history?” In *Empire of Things*, Frank Trentmann unfolds the extraordinary story of our modern material world, from Renaissance Italy and late Ming China to today’s global economy. While consumption is often portrayed as a recent American export, this monumental and richly detailed account shows that it is in fact a truly international phenomenon with a much longer and more diverse history. Trentmann traces the influence of trade and empire on tastes, as formerly exotic goods like coffee, tobacco, Indian cotton and Chinese porcelain conquered the world, and explores the growing demand for home furnishings, fashionable clothes and convenience that transformed private and public life. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought department stores, credit cards and advertising, but also the rise of the ethical shopper, new generational identities and, eventually, the resurgence of the Asian consumer. With an eye to the present and future, Frank Trentmann provides a long view on the global challenges of our relentless pursuit of more—from waste and debt to stress and inequality. A masterpiece of research and storytelling many years in the making, *Empire of Things* recounts the epic history of the goods that have seduced, enriched and unsettled our lives over the past six hundred years.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is an extraordinary book, bringing in wide swaths of history, economics and sociology around the globe from the 15th to the 21st centuries. It's full of facts, their contexts and the author's interpretations, and nothing is included just to function as padding; it's all good. Even better, the book is written in straightforward, fluent English, not in academic-ese, and the organization (chronological and then more topical) could not be clearer. Because of the length and breadth, you have to devote some time to it, but it's time very well spent.

Great read, well researched, probably the most interesting and insightful history book I've read in a long time. Wonderful job putting today's society in context and providing the insight into how we are were we are.

This reads like a textbook. I was hoping it would be more interesting. There are a few fascinating tidbits, but I would have been more interested if the ratio was weighted more toward the psychology of our relationship to possessions rather than seemingly endless inventories of possessions of 17th century Italians. I am about halfway finished reading this book. I have been working on it for about 3 weeks and it is a slog. Also, on my Kindle Paperwhite, this book is hard to navigate between the text and the footnotes, and there are no links to the referenced photos. I have not had this trouble with other books on Kindle.

I struggle with the guilt of being part of the conspicuous consumption cadre, and strive to rein it in. This book both taught me new knowledge while disillusioned some misconceptions on where the problems and solutions space lie. Food for thought as I deliberate the path I could take as part of the solution.

Vast in scope, mind-numbing in detail, prolix beyond belief, and so repetitive you'll get very tired of knowing how many shirts Jacob had in his chest in 1611....and, in the end, inconclusive. The book does not elucidate HOW we became a world of consumers (apparently we always have been) it just documents ad nauseum and ad infinitum that we are. No fooling.

Informative and scattershot addendum to the histories of globalization. Trentmann's key concern is emphasizing that global trade isn't just a phenomenon of the recent past, but has been intensively altering culture on a majority of the world's population for at least since the 14th century.

This well-written, expansive history of consumption covering the 15th to 21st centuries, including several cultures, not just Anglo-Saxon, is spoiled by the primitive Kindle implementation. This lengthy book has hundreds of footnotes for each chapter, which I like to read. New ideas are often tucked into footnotes. But looking at these notes is so tedious that reading is totally disrupted. Clicking on a footnote link takes you to the beginning of the notes chapter, not to the footnote within the chapter. The reader must page through the notes to find the desired footnote number. Fortunately, once at the note, the number can be clicked to return to the correct location in the book itself. This means the links to/from the notes work in only one direction, backward. An additional, similar flaw occurs for the illustrations in this magnificent book. All are collected together at the end. There are over fifty illustrations accompanying this book. They are mentioned by number within the text. Why no link to the numbered illustrations at the end? There are no links. This is otherwise an engaging, well-written, detailed book with specific historic incidents about real people. The descriptions are accompanied by thoughtful analysis of choices and changes as the economy and cultures have evolved. Why not take advantage of what Kindle can add to pleasant reading? The publisher created this Kindle on the cheap. Reader beware!

Everything you ever wanted to know about consumption, leisure, sociology, psychology and history are all here in minute detail. It is a long book, but it is exceptionally well written and isn't the least bit dull. So, if you want to know about teen consumption or consuming China after Mao or our penchant for "stuff" this book is the place to begin.

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