

ADVERTISING AND PEOPLE OF COLOR

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... For years advertisers in the United States reflected the place of non-Whites in the social fabric of the nation either by ignoring them or, when they were included in advertisements for the mass audience, processing and presenting them in a way that would make them palatable salespersons for the products being advertised. These processed portrayals largely mirrored the stereotypic images of minorities in the entertainment media that, in turn, were designed to reflect the perceived values and norms of the White majority. In this way, non-White portrayals in advertising paralleled and reinforced their entertainment and journalistic images in the media.

The history of advertising in the United States is replete with characterizations that, like the Frito Bandito, responded to and reinforced the preconceived image that many White Americans apparently had of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans. Over the years advertisers have employed Latin spitfires like Chiquita Banana, Black mammies like Aunt

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Jemima, and noble savages like the Santa Fe Railroad's Super Chief to pitch their products to a predominantly White mass audience of consumers. In 1984 the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies in Philadelphia sponsored an exhibit of more than 300 examples of racial and ethnic images used by corporations in magazines, posters, trade cards, and storyboards.

The advertising examples in the exhibit include positive White ethnic stereotypes, such as the wholesome and pure image of Quakers in an early Quaker Oats advertisement and the cleanliness of the Dutch in a turn-of-the-century advertisement for Colgate soaps. But they also featured a late-19th-century advertisement showing an Irish matron threatening to hit her husband over the head with a rolling pin because he didn't smoke the right brand of tobacco. Like Quaker Oats, some products even incorporated a stereotypical image on the package or product line being advertised.

"Lawsee! Folks sho' whoops with joy over AUNT JEMIMA PANCAKES," shouted a bandanna-wearing Black mammy in a magazine advertisement for Aunt Jemima pancake mix, which featured a plump Aunt Jemima on the box. Over the years, Aunt Jemima has lost some weight, but the stereotyped face of the Black servant continues to be featured on the box. Earlier advertisements for Cream of Wheat featured Rastus, the Black servant on the box, in a series of magazine cartoons with a group of cute but ill-dressed Black children. Some of the advertisements played on stereotypes ridiculing Blacks, such as an advertisement in which a Black schoolteacher, standing behind a makeshift lectern made out of a boldly lettered Cream of Wheat box, asks the class, "How do you spell 'Cream of Wheat?'" Others appeared to promote racial integration, such as a magazine advertisement captioned "Putting it down in Black and White," which showed Rastus serving bowls of the breakfast cereal to Black and White youngsters sitting at the same table.

Racial imagery was also integrated into the naming of trains by the Santa Fe railroad,

which named one of its passenger lines the Super Chief and featured highly detailed portraits of the noble Indian in promoting its service through the Southwestern United States. In another series of advertisements, the railroad used cartoons of Native American children to show the service and sights passengers could expect when they traveled the Santa Fe line.

These and other portrayals catered to the mass audience mentality by either neutralizing or making humor of the negative perceptions that many Whites may have had of racial minorities. The advertising images, rather than showing people of color as they really were, portrayed them as filtered through Anglo eyes. This presented an out-of-focus image of racial minorities, but one that was palatable, and even persuasive, to the White majority to which it was directed. In the mid-1960s Black civil rights groups targeted the advertising industry for special attention, protesting both the lack of integrated advertisements including Blacks and the stereotyped images that the advertisers continued to use. The effort, accompanied by support from federal officials, resulted in the overnight inclusion of Blacks as models in television advertising in 1967 and a downplaying of the images that many Blacks found objectionable.

"Black America is becoming visible in America's biggest national advertising medium," reported the *New York Times* in 1968. "Not in a big way yet, but it is a beginning and men in high places give assurances that there will be a lot more visibility."¹

But the advertising industry did not generalize the concerns of Blacks, or the concessions made in response to them, to other groups. At the same time that some Black concerns were being addressed with integrated advertising, other groups were being ignored or singled out for continued stereotyped treatment in such commercials as those featuring the Frito Bandito.

Among the Latino advertising stereotypes cited in a 1969 article² by sociologist Tomás Martínez were commercials for

Granny Goose chips featuring fat gun-toting Mexicans, an advertisement for Arrid underarm deodorant showing a dusty Mexican bandito spraying his underarms after a hard ride as the announcer intones, “If it works for him it will work for you,” and a magazine advertisement featuring a stereotypical Mexican sleeping under his sombrero as he leans against a Philco television set. Especially offensive to Martínez was a Liggett & Meyers commercial for L&M cigarettes that featured Paco, a lazy Latino who never “feenishes” anything, not even the revolution he is supposed to be fighting. In response to a letter complaining about the commercial, the director of public relations for the tobacco firm defended the commercial’s use of Latino stereotypes.

“Paco’ is a warm, sympathetic and lovable character with whom most of us can identify because he has a little of all of us in him, that is, our tendency to procrastinate at times,” wrote the Liggett & Meyers executive. “He seeks to escape the violence of war and to enjoy the pleasure of the moment, in this case, the good flavor of an L&M cigarette.”³ Although the company spokesman claimed that the character had been tested without negative reactions from Latinos (a similar claim was made by Frito-Lay regarding the Frito Bandito), Martínez roundly criticized the advertising images and contrasted them to what he saw as the gains Blacks were then making in the advertising field.

“Today, no major advertiser would attempt to display a black man or woman over the media in a prejudiced, stereotyped fashion,” Martínez wrote.

Complaints would be forthcoming from black associations and perhaps the FCC. Yet, these same advertisers, who dare not show “step’n fetch it” characters, uninhibitedly depict a Mexican counterpart, with additional traits of stinking and stealing. Perhaps the white hatred for blacks, which cannot find adequate expression in today’s ads, is being transferred upon their brown brothers.⁴

In 1970 a Brown Position Paper prepared by Latino media activists Armando Rendón and Domingo Nick Reyes charged that the media had transferred the negative stereotypes it once reserved for Blacks to Latinos, who had become “the media’s new nigger.”⁵ The protests of Latinos soon made the nation’s advertisers more conscious of the portrayals that Latinos found offensive. But, as in the case of the Blacks, the advertising industry failed to apply the lessons learned from one group to other racial minorities.

Although national advertisers withdrew much of the advertising that negatively stereotyped Blacks and Latinos, sometimes replacing them with affluent, successful images that were as far removed from reality as the negative portrayals of the past, the advances made by those groups were not shared with Native Americans and Asians. Native Americans’ names and images, no longer depicted either as the noble savage or as cute cartoon characters, have all but disappeared from broadcast commercials and print advertising. The major exceptions are advertising for automobiles and trucks that bear names such as Pontiac, Dakota, and Navajo and sports teams with racial nicknames such as the Kansas City Chiefs, Washington Redskins, Florida State University Seminoles, Atlanta Braves, and Cleveland Indians. Native Americans and others have protested these racial team names and images, as well as the pseudo-Native American pageantry and souvenirs that accompany many of them, but with no success in getting them changed.

Asians, particularly Japanese, continue to be dealt more than their share of commercials depicting them in stereotypes that cater to the fears and stereotypes of White America. As was the case with Blacks and Latinos, it took organized protests from Asian American groups to get the message across to the corporations and their advertising agencies. In the mid-1970s, a southern California supermarket chain agreed to remove a television campaign in which a young Asian karate-chopped his way down

the store's aisles cutting prices. Nationally, several firms whose industries have been hard-hit by Japanese imports fought back through commercials, if not in the quality or prices of their products. One automobile company featured an Asian family carefully looking over a new car and commenting on its attributes in heavily accented English. Only after they bought it did they learn it was made in the United States, not Japan. Another automobile company that markets cars manufactured in Japan under an English-language name showed a parking lot attendant opening the doors of the car, only to find the car speaking to him in Japanese. For several years Sylvania television ran a commercial boasting that its television picture had repeatedly been selected over competing brands as an off-screen voice with a Japanese accent repeatedly asked, "What about Sony?" When the announcer responded that the Sylvania picture had also been selected over Sony's, the off-screen voice ran off shouting what sounded like a string of Japanese expletives. A 1982 *Newsweek* article observed that "attacking Japan has become something of a fashion in corporate ads" because of resentment over Japanese trade policies and sales of Japanese products in the United States, but quoted Motorola's advertising manager as saying, "We've been as careful as we can be" not to be racially offensive.⁶

But many of the television and print advertisements featuring Asians featured images that were racially insensitive, if not offensive. A commercial for a laundry product featured a Chinese family that used an "ancient Chinese laundry secret" to get their customers' clothes clean. Naturally, the Chinese secret turned out to be the packaged product paying for the advertisement. Companies pitching everything from pantyhose to airlines featured Asian women coiffed and costumed as seductive China dolls or exotic Polynesian natives to pitch and promote their products, some of them cast in Asian settings and others attentively caring for the needs of the Anglo men in the

advertisement. One airline boasted that those who flew with it would be under the care of the Singapore Girl.

Asian women appearing in commercials were often featured as China dolls with the small, darkened eyes, straight hair with bangs, and a narrow, slit skirt. Another common portrayal featured the exotic, tropical Pacific Islands look, complete with flowers in the hair, a sarong or grass skirt, and shell ornament. Asian women hoping to become models sometimes found that they must conform to these stereotypes or lose assignments. Leslie Kawai, the 1981 Tournament of Roses Queen, was told to cut her hair with bangs by hairstylists when she auditioned for a beer advertisement. When she refused, the beer company decided to hire another model with shorter hair cut in bangs.⁷

The lack of a sizable Asian community, or market, in the United States was earlier cited as the reason that Asians are still stereotyped in advertising and, except for children's advertising, are rarely presented in integrated settings. The growth rate and income of Asians living in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, however, reinforced the economic potential of Asian Americans to overcome the stereotyping and lack of visibility that Blacks and Latinos challenged with some success. By the mid-1980s there were a few signs that advertising was beginning to integrate Asian Americans into crossover advertisements that, like the Tostitos campaign, were designed to have a broad appeal. In one commercial, television actor Robert Ito was featured telling how he loves to call his relatives in Japan because the calls make them think that he is rich, as well as successful, in the United States. Of course, he adds, it is only because the rates of his long distance carrier were so low that he was able to call Japan so often.

In the 1970s mass audience advertising in the United States became more racially integrated than at any time in the nation's history. Blacks, and to a much lesser extent

Latinos and Asians, could be seen in television commercials spread across the broadcast week and in major magazines. In fact, the advertisements on network television often appeared to be more fully integrated than the television programs they supported. Like television, general circulation magazines also experienced an increase in the use of Blacks, although studies of both media showed that most of the percentage increase had come by the early 1970s. By the early 1970s the percentage of prime-time television commercials featuring Blacks had apparently leveled off at about 10%. Blacks were featured in between only 2% and 3% of magazine advertisements as late as 1978. That percentage, however small, was a sharp increase from the 0.06% of news magazine advertisements reported in 1960.⁸

The gains were also socially significant, because they demonstrated that Blacks could be integrated into advertisements without triggering a White backlash among potential customers in the White majority. Both sales figures and research conducted since the late 1960s have shown that the integration of Black models into television and print advertising does not adversely affect sales or the image of the product. Instead, a study by the American Newspaper Publishers Association showed, the most important influences on sales were the merchandise and the advertisement itself. In fact, while triggering no adverse affect among the majority of Whites, integrated advertisements were found to be useful in swaying Black consumers, who responded favorably to positive Black role models in print advertisements.⁹ Studies conducted in the early 1970s also showed that White consumers did not respond negatively to advertising featuring Black models, although their response was more often neutral than positive.¹⁰ One 1972 study examining White backlash, however, did show that an advertisement prominently featuring darker-skinned Blacks was less acceptable to Whites than those featuring

lighter-skinned Blacks as background models.¹¹ Perhaps such findings help explain why research conducted later in the 1970s revealed that, for the most part, Blacks appearing in magazine and television advertisements were often featured as part of an integrated group.¹²

Although research findings have shown that integrated advertisements do not adversely affect sales, the percentage of Blacks and other minorities in general audience advertising did not increase significantly after the numerical gains made through the mid-1970s. Those minorities who did appear in advertisements were often depicted in upscale or integrated settings, an image that the Balch Institute's Stolarik criticized as taking advertising "too far in the other direction and created stereotypes of 'successful' ethnic group members that are as unrealistic as those of the past."¹³ Equally unwise, from a business sense, was the low numbers of Blacks appearing in advertisements.

Advertisers and their ad agencies must evaluate the direct economic consequences of alternative strategies on the firm. If it is believed that the presence of Black models in advertisements decreases the effectiveness of advertising messages, only token numbers of Black models will be used,

wrote marketing professor Lawrence Soley at the conclusion of a 1983 study.

Previous studies have found that advertisements portraying Black models do not elicit negative affective or conative responses from consumers. . . . Given the consistency of the research findings, more Blacks should be portrayed in advertisements. If Blacks continue to be underrepresented in advertising portrayals, it can be said that this is an indication of prejudice on the part of the advertising industry, not consumers.¹⁴

◆ *Courtship of Spanish Gold and the Black Market*

Although Soley stopped short of accusing corporate executives of racial prejudice, he contended that a “counterpressure” to full integration of Blacks into mainstream media portrayals was that “advertising professionals are businessmen first and moralists second.”¹⁵ If so, then it was the business mentality of advertising and corporate professionals that led them into increasingly aggressive advertising and marketing campaigns to capture minority consumers, particularly Blacks and Latinos, in the 1970s and 1980s.

Long depicted as low-end consumers with little money to spend, Black and Latino customers became more important to national and regional advertisers of mainstream goods who took a closer look at the size, composition, and projected growth of those groups. Asian Americans, who experienced a sharp percentage growth in the 1970s and were generally more affluent than Blacks and Latinos, were not targeted to the same extent, probably because of their relatively small numbers and differences in national languages among the groups. And, except for regions in which they comprised a sizable portion of the population, Native Americans were largely ignored as potential consumers of mainstream products.

One part of the courtship of Blacks and Latinos grew out of the civil rights movements of the 1960s, in which both Blacks and Latinos effectively used consumer boycotts to push issues ranging from ending segregation to organizing farmworkers. Boycotts had long been threatened and used by minority consumers as economic leverage on social issues. But in the 1960s Black ministers organized the Philadelphia Selective Patronage Program in which Blacks did business with companies that supported their goals of more jobs for Blacks. This

philosophy of repaying the corporations that invest in the minority communities through consumer purchases was replicated in other cities. It was followed by slick advertising campaigns directed at minority consumers. In 1984 the same line of thinking led to the brewers of Coors beer attempting to end disputes with Blacks and Latinos by signing controversial agreements with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and five national Latino groups that committed the brewery to increase its financial support of the activities of those organizations as Blacks and Latinos increased their drinking of Coors beer.

A second, and more influential, element of the courtship has been the hard-selling job of advertising agencies and media specializing in the Black and Spanish-speaking Latinos. Spurred by the thinking of Black advertising executive D. Parke Gibson in his 1968 book *The \$30 Billion Negro* and a steady stream of articles on Black and Latino consumers in media trade publications, national advertisers became aware of the fact that minorities were potential consumers for a wide range of products. The advertisers also were persuaded that the inattention they had previously received from mainstream products made Blacks and Latinos respond more favorably and with greater loyalty to those products that courted them through advertisements on billboards and in the publications and broadcast stations used by Latinos and Blacks.

The third, and most far-reaching, element in the courtship was a fundamental change in the thinking of marketing and advertising executives that swayed them away from mass audience media. Witnessing the success they had in advertising on radio stations and magazines targeted to specific audience segments following the advent of television as the dominant mass medium in the 1950s, advertising agencies advised their clients to go after their potential customers identified with market segments, rather than the mass audience.

Advertisers found that differences in race, like differences in sex, residence, family status, and age, were easy to target through advertising appeals targeted to media whose content was designed to attract men or women, young or old, suburban or rural, Black or White, Spanish or English speaking. These media, in turn, produced audience surveys to show they were effective in reaching and delivering specific segments of the mass audience. By the mid-1980s, market and audience segmentation had become so important to advertisers that the term *mass media* was becoming an anachronism.

“It is a basic tenet of marketing that you go after markets with rifles, not shotguns. It is foolhardy—and idealistic in the worst way—to try to sell the same thing to everyone in the same way,” wrote Caroline R. Jones, executive vice president of Mingo-Jones Advertising, in a 1984 article in the advertising trade magazine *Madison Avenue*.

Good marketing involves breaking down potential markets into homogeneous segments; targeting the most desirable segments; and developing creative programs, tailored for each segment, that make your messages look different from your competitors’. All of that should be done with the guidance of thorough research on characteristics, beliefs and preferences of the people in the targeted markets.¹⁶

Like others who have pitched minority audiences to major corporations as ripe targets for slick advertisements, Jones advised advertising professionals reading the magazine to target advertising to Black consumers because “*there’s money in it.*” Among the factors she cited as making Blacks desirable customers was a reported disposable income of more than \$150 million, a “high propensity for brand names and indulgence items,” a high degree of “brand loyalty,” a young and growing population, growing education and income, concentration in the nation’s largest

25 cities, and “its own growing media network.”¹⁷

Much the same approach has been used to sell Latinos to advertising agencies as a target too good to be passed up. A 1965 article on Latino consumers in the advertising trade magazine *Sponsor* was headlined “America’s Spanish Treasure,” a 1971 *Sales Management* article proclaimed “Brown Is Richer Than Black,” and in 1972 *Television/Radio Age* advised readers, “The Spanish Market: Its Size, Income and Loyalties Make It a Rich Marketing Mine.”¹⁸ In addition to the characteristics that were cited as making Blacks an attractive market, Latinos have been depicted as being especially vulnerable to advertisements because their use of Spanish supposedly cuts them off from advertising in English-language media. Thus, advertisers are advised to use the language and culture that are familiar with their target audience to give their messages the greatest delivery and impact.

“U.S. Hispanics are most receptive to media content in the Spanish language,” wrote Antonio Guernica in a 1982 book titled *Reaching the Hispanic Market Effectively*.¹⁹ Guernica and others have counseled advertisers to package their commercial messages in settings that are reinforced by Latino culture and traditions. These appeals link the product being advertised with the language, heritage, and social system that Latinos are most comfortable with, thus creating the illusion that the product belongs in the Latino home.

“The language, the tradition, the kitchen utensils are different” (in a Latino home) said Shelly Perlman, media buyer for the Hispania division of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency in a 1983 *Advertising Age* article.

There are ads one can run in general media that appeal to everyone but that contain unmistakable clues to Hispanics that they are being sought. It can be done with models, with scene and set design—a whole array of factors.²⁰

Corporations seeking the Latino dollar also have been told to picture their products with Latino foods, celebrities, cultural events, community events, and family traditions. The goal has been to adapt the product to make it appear to be a part of the Latino lifestyle in the United States, which often requires being sensitive to the language, food, and musical differences among Latinos in different parts of the nation and from different countries in Latin America.

For both Blacks and Latinos the slick advertising approach often means selling high-priced, prestige products to low-income consumers who have not fully shared in the wealth of the country in which they live. But Blacks and Latinos, who have median family incomes well below national averages, have been nonetheless targeted as consumers for premium brand names in all product lines and particularly in liquor, beer, and cigarettes. In response, Black and Latino community groups and health organizations in the 1990s protested the targeting of alcohol and tobacco products to their communities and, in some cases, forced outdoor advertising companies to restrict the number of such billboards in these communities.

Through the 1990s, corporations making and marketing products ranging from beer to diapers tried to show Blacks and Latinos that consumption of their goods is part of the good life in America. It may not be a life that they knew when they grew up in the ghetto, barrio, or in another country. It may not even be a life that they or their children will ever achieve, but it is a lifestyle and happiness they can share by purchasing the same products used by the rich and famous. Prestige appeals are used in advertising to all audiences, not just minorities. But they have a special impact on those who are so far down on the socioeconomic scale that they are especially hungry for anything that will add status or happiness to their lives and help them show others that they are "making it." The advertisements promote conspicuous consumption, rather than hard work and savings, as the key to the good life. . . .

By recognizing elements of the Black or Latino experience that may have been ignored by White Americans, the advertisers also play on national or racial pride to boost sales of their products. In the 1970s, Anheuser-Busch commissioned a series of glossy advertisements commemorating the Great Kings of Africa, and Schlitz produced a Chicano history calendar. These and similar advertising campaigns provided long overdue recognition of Black and Latino heritage, but they also prominently displayed the corporate symbols of their sponsors and were designed to boost the sale of beer more than to recognize overlooked historical figures and events. . . .

The media targeted to non-Whites are eager to promote themselves as the most effective way to reach consumers of color. In 1974 one of New York's Black newspapers, the *Amsterdam News*, vigorously attacked the credibility of a New York *Daily News* audience survey that showed it reached more Black readers than the *Amsterdam News*. In a 1979 *Advertising Age* advertisement, *La Opinión*, Los Angeles's Spanish-language daily newspaper, promised advertisers it could show them how to "Wrap Up the Spanish-language Market." Advertising is the lifeblood of the print and broadcast media in the United States, and media that target people of color have been quick to promote themselves as the most effective vehicles for penetrating and persuading the people in their communities to purchase the products advertised on their airwaves and in their pages.

How Loud Is the Not-so- Silent Partner's Voice? ◆

Minority-formatted publications and broadcasters depend on advertising to support their media. They have benefited from the increased emphasis on market segmentation by promoting the consumption patterns of the audiences they reach and their

own effectiveness in delivering persuasive commercial messages to their readers, listeners, and viewers. But advertising is also a two-edged sword that expects to take more money out of a market segment than it invests in advertising to that segment. Black and Spanish-language media will benefit from the advertising dollars of national corporations only as long as dollars are the most cost-effective way for advertisers to persuade Blacks and Latinos to use their products. This places the minority-formatted media in an exploitative relationship with their audience, who because of language, educational, and economic differences sometimes are exposed to a narrower range of media than Whites. Advertisers support the media that deliver the audience with the best consumer profile at the lowest cost, not necessarily the media that best meet the information and entertainment needs of their audience.

The slick, upscale lifestyle used by national advertisers is more a goal than a reality for most Blacks and Latinos. It is achieved through education, hard work, and equal opportunity. Yet advertisers promote consumption of their products as the short-cut to the good life, a quick fix for low-income consumers. The message to their low-income audience is clear: You may not be able to live in the best neighborhoods, wear the best clothes, or have the best job, but you can drink the same liquor, smoke the same cigarettes, and drive the same car as those who do. At the same time, advertising appeals that play on the cultural or historical heritage of Blacks and Latinos make the products appear to be “at home” with minority consumers. Recognizing the importance of national holidays and the forgotten minority history, they have joined with Blacks and Latinos in commemorating dates, events, and persons. But they also piggy-back their commercial messages on the recognition of events, leaders, or heroes. Persons or events that in their time represented protest against slavery, oppression, or discrimination are now used to sell products.

Advertising, like mining, is an extractive industry. It enters the ghetto and barrio with a smiling face to convince all within its reach that they should purchase the products advertised and purchase them often. It has no goal other than to stimulate consumption of the product; the subsidization of the media is merely a by-product. But owners of minority-formatted media, having gained through the increased advertising investments of major corporations, now have greater opportunities to use those increased dollars to improve news and entertainment content and, thus, better meet their social responsibility to their audience. Unlike advertisers, who may support socially responsible activities for the purpose of promoting their own images, minority publishers and broadcasters have a long, though sometimes spotty, record of advocating the rights of the people they serve. Their growing dependence on major corporations and national advertising agencies should do nothing to blunt that edge as long as the audiences they serve continue to confront a system of inequality that keeps them below national norms in education, housing, income, health, and other social indicators.

Notes ◆

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