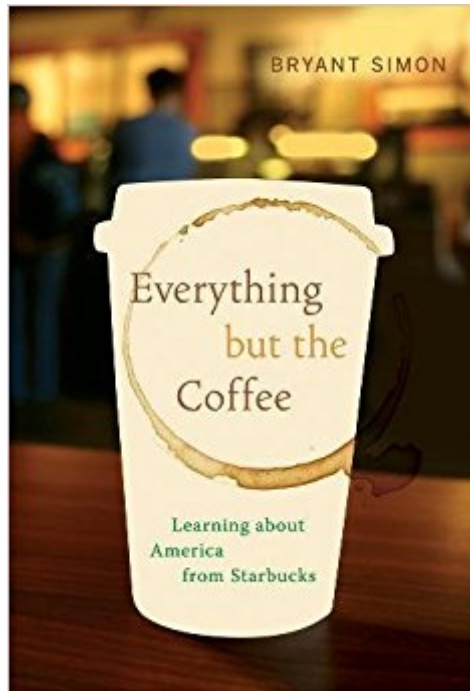




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Everything But The Coffee: Learning About America From Starbucks



Synopsis

Everything but the Coffee casts a fresh eye on the world's most famous coffee company, looking beyond baristas, movie cameos, and Paul McCartney CDs to understand what Starbucks can tell us about America. Bryant Simon visited hundreds of Starbucks around the world to ask, Why did Starbucks take hold so quickly with consumers? What did it seem to provide over and above a decent cup of coffee? Why at the moment of Starbucks' profit-generating peak did the company lose its way, leaving observers baffled about how it might regain its customers and its cultural significance? Everything but the Coffee probes the company's psychological, emotional, political, and sociological power to discover how Starbucks' explosive success and rapid deflation exemplify American culture at this historical moment. Most importantly, it shows that Starbucks speaks to a deeply felt American need for predictability and class standing, community and authenticity, revealing that Starbucks' appeal lies not in the product it sells but in the easily consumed identity it offers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

After five years of on-site investigation, including Starbucks locations across the country and around the world, author and history professor Simon (Boardwalk Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America) has produced a less-than-earth-shaking examination of the coffee chain's influence on America (and its American influence abroad). Simon's hodgepodge of observations are heavy on the obvious ("Lots of people, I learned from my many hours of observation, used Starbucks as a

second place, as a work space and meeting room"), and light on revealing details or investigation ("After making its five-cent donation to the world's water-deprived" per bottle of their Ethos water, "the company still gets an extra twenty to fifty cents... of profit"). Those who frequent Starbucks will enjoy Simon's range of topics, from business matters to the music played to the (very American) concept of "self-gifting." Though Simon's knowledge of the brand is obvious, his insight is sparse and his in-person observations lack color (though Starbucks deserves some of the blame for that). Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
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“Those who frequent Starbucks will enjoy Simon's range of topics, from business matters to the music played to the (very American) concept of self-gifting.” (Publishers Weekly 2009-12-07) "Simon's book is a fascinating, sometimes dispiriting look at how Starbucks is emblematic of some deeper socioeconomic phenomena at work in this country over the past decade and a half." (Mike Miliard Boston Phoenix 2009-12-09) "A thoughtful, in-depth study." (World Wide Work 2010-04-25)

Whether you're a Starbucks junkie or a Starbucks hater, this book lends an excellent insight into one of the world's largest and fastest growing companies. The author discusses everything from Starbucks' ethics, consumption, to sociological role of the company in simple "plain English" that everyone can learn from. An excellent read for anyone interested in the state of modern corporations, environmental sustainability, and how you can help change how things are run.

Met the author several years ago. Great book! Just bought another copy for my brother!

I wanted to like this book, I really did. But I felt that it was just one big, long bash of Starbucks. Over and over again, the author made his point. Too bad, as I had really hoped that at some point it would move beyond the bashing and brought something positive to the text.

Awesome book! Capitalism FTW! MURICA!

insightful, inspiring and well written book. I will read it twice later. also a lively case study for business school.

Synopsis of what theory is being explained is at from what the expectations of the reader....Disappointment of a readThanks

Bryant Simon, the author of "Boardwalk of Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America," has written another compelling book about a once beloved, now declining, American institution in "Everything But the Coffee: Learning About America from Starbucks." From its inception in the early 1970s to today, Simon traces the rise and fall of Starbucks, not only as a company and business venture, but also as a piece of Americana. Simon, a Professor of History at Temple University, defines what he calls "the Starbucks moment," where in a short period of time, Starbucks exploded and was literally everywhere. However, as he points out, as quickly as Starbucks arrived and became the talk of the business community and Wall Street, the company began to fade and lose its luster. He describes how Starbucks sought people of status and wealth to tout its name and logo and then how it used those high end customers to draw in the middle class. It was the middle class customers buying high priced coffees and lattes that allowed Starbucks its meteoric rise and swollen stock price. Starbucks, says Simon, convinced a whole group of people that they could abdicate their responsibilities for environmentalism, human rights, poor peasant farmers, and an array of other causes to a large corporation simply by paying more for its products. Yet despite the company's advertising - or is it propaganda? - Simon shows that very little of what Starbucks claims is reality. One example he sites is the environmental issue of recycling. Clearly, using ceramic cups that can be washed is more environmentally sound than using paper cups that go into a landfill. Simon opines that rather than providing reusable cups for its customers, Starbucks continues to use paper cups (the inside is coated with a polyethylene plastic) so that its logo can continue to be seen. After all, if a customer has a paper cup, he or she is more inclined to leave the coffee shop with cup in hand to become a walking advertisement. In an amusing story, he recalls going into a Starbucks and asking for a mug because he was going to drink his coffee on site. Bedlam ensued as the staff searched for a ceramic mug. Just as he was about to give up and settle for a paper cup, an employee shouted "I found it!" "It" was the only ceramic, or reusable, cup in the place. In other chapters, Simon talks about Starbucks role as a "Third Place," which is a term used to describe somewhere outside the home or workplace where people meet. Starbucks' ventures into music and books and its impact on globalization and fair-trade coffee are some other topics covered. As the author states in the Afterword, "Everything but the Coffee" was not intended to be a hatchet job on Starbucks. "I defended Starbucks against what I saw then...as knee-jerk attacks against bigness...."

However, after getting into his research, "...I stopped seeing the company as an engine of community. Instead, I saw it as a mythmaker offering only an illusion of belonging...." What the reader will find is a well-written, well-researched work that will be an eye opening experience for those who have loved or hated Starbucks. Eric Schlosser's "Fast food Nation" opened the first decade of the 21st Century with an expose of McDonalds and the fast food industry. Bryant Simon ends the decade with a dissection of Starbucks and the abdication of consumer responsibility.

Reading this book is akin to drinking a strong, rich espresso in a literary sea of cloying frappuccinos. It's a book for anyone wanting to decipher the hipsters wearing those obnoxious Chuck Sneakers drinking the \$2 Pabst beer, the Whole Foods shopper carrying the reusable shopping bag, and of course, the Starbucks drinker who ordered the iced single venti toffeenut soy latte (no foam). If I was a marketing, sociology, history, business or economics professor, I'd mandate my students to read this book. Instead, I'm a 20-something enjoying every paragraph to the last drop. The way it weaves all of these disciplines into such a poignant narrative of Starbucks is impressive. The dizzying breadth and more importantly, depth of knowledge contained herein would have me believe that this book took the work of several authors. I'm going to copy and paste a paragraph to exemplify what I mean: "To display smarts, superior tastes, and even enlightened politics, the upper classes of the 1990s focused their buying on things that looked natural and rare but also required special knowledge to fully understand. This buying was not just about changing aesthetics, as David Brooks suggested in his bobo study, or about the intrinsic value of design, as Virginia Postrel argued in *The Substance of Style*. It tied the upper middle classes back to Veblen. Buying in post-Reagan America was not about keeping up with the Joneses; it was about separating yourself from the Joneses, the conformists in the middle." If quality writing like this doesn't engage you, I have a different book on Starbucks to recommend. It's called "How Starbucks Saved My Life." Probably more your speed.

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