



Refined Tastes: Sugar, Confectionery, and Consumers in Nineteenth-Century America (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science)

Wendy A. Woloson

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American consumers today regard sugar as a mundane and sometimes even troublesome substance linked to hyperactivity in children and other health concerns. Yet two hundred years ago American consumers treasured sugar as a rare commodity and consumed it only in small amounts. In *Refined Tastes: Sugar, Confectionery, and Consumers in Nineteenth-Century America*, Wendy A. Woloson demonstrates how the cultural role of sugar changed from being a precious luxury good to a ubiquitous necessity. Sugar became a social marker that established and reinforced class and gender differences.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Woloson explains, the social elite saw expensive sugar and sweet confections as symbols of their wealth. As refined sugar became more affordable and accessible, new confections -- children's candy, ice cream, and wedding cakes -- made their way into American culture, acquiring a broad array of social meanings. Originally signifying male economic prowess, sugar eventually became associated with femininity and women's consumerism. Woloson's work offers a vivid account of this social transformation -- along with the emergence of consumer culture in America.

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