



A Nation of Salesmen: The Tyranny of the Market and the Subversion of Culture

Earl Shorris

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If Adam is the archetype of man, and Eve of woman, then the serpent who sold the apple to Eve in the Garden of Eden was the first salesman: all culture and commerce flow from that act.

In this groundbreaking book on the nature and meaning of the sale, Earl Shorris takes us on a journey that starts in Eden and comes at last to a consideration of where we are and what we have become in late twentieth-century America, where selling has finally become the dominant human activity. Shorris focuses on the perfection of this particular art here in America, where the vast frontier with its isolated settlements cast the salesman in a heroic role: he was literally the bearer of culture, the source of a panoply of needed and wanted items, everything from parasols to plowshares. He was Prometheus. All of this changed dramatically in the years following World War II, when it dawned on manufacturers and sellers that the American economy was producing more goods than people wanted or needed. Demand would have to be created in order to sustain the expansion of markets, and then, as the economy became oversold, the role of the salesman changed: his task was now to kill the competition. The argument of this brilliant work draws on classical philosophy, contemporary politics, psychology, and economics; it is grounded in the author's long experience as an advertising executive and consultant to major corporations. His firsthand observations and interviews with salesmen of every description form the anecdotal bedrock of the narrative, which is further enlivened by a series of fictions in which salesmen practice aspects of their trade. Out of these stories and insights emerges a chilling new paradigm of human life in our times: that of homo vendens. Shorris shows us how America became a nation of salesmen, and what this means to our economy, our politics, our culture, and our character - especially our freedom to live as dignified persons.

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