

ABSTRACT

“Buy For the Sake of Your Baby” examines influences that governmental funding and regulation, private philanthropy, and business pursuit of profit had in developing the consumer society for infants in the United States in the period since World War II. Almost everyone who has had a child or grandchild, or even makes the act of stepping into a buybuy BABY store, has experienced the unintuitive strangeness of the infant consumer landscape. By focusing on thematic topics that explore the contours of intersection between consumer society and babies, I illuminate what placed “buying for baby” as a historically unique experience. To enable examinations of safety, nutrition, advice, and infertility, my dissertation draws upon newly available source material from the second half of the twentieth century to demonstrate the essential intersections of political willingness, parental desire to protect their children, and corporate marketing caused the consumer experience of babyhood to take on the aggressive strangeness that made buying for baby a contested consumer landscape. My dissertation not only explains the roots and causes of modern baby-related consumer controversies, it also contextualizes these by history and demonstrates how necessary political will was to seemingly non-political elements of society.