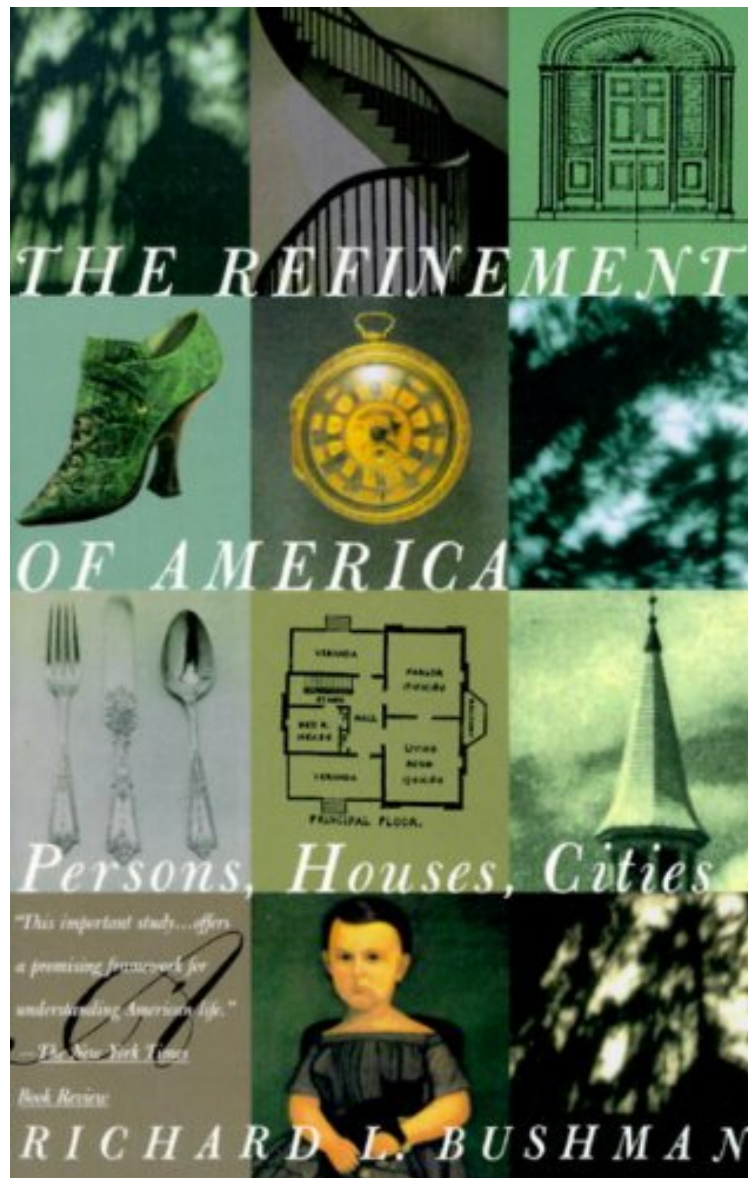


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# The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities

Richard Lyman Bushman

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**Richard Lyman Bushman : The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. RecommendedBy Bianca SultanaIn The Refinement of America, Richard L. Bushman focuses on gentility and how the desire to become one of society's elite led to the formation of a whole new class of consumers. The soaring demand for such accoutrements as porcelain and silver made way for industrial capitalism by creating a market economy. Bushman takes a positive outlook on the spread of commerce and

gentility throughout the 18th century British Atlantic World. The gentrification and refinement of America created the desire for social mobility, the American Dream. "Gentility offered the hope that however poor or however undignified their work, could become middle class by disciplining themselves and adopting a few outward forms of genteel living." (Bushman, xvi) In this way lines between classes were blurred. Education and worldliness became more important than ever before, as being polite and well-spoken marked respectability. Bushman's work is easy to read and enjoyable. Growing up in present-day America, we are all taught by our parents to say "please" and "thank you," and Bushman offers us insight into the origins of polite culture. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in learning a little bit more about America (particularly, the 18th century) that is not found in school-used text books. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. *Courtiers in America* By James Humphreys Richard Bushman argues that what we today call manners in America resulted from our forefathers imitating Italian Renaissance court fashion and etiquette. Beginning with the American aristocracy, the gentry, the pursuit of refinement flowed downward from the mansions and plantation houses to the homes and cabins of people on the frontier. From this trickle-down process we today practice customs such as, putting our hand over our mouth when we yawn, having a living room separate from the kitchen, eating with a knife and fork, even putting brick on our houses. He carries his argument well throughout the book. Anyone wondering how or why people act the way they do will find this interesting. 13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. *the cultural phenomenon of "gentility" examined* By Kindle Customer Richard L. Bushman, in his book *Refinement of America*, takes a fresh look at Colonial America and the cultural phenomena of the rise of "gentility." Taking a somewhat cross-disciplined approach to his material, he has combined the traditional historian's look at documentary evidence such as probate records, with an antiquarian's curatorial view of historic sites and an anthropological look at society and social customs. By close examination of the proliferation in material goods after 1690 as well as various other changes that show movement from survival levels of existence to flourishing societies in the new colonies, Bushman lays groundwork demonstrating the profound impact that ideas of gentility had in the stratification of American society into classes. Perhaps the most interesting point that Bushman raises is the potential for cross-class mobility that existed in Colonial America. By examining the changes from one generation to the next, Bushman is able to show the push toward gentility and gentrification among a rising middle class of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bushman, in describing the cities and society of eighteenth century America, also makes comparisons to the English and European societies--with their similar social functions and gentility. There is, however, a distinctly American and republican cast to the colonial culture that Bushman is pointing out by these comparisons. American genteel society is not merely a transplanted European aristocracy, but rather a new sort of upper class where status is gained through personal achievement; and family connections, while capable of giving advantage, are secondary to individual skills and success. Overall, Bushman has painted a fascinating side of early American culture from a new perspective -- seeing a deep cultural phenomena of gentility taking shape and in turn shaping the American mind. With his in-depth look and cross-generational approach he makes a good case for his viewpoint on gentility. His variety of documents--probate papers and estates inventories taken together with letters and memoirs, balance out the total lives of his subjects. If there is any weakness to Bushman's book it is that it treats primarily with a such a small segment at the top of the social ladder and seems to neglect the daily lives of the lower classes against which the genteel must be juxtaposed. In all fairness, to have added a closer look at a wider cross-section of population would take far more than one volume and, in fact, might be better left to future texts. Bushman is to be commended for his socio-cultural approach to a issue that helped to shape American individuality and yet might never have been looked at closely by purely traditional historians.

This lively and authoritative volume makes clear that the quest for taste and manners in America has been essential to the serious pursuit of a democratic culture. Spanning the material world from mansions and silverware to etiquette books, city planning, and sentimental novels, Richard L. Bushman shows how a set of values originating in aristocratic court culture gradually permeated almost every stratum of American society and served to prevent the hardening of class consciousness. A work of immense and richly nuanced learning, *The Refinement of America* newly illuminates every facet of both our artifacts and our values. From the Trade Paperback edition.