

Segmenting America: Consumer Marketing after 1945

By

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Introduction

Throughout the month of April 1990, after each of his Sunday sermons, the Reverend Calvin Butts led his congregation out of Abyssinian Church in Harlem, New York, carrying buckets of white paint and long-handled roller brushes. On each of these spring mornings, the congregation set up at busy street corners and proceeded to paint over the many billboards featuring tobacco and alcohol advertisements that had multiplied throughout Harlem over the past few years. On these newly blank canvases, the congregation painted works of art recognizing members of their community. Where a massive billboard at 138th and Lennox had once advertised Salem Cigarettes, it now offered a happy 85th birthday to Clara Hale, the founder of Hale House, a respite home for precariously housed youth living with addiction or HIV. The congregation's protest action garnered media coverage across the United States. They were featured prominently in debates over what the protestors called "target marketing": the act of directing corporate ads to specific communities, extracting profit by needling the weaknesses caused by ongoing structural inequities.¹

News organizations invited a number of commentators to join Reverend Butts in debating the merits of targeted marketing or, as it had been known in marketing circles for nearly half a century, "consumer market segmentation." One such commentator was the African American marketing executive Caroline Jones. Jones owned Caroline Jones Advertising, a small but well-recognized advertising and marketing firm. Where Butts argued the case of Harlem residents besieged by billboard advertisements, calling for community control over the billboards in their

¹ Stephanie Strom, "Billboard Owners Switching, Not Fighting," *New York Times*, April 4, 1990, B1, cont. on B4.

neighborhoods, Jones took a decidedly different approach. Across speeches at trade events, appearances as a talking head in the news, and in guest pieces for magazines columns such as *Penthouse's* *Advise and Dissent*, Jones focused on how marketing was being framed in the debate. The tobacco industry wasn't over-targeting black consumers, she suggested. Rather, Jones argued that most other merchandisers were to blame because they simply ignored people of color. "[W]hat looks like a *concentration* of cigarette and liquor advertising" she argued, "is due to the *lack* of other kinds of messages. Where are the stereos, perfumes, jewelry, clothes, [or] baby food?" The issue, she suggested, was the lack of robust and engaged advertising toward black consumers writ large. Jones' narrative suggested that Butts and his congregation had missed the point: African American consumers wanted more advertising, not less. In turn, she called for tobacco companies – and merchandisers of all stripes – to consider hiring the black advertising and marketing experts who knew this community well.



(Figure 1: Members of Rev. Butts' Congregation. Photographer: Jim Wilson, *New York Times*, June 1990).

As a marketing professional, Jones knew the power tobacco corporations commanded in the American media landscape and her arguments were purposefully cast to draw their attention. For example, by 1988, the tobacco and cookie conglomerate R.J. Reynolds-Nabisco was the fourth largest advertiser in the United States, commanding enormous sway across the entire advertising and marketing industry.² Jones' narrative purposefully elided any wrongdoing on the part of such organizations. She moved blame onto other merchandisers and, in the process, constructed a monolithic national black consumer market that was deeply amiable to more advertising, not less. More importantly for Jones, however, her claims signaled to Big Tobacco that she was an ally as well as a potential advertising and marketing consultant. This strategy worked: R.J. Reynolds-Nabisco followed the Abyssinian protests and Jones' response closely – this was not surprising, given that they were one of the merchandisers with ads being painted over. Their media relations team took note of Jones' comments. They suggested she could assist the conglomerate in weathering the protests and the negative press to come.³

What was it that major media outlets took to Caroline Jones? Why did they equate this marketing professional with an activist and preacher like Calvin Butts? She ran a small ship, so to speak. Her advertising and marketing firm was miniscule compared to many of the advertising agencies operating through the 1980s and 1990s, and she lacked the scores of researchers, consultants, and analysts that such agencies employed. Yet at the same time, Jones and small-scale marketers like her commanded the attention of some of the largest merchandisers and

² Judann Dagnoli, "Reynolds Smoulders; Saatchi dismissal prompts look at all agencies" *Advertising Age*, April 11, 1988, p 1.

³ Memo to P.J. Hault from T.C. Harris, "Advertising Agency for Black Market," January 9, 1990. RJ Reynolds Records. Unknown. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/ffbl0094>. See also Julian Dagnoli, "RJR's Uptown Targets Blacks," December 18, 1989, Lorillard Records, <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/xrhh0055>; R. Griggs, "Black Cigarette Come Under Fire," *Adweek*, January 22, 1990, Philip Morris Records. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/fzhd0090>.

media organizations of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Why did these organizations embrace Jones as an expert on African American needs and wants in the United States? The vision of a singular black community that she put forward in the press was a marketing vehicle designed to attract the eye of potential clients like R.J. Reynolds-Nabisco. She was not an advocate for these communities per se. If anything, her arguments stood in opposition to the ones made by Butts, who wanted to put power in the hands of his own community. Yet CNN and a host of other organizations and institutions understood Jones and other marketing professionals like her to be experts on American society and its divisions. How did such marketing experts come to have the power to *speak* for the very communities they packaged, promoted, and ultimately sold? This dissertation project seeks to understand exactly this phenomenon.

“Segmenting America” addresses a series of historical questions concerning the relationship between market segmentation, American culture, and capitalism in the second half of the twentieth century. It asks: how have post-war marketers, as commercial brokers essential to driving consumer sales, sought to produce and manage specific kinds of consumer types in response to major social changes and political contestations during the second-half of the twentieth century? What role have these marketing constructions played in the development of post-war U.S. capitalism, culture, and society? What have the differential effects of the construction of distinct consumer segments cast along lines of race, class, and gender been on the communities that marketers like Caroline Jones packaged and promoted? And finally, how have the marketing professionals charted throughout this study come to shape our collective sense of public life, history, and culture?

While “Segmenting America” seeks to understand how market segmentation enabled a professional class of marketers to make claims on American culture and society, this project is

also driven by a parallel desire to locate marketing *in* culture. It resists the marketer's narrative of social control and management, exploring the ways in which the stories they tell are so often taken up and naturalized in our collective public memory. Just as Jones did with Big Tobacco, marketing experts set narratives that promise merchandisers control over their consumers. However, a marketer's success with such claims is always shaped by their social positions within larger hierarchies of power. As the Abyssinian protests suggest, the campaigns, arguments, and ideas about consumers put forward by marketing professionals are by no means uncritically accepted by everyday people, nor are merchandisers or other marketing professionals eager to wholly accept claims made by their colleagues within the profession. In this way, this project attends to questions about the limits of marketing as well as the bidirectional nature of influence in a profession near-obsessed with control. It asks: which marketing professionals could make claims on the general market, and which were relegated to niche or segmented markets? As the marketing profession grew in prestige and public recognition through the 1950s and into the 1960s, how were their theories of consumption and desire contested by actors outside the profession? And, as their ideas came to define the terms of American culture, *how* and *why* did some communities begin to condemn segmentation? "Segmenting America" answers these questions and more by situating marketing professionals, their firms, and the elaborations of the consumer marketplace and U.S. society within the broader history of the twentieth century United States.

The niche marketing firms under examination in this study were unlike the advertising agencies that had handled market research throughout the first half of the twentieth century.⁴

⁴ Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Stephen R. Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (University of Illinois Press, 1984); Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for*

They were smaller and more agile organizations, often operated by people who had founded them and specializing in specific kinds of consumer markets, either by choice or by commercial necessity. By their very premise, these organizations rejected the long-held and powerful notion of a national white middle-class mass market, a vision of a capitalist market society that had defined much of the first half of the twentieth century. Their market research, consultation, campaign pitches, and public-facing writing in the popular press advanced a very different vision of the consumer marketplace: one segmented by age, race, gender, and class. As marketing professionals, they tethered their work to the claim that they could assist merchandisers and advertising agencies in developing campaigns that spoke meaningfully to specific consumer segments that eluded corporate executives and CEOs, many of whom worried they had grown too distant from ordinary people to understand the rhythm and flow of everyday life.

Although market segmentation flourished in the post-war decades, consumer market research itself has a history that begins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during the United States' transition to an industrial capitalist consumer economy. Throughout this period, the study of desire and the ways it could be channeled to shape purchasing decisions became an essential element of advertising strategy. Historians of business and culture from Susan Strasser onwards have documented the rise of this new consumer society and the actors

Modernity, 1920-1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Elspeth H Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884-1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Charles F. McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Katherine J Parkin, *Food Is Love: Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Lawrence R. Samuel, *Freud on Madison Avenue: Motivation Research and Subliminal Advertising in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Australia; Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012).

who drove the relentless expansion of commercial marketing and merchandising systems in the early decades of the twentieth century. They have catalogued the array of marketing consultants, PR experts, advertising executives, and other players who fleshed out a body of thought based on not only producing but also commanding and managing consumer desire.⁵

During the first half of the twentieth century, many large American manufacturers developed a mass market framework for producing, advertising, and selling their goods. Under this model, standardized products were churned out at a rapid pace and little variation, with major manufacturers banking on high volume to turn low margins into robust profits. Of course, even within this mass market paradigm, forms of segmentation existed in large, established industries like automobiles and confections. This segmentation was a question of product, however, not customer. For example, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, large merchandisers deployed products at specific ‘price classes’ that shaped cost and production numbers. For example, General Motors’ 1925 “A Car for Every Purse and Purpose” campaign organized their makes around certain costs and production volumes in a pyramid shape. Cadillac sat atop the pyramid, with the highest price and lowest volume; meanwhile, Chevrolet occupied the bottom, with the lowest price and the highest volume. Such mass marketing divisions segmented products by cost.⁶ This framework assumed that when the earning power of a potential buyer grew, they would climb the pyramid, ascending to a new set of purchase options.

⁵ Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington, D.C.: Pantheon Books, 1989); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Richard S. Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Philip Scranton, *Endless Novelty: Specialty Production and American Industrialization, 1865-1925*, Revised ed. edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Pamela Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Brown, *The Corporate Eye*.

⁶ On price classes and pyramids, see Oliver Zunz, *Why the American Century?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 94-96. Scholars of specific manufacturers have documented this phenomenon. Historian Regina Blaszczyk has argued that glass and ceramics merchandisers began to

Where this model was applied to consumers, it replicated a parallel, stratified class formulation. For example, during the 1920s, a similar model of classification had been developed at J. Walter Thompson: the ABCD model. This model was used to sort families into specific class positions, making door-to-door sales more efficient. Class A homes were those of considerable wealth; Class B families were “comfortable middle class homes” which were “personally directed by intelligent women”; Class C homes were those of “skilled mechanics, mill operators, or petty trades people (no servants)” and Class D were either unskilled laborers or located in “foreign districts” where it was difficult “for American ways to penetrate.”⁷ Such a model was concerned primarily with slotting homes into income categories roughly correlated to employment and ethnicity. It assumed, as one post-war marketing critic would later suggest of the mass market model, that “a rich man is simply a poor man with more money,” and that “given the same income, the poor man would behave exactly like the rich man.”⁸

The marketing professionals examined in “Segmenting America” were part of a transition in market segmentation from product to the consumer. This transition was not the result of marketing innovation, though a number of the marketers under consideration here suggest they invented the concept, but rather the result of a variety of factors: growing wages, activist pressure, and state intervention, to name but a few. In the years after the Second World War, post-war marketing experts drummed up business for themselves by arguing that the specific

think in terms of class markets by the 1920s and 1930s. See Regina Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).
⁷ Cited in Jean M. Converse, *Survey Research in the United States, its Roots and Emergence, 1890-1960*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987): 113; Stefan Schwarzkopf, “Discovering the Consumer: Market Research, Product Innovation, and the Creation of Brand Loyalty in Britain and the United States in the Interwar Years” *Journal of Macromarketing* Vol. 29, No. 1 (March 2009): 8-20; “Agency in Action: Learning our ABCD’s” *Advertiser’s Weekly*, March 12, 1936, 360-1.
⁸ Pierre Martineau, “Social Classes and Spending Behavior,” *Journal of Marketing* Vol. 23 (October 1958): 121-30, quote from 122-23.

social positions of American consumers brought with them distinct universes of evolving wants and needs that did not necessarily climb a teleological class hierarchy en route to secure, middle-class American whiteness. Such a consumer was “profoundly different in his mode of thinking and his way of handling the world” from those who stood outside his social position. “[W]here he buys and what he buys will differ not only by economics” argued one marketing professional capitalizing on this shift, “but in symbolic value” as well. These marketing professionals made their pitch to merchandisers by arguing that their marketing shops, their marketing techniques, and their staff alone had access to the “modes of thinking” and ways “of handling the world” that shaped their particular segments’ impetus to buy.⁹ The specific markets these actors made were a kind of intellectual commodity themselves: constructions designed to tether access to these markets to the firms that these marketing professionals worked for. Their claims suggested that their keen insights alone would translate into deeper brand loyalty and perhaps even higher margins on the goods a merchandiser sold.¹⁰ “Segmenting America” follows how marketing professionals took up social and cultural categories as tools for making market segments. I show how they deployed race, gender, and class together to construct segments like the “working women’s market” or the “low income urban black consumer” defined on terms amiable to both themselves and their potential clients.

As market segmentation proliferated through the 1940s and 1950s, the concept of a coherent, singular mass market as it had been understood through the first half of the twentieth

⁹ Pierre Martineau, “Social Classes and Spending Behavior,” 122-23.

¹⁰ On post-war mass consumption and segmentation generally, see Joseph Turow, *Breaking Up America: Advertisers and the New Media World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), “Roots of Division”; Gary S. Cross, *All Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); “A New Consumerism,” Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, 1 edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003): 292-345.

century buckled. This concern was not lost on merchandisers and analysts of the period: some took segmentation as a sign, questioning if the very concept of a national market had always been a kind of “myth” about reach and market penetration.¹¹ Even so, the stakes of a coherent national market were high and despite calls otherwise, the concept endured. The concept had served as a proxy for American political and democratic life since the 1880s, a vision of buyers and sellers firmly limited to a respectable middle-class whiteness. For example, some of the first firms to construct and sell a national “mass” market in the 1880s – such as the Curtis Publishing Company, which produced both the *Saturday Evening Post* and *The Ladies Home Journal* – had systematically worked to create a “national” market that screened out both working people and people of color.¹² Enduring ideas about the whiteness of the mass (and as it came to be known towards the end of the twentieth century the “general”) market complicated the work of post-war marketing experts, especially those who specialized in selling communities of color. Well into the 1990s, marketing arguments about the economic buying power of black consumers or working women were forced to strike a careful balance between promising merchandisers exciting, new commercial opportunities and potentially challenging the hierarchies of race and gender embedded in the general market. Often, merchandisers intuited these opportunities as potential risks, measuring the value of these markets against access to the general, and fearing that advertising campaigns that spoke to marginalized communities might undermine their

¹¹ Jack B. Weiner, "Myth of the National Market," *Dun's Review and Modern Industry* Vol. 83 (May 1964): 40-41.

¹² Douglas Ward, “Capitalism, early market research, and the creation of the American consumer,” *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* Vol. 1, No. 2 (2009): 210. On ‘national’ broadcasts as fantasy in the 1920s, see Michelle Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 183.

product or brand's success in the general market of ostensibly white, lower-middle class consumers.¹³

The tools and techniques of post-war market research were partly derived from massive state and private investments in mid-century “social science”, a connection which enabled marketing to become its own scholarly field supported by a vast array of university business schools, academic journals, trade publications, scholarly and professional associations, and conferences. However, the “discipline” of marketing looked decidedly different from other social sciences of the period. Scholarly outlets like the *Journal of Marketing* (first published in 1934) or the *Journal of Consumer Research* (first published in 1974) were as likely to include articles written by directors of research at large and small advertising and marketing firms as they were to feature work by university professors – many of whom often owned or consulted for marketing firms themselves. What's more, where sociological or anthropological research was published and accessible to the public—or at least other academics in the field—the vast majority of the actual market research that informed marketing strategy remained proprietary. Instead, marketing professionals filled their journals and trade publications with commentary and critique on general methods, topics of concern, and techniques. In its quasi-secretive orientation, mid-century and post-war marketing was a distinctly capitalist academic formation and site of knowledge production operating across universities and corporations alike. Its emergence as a social science throughout the 1950s, complete with university departments, academic publications, and an accompanying trade press industry, served to both legitimate the profession

¹³ Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); Julian Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness; Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1890-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Anna G. Creadick, *Perfectly Average: The Pursuit of Normality in Postwar America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010).

as well as lend veracity to the conclusions it forwarded about the specific populations and communities which marketing professionals called into existence as consumers.

Of course, not all marketing experts could access these institutional networks. Many were denied on the basis of race, gender, or class position. Instead, these marketers seized upon the premium that mid-century marketing placed upon culture as a category. These marketers, such as Estelle Ellis, the focus of chapter one, claimed that their own gender, race and class position *endowed* them with specific insights into the kinds of people they purported to represent, constructing a consumer type that was amiable to potential clients. They used these claims to work both themselves and their marketing ideas into these networks, claiming expert authority and developing their professional and public-facing image in the process.

By drawing upon psychology, anthropology, and sociology, marketing also adopted the ideological and cultural claims that such cognate fields carried with them at mid-century: a triumphalist vision of modernization and perfectibility that sought not simply to know the consumer and the ‘market’ writ large, but to command and control their future. The drive to know and control is central to market research. Since its earliest days, marketing and advertising professionals have been haunted by concerns over verifiability. Their work has been (and continues to be) complicated by an anxiety that haunts all market research: that people exceed their categories and that we cannot know, in any real way, why a person makes the decisions they do. This is why, throughout the twentieth century, marketing professionals conjured up new techniques for claiming control over the consumers they sold: these ranged from the psychoanalytic vogue of “motivational research” in the 1950s to large-scale, ‘data-driven’ quantitative approaches that would dominate the 1980s and 1990s.

As social change rocked the confidence of major merchandisers, marketers promised that these aforementioned techniques and tools, alongside their particular knowledge of consumers wants and needs, would steady the boat, revealing paths forward for executives who felt alienated by an uncertain future. By the end of the twentieth century, the profession would claim predictive power through the power of computational data analysis, promising both merchandisers and the public alike that their marketing techniques had the power to not only reveal “who we are” as a society, but “where we are going” as well.¹⁴ The field, then, has been defined by a futurist orientation deeply invested in the always-already new of technological modernity. By the end of the twentieth century, its language had evolved into a kind of technoscience which promised the state, major corporations, media institutions, non-profits and the public alike that it could understand, anticipate, and manage changes to come.¹⁵

This dissertation follows post-war niche and segmented marketing professionals as their ideas about who constituted American society and the nature of consumer desire and identity took off. It explores how their elaborations of the ideal consumer moved out of corporate boardrooms and into popular culture. It tracks how these marketing professionals promised merchandisers that they could make sense of and manage social change. Finally, it documents how these marketing experts remade themselves and their profession as a new breed of public intellectual, a professional class who claimed profound knowledge of the needs and desires of

¹⁴ Arnold Mitchell, *The Nine American Lifestyles: Who We Are and Where We Are Going* (New York: Macmillan, 1984).

¹⁵ Josh Lauer, *Creditworthy: A History of Consumer Surveillance and Financial Identity in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), esp. chapters 7 through 9; Dan Bouk, “The History and Political Economy of Personal Data over the Last Two Centuries in Three Acts.” *Osiris* 32, no. 1 (2017): 85–106. For a theoretical treatment of capitalist “seeing” through “infrastructures of calculation and experiment” like demography in the post-war years, see Michele Murphy, *The Economization of Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

the very communities they sold. The success of these marketing professionals and, in turn, of market segmentation, fundamentally transformed how we have thought about and understood the nature of consumption and social divisions in American life. “Segmenting America” tells this history.

Central Arguments

“Segmenting America” charts the emergence and transformation of market segmentation over the second half of the twentieth century. I argue that post-war marketing evolved through a tension between the desire to incorporate new kinds of consumers and publics into mass consumption regimes and the ongoing maintenance of an explicitly white, normative mass or general market. In particular, I chart how marketing professionals offered their services as a set of techniques to manage, respond to, and capitalize upon social changes which occurred during this period. Through six chapters, I explore this tension in three ways. First, I track marketing and market segmentation as concepts in culture. I explore the ways marketing responded to and was transformed by political contestations, by social transformations fueled by the call for civil rights, and by debates over the place of advertising in popular culture. In doing so, I follow how market segmentation transitioned from being understood as an opportunity to draw new consumers into the fruits of post-war capitalism to, by the end of the twentieth century, being condemned as a tool used by pernicious merchandisers to exploit particular communities for profit. Second, I attend to the opportunities that market segmentation created for new kinds of marketing professionals. I reveal how marketing professionals seized social upheavals like the women’s movement, the sexual revolution, or Civil Rights activist pressures to make their claims. I follow the ways in which segmentation both enabled and constrained the ability of

certain professionals to make claims about the nature of the communities they represented and to generate social power for themselves and potential sales for their clients. And third, I follow the development of the marketing concepts and consumer composites these professionals constructed, tracking the long-term effects of how they animated ideas about the teenage girl, the working woman, or the blue-collar housewife. I reveal the strategies they used to insert these figures into culture and I show how their ideas were taken up, contested, or naturalized by scholars, merchandisers, and ordinary people alike.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, marketing professionals began to talk about the distinct social positions that consumers occupied *within* the mass market. These marketing professionals forwarded specific segments along lines of gender and class difference but defined these categories on terms amiable to their clients as well as their own careers. Some of these marketing constructions advanced visions of gender in particular that cut against dominant tropes of the period. While these divisions troubled the idea of the homogenous mass market, they did not challenge the coherence and dominance of whiteness or the bounds of a public culture defined by Jim Crow. Rather, these experts argued that the teenage girl or the blue-collar housewife commanded the power of the American marketplace. They filled these types in with richly detailed profiles, endowing them with personalities, anxieties, and, most crucially, highly profitable visions of future consumption. These marketing professionals, coming from both the academy and elsewhere, pushed their research into public culture, remaking themselves as public intellectuals who keenly understood the nature of post-war society and had the power to both divine consumer want and to shape it.

Under pressure from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, marketing professionals were forced to confront African Americans as a part of the American consumer market. Activists

seized onto the claims these professionals made. They argued that if marketing had the power to shape consumer identity, then integration of the mass media could end American racism.

Marketers and merchandisers, however, responded to calls for integration by measuring how blackness might *risk* a product's viability in the general market. This logic of risk shaped how segmentation would operate well beyond the 1970s. While activist and state pressure would lead advertising agencies to train black marketing experts, these men and women (such as Caroline Jones) would be unable to secure general market contracts as merchandisers intuited black marketers and advertisers as experts solely in the African American market. Consequently, segmentation re-enforced a decidedly white vision of the American "mainstream" well into the 1980s.

In the 1960s and 1970s, advancements in the speed of data processing attracted marketing professionals interested in bringing their work to new scales. These professionals argued that these new, statistically-grounded techniques lent their work more veracity than qualitative research ever had. They proposed this as a movement 'beyond' divisions like race, gender, and class. However, as this "Segmenting America" reveals, new modes of data analysis simply shed the language of identity for claims of scientific objectivity. They reproduced the very same logic that segmentation had produced in the 1960s, swapping terms like the "black consumer" for new categories grounded in large-scale psychological testing and, in the process, further obscuring the structural inequalities which marketing could produce. By the end of the twentieth century, however, activists like the Abyssinian parishioners forced the uneven experiences of market segmentation into public discussion. Their advocacy built on decades of anti-tobacco organizing in the ongoing civil rights movement. It revealed to the American public how the kinds of advertisements seen by white "general market" consumers were drastically different from those

targeted at consumers of color, animating the nature of market segmentation, or ‘targeting’ as they called it, in an already unequal society.

Approach

This dissertation approaches marketing as a set of knowledge production practices embedded in culture. Post-war marketing professionals working at small firms spoke for the communities they packaged and promoted by constructing composite consumer types endowed with a specific set of market-oriented futures. They maneuvered themselves, their clients, and their marketing commodities into a variety of different post-war institutions, and they framed themselves as arbiters of the divisions within American public culture. We must understand these techniques to appreciate the ways in which market segmentation left an indelible mark on American culture, politics, and life in the post-war decades.

Constructing the Consumer Type

The post-war marketing professionals that I examine in “Segmenting America” did not simply discover new consumer markets in the transition from mass to niche (although they often claimed that they did). As I argue throughout, these small firms instead *constructed* the consumer categories that they claimed expertise in, drawing upon moments of significant social and cultural change to claim expertise. In other words, the mass market did not organically fracture along pre-existing lines like gender, race, or class. While professional marketers traded in this language, the narratives they brought to merchandisers were manufactured and far more complex.

Post-war marketing firms relied on specific consumer types built around ideas about sex, race, and class position that are amiable to merchandisers. Their market constructions are what

the communication scholar Dallas Smythe has called the “audience commodity”: packaged abstractions meant to teach merchandisers who a consumer was.¹⁶ To lend these narrative constructions weight, marketing professionals turned to different strategies, which were simultaneously constrained by their own social position as well as popular ideas about the racialized and gendered consumer markets they represented. For African American consumer markets, marketing professionals like Caroline Jones moved within the narrow range of black representations that merchandisers understood and were comfortable with. These shaped both her strategic self-presentation to merchandisers as well as the marketing claims she could make. For women like Estelle Ellis, a marketing executive who specialized in young white women, the mid-century possessive investment in whiteness enabled the promise of upward mobility and long-term return. Other marketing experts capitalized upon advancements in social science research, deploying the latest quantitative interview instruments, focus groups, and large-scale survey and survey analysis to make their case. Regardless of how advanced their techniques were purported to be, however, even the most complex mathematical marketing algorithms developed in the 1970s and 1980s were presented to merchandisers and the public alike as narrative portraits that collapsed entire communities into a singular type amiable to merchandisers’ preexisting ideas about who those consumers were and what the nature of their value could be.

In selling these narratives, marketing professionals presented their firms and themselves as novel opportunities for merchandisers to both make sense of social change and to draw new kinds of consumers into the market. However, the construct of the “ideal consumer” was ideal for the clients of these marketing firms, not the consumers that were being sold to. This

¹⁶On the audience as commodity, see Dallas Smythe’s foundational “Communications: blindspot of western Marxism,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* Vol. 1, No. 3 (1977): 1–27.

disconnect took advantage of the cultural, economic, and political distance between the corporate classes these marketers addressed and the consumers they claimed to represent. Marketing professionals like Jones framed their firms as an opportunity for major merchandisers to learn how to capitalize on change. They showed clients how to benefit from the sexual revolution, navigate the civil rights movement, and seize upon the West Coast counterculture. In doing so, marketing became understood as a way for merchandisers to better understand how the U.S. social climate was changing and what could be done to respond to it.

The promise to make sense of post-war social change was also the promise to control and manage it. The consumer profiles and composites developed by the marketing firms under consideration in “Segmenting America” all had an orientation towards the future. These firms and their leaders were as much interested in today’s consumer as they were in the consumer of tomorrow. In this way, market research not only collapsed difference into aggregate, homogenized, and digest-able narrative types, but also projected these types into the future as static categories that promised merchandisers long-term sales and security. Under such a framework, African Americans were profitable as perpetually low-income consumers; young white teenage girls promised a lifetime of brand loyalty as they became workers and later mothers; and working-class women were forever lost to modernity, easily sold on the promise of technological convenience and ease. As new communities were identified as potential marketing targets, post-war market segmentation and its orientation towards the future promised corporations a handle on the changing social and economic landscape of the United States.

Broadening the Marketing Concept

“Segmenting America” argues that marketing professionals rendered these narrative composites powerful by tapping into other professional fields and bending those fields to their needs. Whether personified in fictitious characters or narrated as a consumer type, marketing professionals’ consumer composites took on power as they were inserted into an expansive set of post-war institutions well beyond the field of market research. By moving their ideas into new arenas, marketers set the terms by which popular media, merchandisers, and public sector organizations imagined their own respective constitutive publics and long-term needs. In other words, the work of post-war marketing firms did not always look like marketing. They argued that the full valuation of their client’s campaigns, promotional vehicles, and more would not be realized until they were legible well beyond the market. In doing so, they sought to reframe blue chip corporations like Kimberly-Clark or General Mills as institutional authorities that represented advancements in public health, education, and more.

In addition to producing market research and consulting for clients, marketing professionals built up their own public image as well. They disseminated their own ideas by publishing pieces in various public-facing outlets. They published articles carrying their byline in American magazines like *Life*, *Redbook*, and *Penthouse* and, toward the end of the twentieth century, they appeared on CNN and other cable news channels. When Estelle Ellis or Lloyd Warner (the subject of chapter two) wrote for magazines and newspapers, they cast their marketing research – itself a commodity – as organic findings that revealed the true nature of American life. As their renown grew and media outlets and news companies wrote profiles about these marketers and their ideas, such profiles invited audiences to discover the “truth” of working women, African Americans, or other segments of the United States through these marketer’s perspective. In doing so, media outlets encouraged their readers to understand

themselves through marketing terms as well. Marketers' cultural and economic capital grew as they simultaneously advised American corporate behemoths, spoke to consumers, and positioned themselves as public intellectuals with insight into the changing shape of American society and its divisions.

In these ways, post-war marketing far exceeds the quiet and underhanded movements of a handful of "hidden persuaders."¹⁷ Throughout the post-war period, marketing became an increasingly public affair, one that centered the marketing professional and their expertise as a new way to understand American society. So much so that by the end of the twentieth century, the work of marketing would be understood as in conversation with other avenues for "seeing" total populations and their divisions. Magazines like *American Demographics*, first published in 1982 by *Advertising Age* publisher Crain Communications, would chronicle advancements in demography for four tightly-bound audiences: state demographers, academics, media professionals, and those in marketing and advertising. The pages of *American Demographics* reveal how these closely aligned professionals spoke to one another, swapped membership, and exchanged knowledge on new ways of thinking about, ordering, and imagining populations in the United States.

Market Segmentation and Public Life

The marketing practitioners examined in "Segmenting America" succeeded well beyond their wildest expectations in setting the narrative of post-war American life. As I argue

¹⁷ Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: D. McKay, Co., 1957). On this history, see Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Karen S. Miller, *The Voice of Business: Hill & Knowlton and Postwar Public Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010).

throughout, many of the marketing concepts and social divisions created by the marketers considered in this dissertation were taken up by journalists, critics, and historians not as marketing facts but as primary source evidence documenting the way things were. In many instances, marketers have written the first draft of history as their words and thinking circulated from press release to newspapers and magazines to professional and scholarly journals. Yet the arrival of market segmentation into public life (and the touting of these elaborations as *fact* by marketers) was not guaranteed, nor were these movements without contestation. Activists and organizers seized on both the language of market segmentation and theories of consumer identity forwarded by marketers to make their claims. As marketers offered merchandisers strategies for managing the civil rights movement or targeting communities of color, ordinary people pushed back. Indeed, even marketing critics of the 1950s grew concerned over the long-term impact of consultants, marketing advisors, and PR agents as their social power grew in the 1950s and 1960s. Some who followed the industry scrutinized the reach of this new professional class. The advertising critic Irwin Ross had already warned in 1959, those living in the United States breathed “an atmosphere drenched with the clichés of public relations.”¹⁸ Such critics worried wondered how one could determine truth when so much of the knowledge generated within corporations and circulated by marketing professionals was designed to redefine our social worlds on commercial terms. “Segmenting America” documents how, by the early 1960s, the saturation of marketing concepts and ideas in public life had already become undeniable.

Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, the language of market segmentation became more accessible to a consuming public, as did anxieties over its long-term social and economic effects. These concerns would come to a head in the 1990s, when debates over the ethics of marketing to

¹⁸ Irwin Ross, *The Image Merchants: The Fabulous World of Public Relations* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 26.

specific populations imperiled the practice by making its impact on American life and culture public. A series of massive data breaches in the 1980s occurred alongside the launch of a tobacco brand explicitly “targeting” African American youth. Protests pushed government officials to question whether segmentation should be regulated or allowed at all. Marketing professionals resisted the language of “targeting,” but the success of the protestors and other organizations forced new questions: was being rendered a consumer necessarily a pathway to citizenship? Or did the narratives deployed by marketers fundamentally limit opportunity for some while providing it for others? By the end of the twentieth century, market segmentation was no longer recognized as a way to draw different identities and communities into the market. Instead, the language of targeting, increasing concerns over surveillance, and widespread community condemnations all framed market segmentation as a fundamentally racist, inequitable practice.

Since the 1980s, media scholars have argued that the United States was “broken up” by a thousand channel universe.¹⁹ As “Segmenting America” reveals, the discourse of market segmentation and the “breaking up” of the United States was itself a product of marketing in the 1950s and 1960s, and one which did not map onto the reality of marketing during this period. Indeed, even the most technologically complex of late twentieth-century contemporary market segmentation practices – many of which were established through the technological advancement in computational data analysis and processing during the 1970s and 1980s – did not disaggregate the bulk of American consumers from one or two categories. The rhetoric of market division, adopted by historians and communications scholars alike, was itself a language developed by marketing professionals. Indeed, although the language of market segmentation

¹⁹ Joseph Turow, *Breaking Up America: Advertisers and the New Media World* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1997); Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer, *Fault Lines: A History of the United States Since 1974* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019).

may have drawn a wider diversity of narratives into American capitalism, by the end of the twentieth century, it largely served to reproduce the very inequalities that it promised to resolve.

Dissertation Organization

“Segmenting America” is comprised of six chapters organized into three sections that, taken together, illustrate how segmentation evolved over the second half of the twentieth century as a set of techniques for the management of social change and the production of consumer identities. Of course, this study is by no means exhaustive. Many different kinds of niche and segmented marketing firms formed, especially at the end of the twentieth century, specializing in many different gendered, sex, and racialized communities.²⁰ The marketing firms and concept I examine here spurred many of the strategies and conditions these later organizations navigated in their work. Section one, which is comprised of chapters one and two, examines how market segmentation emerged within the confines of a Jim Crow public culture. These chapters show how, during the 1940s through to the mid-1960s, marketing professionals established commodified visions of gender and class difference that drained contestation from them, rendering such categories amiable to their merchandiser clients. They examine how these marketing professionals worked their own concepts into popular culture and civil society and the opportunities these new formulations created for new kinds of marketing professionals and their

²⁰ Much of this scholarship comes out of anthropology and sociology. Arlene Dávila, *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People*, First Edition, Updated Edition, with a New Preface edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Marilyn Halter, *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity* (New York: Schocken, 2002); Katherine Sender, *Business, Not Politics the Making of the Gay Market* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Sarah Banet-Weiser, “The Business of Representing,” *American Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (June 15, 2006); Shalini Shankar, *Advertising Diversity: Ad Agencies and the Creation of Asian American Consumers* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); For a historical treatment, see David K. Johnson, *Buying Gay: How Physique Entrepreneurs Sparked a Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

own visions of post-war life to enter the field. Section two, which includes chapters three and four, examines market segmentation against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement. Chapter three documents how segmentation was transformed by CORE and NAACP calls for the integration of the American mass media. They chart how marketers turned to segmentation as a tool to insulate and manage blackness within American advertising and marketing by making concessions to black activists, but only within a model of segmentation that retained a white general market. I show how this resulted in framing black consumer segments and representations of black life as risks to the viability of a product in the “general” market. Chapter four follows the results of one concession made by major advertising agencies of the period: hiring and training black marketing professionals. I examine the work of these professionals as they ascended the corporate ladder both within major agencies and their own firms. I follow their own commodification of the black consumer market and the ways in which they navigated the narrow opportunities of market segmentation. Part three examines how this model of market segmentation was brought to its limits. I examine the adoption of new kinds of statistical analyses as well as community responses to market segmentation in the 1990s. Throughout these chapters, “Segmenting America” reveals that the burdens of these market segmentation were borne more heavily by those who are already marginalized in American society.

Section one begins with an examination of post-war women’s marketing. I do so through examining the work of Estelle Ellis, a marketing professional who got her start as a promotions director with the founding of *Seventeen* magazine in 1944. Ellis provides an opportunity to understand the ways that market segmentation permitted new kinds of actors to enter the profession in the years after the Second World War. Ellis was not formally trained in marketing, nor did she have a professional background in the field; rather, her expertise stemmed from her

young age while working at *Seventeen*. In this chapter, I argue that Ellis transformed the white teenage girl into an ideal marketing vehicle by forwarding this consumer category to merchandisers as a long-term investment. I demonstrate this by looking at three periods of Ellis' career. First, at *Seventeen*, Ellis created "Teena the Teenage Girl," an upwardly mobile, middle-class consumer composite profile that scripted the future of white women's consumption for the post-war period. In the process, Ellis remade the white teenage girl as the centerpiece of post-war capital for American merchandisers. Later, during her time at *Charm* magazine from 1950 to 1958, Ellis constructed a vision of "working womanhood" that she brought to municipal governments throughout the United States. She worked with these city governments to argue for a fundamental redevelopment of urban cores around *Charm's* advertising and market planning. She leveraged her success at both magazines to found her own marketing firm in 1958, Business Image, Inc., where she advised some of America's largest merchandisers. It was at Business Image that she undertook a major marketing contract with Kimberly-Clark: the development of a sex education program that segmented the life cycle of women into six distinct stages, each of which adhered to Kimberly-Clark product lines and services. I demonstrate how Ellis brought this program to state public health, education, and other non-profit institutions on the belief that Kimberly-Clark Corporation would not simply participate in conversations about women's sexual and reproductive health. It would lead them.

At the very same moment Estelle Ellis was fashioning a commercial future for the post-war teenage girl, a group of academics-turned-marketing professionals at the University of Chicago were creating their own vision of the women's market. In chapter two, I examine the Chicago-affiliated market research firm Social Research, Inc. In 1955, University of Chicago professors Lloyd Warner and William Henry drew upon their training in colonial anthropology

and psychology to open Social Research, a marketing firm specializing in social class divisions and “motivational research”, a popular market research technique of the 1950s most associated with Ernest Dichter. Social Research offers a distinct vantage point from which to understand how segmented marketing professionals moved across and capitalized upon different institutional frameworks and sites of knowledge production to garner power for their work. As I argue here, Social Research (unlike other major market research firms of the period) used its a quasi-academic, quasi-commercial position to advance its marketing claims as true reflections on the nature of American class division.

In this chapter, I attend to the methods Social Research used, their construction of the blue-collar housewife as consumer segment, and the firm’s self-promotional work. First, I demonstrate how Social Research moved their arguments about class more broadly into popular culture. Their research was recognized with profiles in *Printer’s Ink*, *LIFE*, and other popular publications. In such pieces, the lines between their academic work and market research were purposefully collapsed, conflating the authority of the former with the commercial logic of the latter. Second, I argue that their most famous marketing text, *The Workingman’s Wife*, drew upon tropes established in their earlier work on Indigenous communities to conjure up a white, working-class housewife who was lost to industrial modernity but who served as the bedrock of American culture. Social Research placed enormous market power in her hands, arguing that her brand choice became part of a general American set of habits. In covering both Social Research’s media positioning and their marketing concepts, this chapter illustrates the breadth of avenues through which ordinary people encountered marketing thinking in the immediate post-war years. Furthermore, this chapter documents the mobilization of marketing composites in the American press, which offered marketing professionals ideas up to a reading public in order to “explain”

phenomenon like class to ordinary people. Social Research definitions of social class segmentation endured well into the late twentieth century, with their argument that the majority of American consumers occupied the lower rungs of their social class framework specifically defining how post-war media and merchandising corporations would understand their average consumer.

Part two of this dissertation examines how segmentation was transformed as activists called for the integration of American mass media, pushing ideas about the normative market beyond the confines of Jim Crow. In chapter three, I examine the 1963 TV Image Campaign produced by the New York City chapter of CORE (the Congress on Racial Equality). The campaign seized on marketing theories developed at Social Research to argue that if the marketing experts ordered consumer identity and worldview, then advertisements depicting integrated scenes of everyday life could challenge American racism. The chapter examines the marketing profession's response to these demands, specifically their fear of a "white backlash" to integrated images. This concern led them to measure integration as a risk to securing sales in the general market of consumers, then coded as white. I argue that in response to Civil Rights agitation, marketing professionals deployed a model of market segmentation that retained the logic of a "general" white market with many other niche or segmented markets positioned alongside it.

In chapter four, I follow the impact of this model of segmentation on black advertising and marketing experts through the career of Caroline Jones. Jones' career demonstrates the opportunities and limitations that this segmentation model afforded marketing professionals of color. After establishing herself at J. Walter Thompson, Jones moved back-and-forth between major national firms and her own agencies. At general market agencies, she completed a series of

highly successful national campaigns; however, at her own firms, merchandisers derided her campaign pitches as explicitly black and therefore a risk to the “general” market. This chapter charts how Jones navigated these tensions. It follows her work in the 1970s as an expert in African American marketing and her later attempts to move into general campaigns. I animate how Jones operated within merchandisers’ constrained vision of black life in order to make a case for the markets she promoted and sold. I also examine how she maneuvered herself into the American press and media networks, eventually becoming a recognized national voice on African American life in the United States.

I argue that Jones’s career reveals the tensions at play in market segmentation when it came to the African American consumer market. In the 1980s, her professional reputation had soared, earning numerous industry accolades, including multiple Clio Awards for best advertisements, 1990’s Foremost Woman in Communications prize, and the prestigious Advertising Woman of the Year award for 1990. Yet despite high visibility, her firm struggled with merchandisers who flat out refused to award her general market campaigns. Paradoxically, this rejection persisted even when some of the marketing work her own firms did for black regional markets ended up being so popular that merchandisers brought them to the national level. Jones reveals the ways in which the language of segmentation claimed to draw representation into the market but in actuality functioned as a means of managing difference and sharpening distinctions between demographics.

The final section of this dissertation examines segmentation at the end of the twentieth century. In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of marketing professionals began to argue that new, computerized data processing programs would transform marketing. They called this technique psychographics. Psychographics drew together psychology, computerization, and large-scale

survey techniques. Its boosters argued that using massive sample sizes and computational statistical analysis, psychographic profiling could construct better, more coherent consumer segments based on values and preferences instead of race, gender, or class. They cast this as the movement of marketing ‘beyond’ identity categories and toward a more ‘real’ picture of the consumer. This chapter examines psychographics through the most popular model of the 1980s, Stanford Research Institute (SRI)’s Values and Lifestyles Survey (VALS).

In Stanford Research associate Arnold J. Mitchell’s 1984 trade press publication on VALS, *The Nine American Lifestyles*, he presented the technique not as market research, but the application of statistical analysis to social criticism. He framed VALS as an extension of David Reisman’s *The Lonely Crowd* and an attempt to parse out the direction of American society in the closing decades of the twentieth century. As a form of psychographics, VALS drew together social critique and statistics to claim veracity as a way of seeing the total population of the United States. However, as this chapter reveals, the move to scientific expertise merely obscured the more subjective elements of the marketing technique. While psychographic methods were lauded for their grounding in quantification, this chapter argues that they were sold to merchandisers and the public alike through the same methods that Ellis, Jones, and Social Research had used to promote themselves: narrative portraits. I argue that these portraits were future-oriented melodramas: stories of pathos that taught merchandisers the human anxieties they needed to exploit in order to make a sale. What’s more, I show how, despite claims psychographics moved marketing ‘beyond’ identity, VALS relied upon enduring racist tropes drawn from urban sociology to “rank” these personalities in an “evolutionary stages” from least to most emotionally satisfied, clustering communities of color in the lower tiers of the schema.²¹

²¹ SRI, “SRI’s Value and Lifestyles Program,” *Rediscovering the North American Vision* (Summer, 1983).

Such a move enabled marketers to target racialized or gendered markets without saying as such. This chapters show how marketer's bolstering of psychographics was a fetishization of data, one which interpreted large-scale analysis as an objective window to the real.

The final chapter of "Segmenting America" examines how communities throughout the United States resisted the language of segmentation, framing it as a form of targeting through which the benefits of a consumer society were unevenly distributed. This chapter follows the failure of R.J. Reynolds-Nabisco's Uptown Cigarettes in 1990, a menthol brand explicitly designed to target young, unemployed black men. This chapter examines how RJR-Nabisco constructed their vision of a young, low income black consumer; the company's development of the Uptown Cigarettes brand; and the community mobilization that led the conglomerate to pull the new brand before it even hit the shelves. Following RJR-Nabisco's defeat, activist organizers across the United States entered a year-long campaign condemning market segmentation as a form of pernicious targeting, calling for community control over the kinds of advertisements which appeared in their neighborhoods. Their protests would force the marketing profession to disclose their practices both in the press and to Congress, where the executive leadership of some of the largest advertising and marketing associations in the United States would be asked to defend segmentation against the risk of possible regulation.

Through these six chapters, "Segmenting America" offers a history of the post-war United States that emphasizes how a number of marketing professionals have forwarded their ideas, the successes they found, and the contestations which emerged as a result. This project reveals how post-war marketing professionals did their work. It follows how they attached themselves and their marketing ideas to the discursive power of the state, to the academy, to media outlets, and more in order to bend such entities to commercial whims. It brings to the

foreground the work of market research, revealing how marketing professionals seek to manage, control, and contain social change, advance their own definitions of race, gender, and class, and, in the process, render themselves experts on the direction of life in the United States. By following the rise and transformation of market segmentation over the post-war years, “Segmenting America” documents how the social and cultural ideas marketing professionals developed became central to the operation of modern American capitalism.

Chapter 1: It's a Working Woman's World: Estelle Ellis and the Marketing of a Post-War Life Cycle for Women

In a 1954 article published in *Redbook* magazine, Estelle Ellis, the commercial marketing director for the recently launched *Charm* magazine, offered up a new vision of women's consumption for the post-war years. She argued that in order to grow their subscription rolls, *Redbook* would have to do as *Charm* had done and turn away from one of the most commercially seductive figures of the mid-twentieth century consumer market: the housewife. Since *Redbook* had first been published in 1903, it had served as a general interest magazine offering short stories, nonfiction pieces, and popular photography to a general market of readers. In the early 1950s, amid falling subscription numbers, publisher Philip Wyman attempted to turn the magazine around by shifting *Redbook's* focus to a younger, 18- to 34-year-old housewife demographic. Ellis' article responded to this transition.

Ellis claimed that the housewife was a one-dimensional fiction. Despite its cultural weight, buoyed by various marketing tropes and texts, from Christine Frederick's 1921 *Selling Mrs. Consumer* to the then popular concept of the household manager, Ellis argued that the housewife failed to capture how shifting economic and social realities were changing the scene for these consumers. American women were being offered new spaces in the market not only as household managers or as mothers, but as workers with wage and purchasing autonomy.¹ Situating herself within this marketing narrative shift, Ellis argued that both she and other women like her were not the anxious housewives conjured up by advertising men, but instead were a force to be reckoned with. "There's a new power growing up in America," she

¹ On the fallacy of the mid-century white male breadwinner, see Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

proclaimed, “and wonder of wonders—we’re it! It’s womanPOWER in more ways than the Secretary of Labor defines it.”²

When Estelle Ellis invoked “womanPOWER” for *Redbook*, she invited her readers to imagine with her the enormous, autonomous purchasing power of working women in 1954. Personifying this segment, she proclaimed, “We’re a power we are—politicians want our votes; pollsters want our opinions; businessmen want our business; stores want our paycheques; and Uncle Sam needs us too [...]” Ellis went on to argue that “In the nation capitol [sic] where literally every other woman is a working woman, Help Wanted FEMALE ads occupy more space than global news, and government bosses vie with industry bosses for our eight hour day. The competition for our spending power—our thirty-three billion dollar collective pay check—is ferocious.” Ellis packaged working women as a consumer category very much apart from the women which mass market magazines, department stores, or grocers imagined. Her working women had little precious time to window shop or leisurely browse. Rather, they shopped efficiently around their work schedule. They relied on store’s services to meet their alteration, pick up, and return needs. And perhaps most crucially, they were bankable, “the first customers to be ‘paid in full’ every month[.]” Women who worked were more than the future of the American department store, argued Ellis: they were the future of the urban United States as well.³

The working womanhood Ellis invoked in her *Redbook* piece was a novel kind of market category. It betrayed both the class and gender expectations that marketing experts had historically deployed to distinguish and explain divisions within the US consumer market. Ellis’

² Estelle Ellis, “WomanPOWER” *Redbook*, 1. Estelle Ellis Papers (hereafter Ellis Papers), Series 2, Box 40, Folder 13.

³ Ellis, “WomanPOWER,” *Redbook*. Ellis Papers, Series 2, Box 40, Folder 13.

definition of working women cut across class lines in novel ways, constructing a “Desk Set” made up of “secretaries, copywriters, lady lawyers, teachers, nurses and beauticians.”⁴ These working women purchased and consumed in similar patterns: they bought on their lunch hour, shopped during short stopovers after work before their commutes home, and capitalized upon “freezer after freezer” aisle full of convenient “ready-in-a-jiffy” meals.⁵ Ellis warned that to address such consumers as though they were solely housewives was to ignore the commercial possibilities that their growing income autonomy offered. To miss working women was to fail to understand how women across the United States were experiencing powerful currents of social and economic change. She framed this as the erasure of a thirty-billion dollar market, a language her audience of magazine workers certainly understood.

As a marketing consultant, Ellis did not ‘discover’ working women—she constructed them. Although working women had been in the workforce for decades, in Ellis hands “working women” and concepts like womenPOWER were marketing commodities which she pitched and sold to merchandisers.⁶ She used these commodities to instruct her clients on how to understand and intuit the needs of working woman as a singular kind of consumer. What’s more, as she constructed these commodities, Ellis used them to shift her own life narrative, framing herself as both an arbiter of the needs of these women as well as a participant in the social transformation

⁴ Ellis, “WomanPOWER” *Redbook*, 1. Ellis Papers, Series 2, Box 40, Folder 13.

⁵ Ellis, “WomanPOWER” *Redbook*, 3. Ellis Papers, Series 2, Box 40, Folder 13.

⁶ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Alice Kesler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

the concept described. Indeed, the vision of respectable working womanhood that Ellis constructed bore little resemblance to her own life history, even as it accrued social power for her. Born in 1920, her working-class Jewish background meant she was not of the social position or the religious imperative that publishing and advertising demanded during this period. She used her marketing chops to position herself in ways that were amiable to some of the largest merchandisers in the United States. Ellis packaged market categories she stood outside of and used these categories to shift and expand her own visibility within the fields of magazine publishing, advertising, and marketing.⁷

Ellis began her marketing career in 1944 at *Seventeen* magazine. She moved to *Charm* magazine in 1950, and in 1958 founded her own marketing consultant and research firm, Business Image, Inc. Her work reveals a story about marketing that has been missed by scholarship on women's consumption in the post-war period.⁸ Ellis built a career around the construction of a mid-century, autonomous, liberal white working womanhood that stood in contrast to the dominant commercial trope that defined American consumer culture during this period: the housewife. At *Seventeen*, Ellis constructed a marketing category called Teena the

⁷ Muriel Meyers, "Interview with Estelle Ellis," transcript of an oral history conducted September 1990 by Muriel Meyers, American Jewish Women of Achievement, New York Public Library, New York City, 2015, pp 6.

⁸ Bill Osgerby, "'A Caste, A Culture, A Market': Youth, Marketing, and Lifestyle in Postwar America," in *Growing Up Postmodern: Neoliberalism and the War on the Young*, ed. Roland Strickland (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Emily Remus, *A Shoppers' Paradise: How the Ladies of Chicago Claimed Power and Pleasure in the New Downtown* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2019); D. Spring, *Advertising in the Age of Persuasion: Building Brand America 1941–1961* (New York: Springer, 2011); Walter A. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Landon Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers' League, Women's Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era*, First Edition edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Kelley. Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of Seventeen Magazine* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Left Coast Press, 2010); Sean Nixon, *Hard Sell: Advertising, Affluence and Transatlantic Relations, c. 1951–69* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Teenage Girl to teach merchandisers about their young readership's long-term commercial brand loyalty and, crucially, their political and work aspirations.⁹ At *Charm*, she and editor Helen Valentine revamped the magazine, transitioning from the white-collar "business girl" to a wider vision: working women across the class and age spectrum.¹⁰ At Business Image, Inc., Ellis

⁹ On the child consumer as a distinct market, see Linda Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Earlier work on marketing to children has focused on merchandising, see William Leach, "Child-World in the Promised Land," in James Gilbert et al., eds., *The Mythmaking Frame of Mind: Social Imagination and American Culture* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company 1993), 209–238; David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and at Play* (New York: Anchor, 1985); David Nasaw, "Children and Commercial Culture: Moving Pictures in the Early Twentieth Century," in Elliott West and Paula Petrik, eds., *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850–1950* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 14–25; Gary Cross, *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); On children and popular culture see Gary Cross, *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); on toys and the performance of a racialized white innocence, see: Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: NYU Press, 2011). On the emergence of the baby boomer, a category which Ellis did not reference, though she did speak to "generations" see Dan Bouk, "Generation Crisis: How Population Research Defined the Baby Boomers" Vol 1, No. 2 *Modern American History* (2018): 321-342. On race and the teenager, see Susan Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007); LaKisha Michelle Simmons, *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). On Estelle Ellis, teen girl culture, and her relationship to *Seventeen* magazine, see Kelley Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of Seventeen Magazine* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2010).

¹⁰ *Charm's* transition from girl to working woman tracks along a longer set of historical shifts in the market. Following the industrial revolution, "girls" referred to any woman who was employed and not married. While the teenager did not supplant girls, it did transform ideas about the nature and role of youth in American labor and culture as questions about respectability, citizenship, and development were brought into the classroom. On working girls, consumption, political demands, and pleasure see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); on ethnicity, immigration, and youth culture of the urban centers detailed by Peiss and Enstad, see Sarah E. Chinn, *Inventing Modern Adolescence* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009). On the intersection of this working culture, leisure, and sexual intimacy, see Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Kathy Peiss, *Hope In a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Pam Haag, *Consent, Sexual Rights, and the Transformation of American Liberalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); on the crisis of the 'modern girl' as heuristic for global capital and cosmopolitanism, see Alys Eve Weinbaum, Lynn M. Thomas, Priti Ramamurthy, Uta G. Poiger, Madeline Yue Dong, and Tani E. Barlow, eds, *The Modern Girl Around the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). For one example of the post-war "girl"

promised to translate social change for corporations that feared they had fallen out of step with American consumers. For Kimberly-Clark, this entailed the creation of a sex education program provided “for free” to American teachers and parents. I argue that Ellis used her work with Kimberly-Clark to formalize the life cycle as a marketing concept which emphasized how dollars spent today by advertisers would spell dividends tomorrow.¹¹

Ellis’ career provides an opportunity to understand how market segmentation enabled new kinds of actors to enter the profession. Ellis was not formally trained in marketing nor did she have a scholarly background in the field. Rather, her expertise stemmed from her young age while working at *Seventeen* and later, her work constructing the *Seventeen* marketing composite, Teena the Teenage Girl. Historians of advertising and consumption have overwhelmingly focused on academically trained sociologists and anthropologist who, in the post-war years, used their credentials to forward their own definitions of the consumer and the nature of the mass market. These actors are no doubt important – and are the focus of chapter two – but they do not tell us the whole story. Unlike these researchers, Ellis was not trained in psychoanalysis or social anthropology and did not have a university affiliation. Her career involved no work with major

problem and the question of labor, see: Jennifer Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl: Employability, Domesticity, and the Gendering of Canada’s Welfare State, 1939-1947* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

¹¹ On sex education, see Jeffrey Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000); Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America?: Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005); Kristin Luker, *When Sex Goes to School: Warring Views on Sex—and Sex Education—since the Sixties* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); Susan K. Freeman, *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education before the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006) Natalia Mehlman-Petrezela, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). On corporately sponsored curricula, see Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, “Business Propaganda in the Schools: Labor’s Struggle Against the Americans for the Competitive Enterprise System, 1949-1954” *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2000): 255-278; Kim Philips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessman’s Crusade Against the New Deal* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 213-236; Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 145-193; Caroline Jack “Fun Facts about American Business: Economic Education and Business Propaganda in an Early Cold War Cartoon Series” *Enterprise and Society* (2015): 491-520.

research units at newspapers like the *Chicago Tribune* or the *New York Times*. Rather, marketing professionals like Estelle Ellis animate the ways in which the field was opened up in the post-war period as merchandisers looked to understand the internal social worlds and cultures of specific kinds of consumers.¹²

This chapter begins by documenting Ellis' early career, especially her arrival at *Seventeen*, where she constructed "Teena the Teenage Girl," the marketing vehicle deployed to package and explain the long-term social and economic power of *Seventeen's* readership to potential advertisers. Ellis, editor Helen Valentine, and other staff members moved to *Charm Magazine* in 1950, where Ellis pitched "womanPOWER" to major urban department stores, arguing that pre-war models of display and commercial service would fail in light of new labor arrangements and the consuming demands of working womanhood. In the final section of this chapter, I turn to Ellis' Business Image, Inc., the marketing firm she founded after leaving *Charm* in 1958. At Business Image, Ellis undertook a major redevelopment of Kimberly-Clark, makers of Kotex sanitary napkins.

Through examining Ellis' work, we can better understand how marketing professionals constructed their categories. For example, the power of Ellis' vision lay in its exclusions. The twinned heterosexuality and whiteness of her marketing tropes across all three firms discussed in this chapter were crucial to their long-term financial return. This narrow vision of post-war working womanhood determined who could be captured within the category of a 'women's

¹² Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); Daniel Horowitz, *Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939-1979* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); Lawrence Samuel, *Freud on Madison Avenue: Motivation Research and Subliminal Advertising in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

market' and was not.¹³ This occurred even as Ellis recognized herself as sitting in a vexed position outside the social class and ethnic boundaries policed by marketing and publishing in the post-war period.

For Ellis, womanPOWER was not simply the sum buying power of all working women – it was a specific market category she put to work, both for herself and the firms which hired her. It was built into a story Ellis often told, about both women as consumers, but also herself: about how labor opportunities had changed; how consumption had shifted; and how the social world of working- and middle-class women would continue to evolve over the decades following the Second World War. Ellis sold a vision of post-war white women's future consumption to a vast range of different institutions and corporate actors, pushing marketing work just as far as the articles published in magazines which employed her. Throughout her career she took *Seventeen*, *Charm*, and later the Kimberly-Clark Corporation to institutions well beyond potential advertisers, connecting with sex education organizations, city governments, business improvement districts, federal and state governments, and more. In doing so she both remade her own position as well as the vision American merchandisers had of an autonomous, white womanhood. Through this, Ellis built her own reputation and cultural power by offering these organizations her expertise as a young, working woman—a layered commodification that

¹³ On the economic investments in whiteness, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). On the intersection of whiteness and heterosexuality in the production of “normal sexuality,” see Julian Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). On racial difference as queer aberration, see Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); on the intersection of queerness and race difference, see Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3 (1997): 437–65.

accrued as much value for Ellis as it did for the major merchandisers and publishers who eagerly courted her advice and direction.

Teena the Teenage Girl: Marketing the White Teenage Girl’s “powerful present, her promising future.”

Estelle Ellis’ work at *Seventeen* magazine transformed the teenage girl into a robust commercial marketing opportunity for post-war merchandisers. Where teenagers had been historically understood as unviable market actors, Ellis constructed a consumer market composite, “Teena the Teenage Girl,” which narrated to American merchandisers how marketing to the teens of today could lead to dividends tomorrow. In this section, I demonstrate how Ellis went about constructing Teena and the upwardly mobile narrative she endowed the composite with. In addition, I explore how Teena became the foundation of the magazine’s promotional vision of teenage girl culture, defining how both editorial and advertising divisions of the magazine understood their young readership’s long-term buying power.

Historians have argued that in between the pages of *Seventeen*, its readership encountered a form of civic consumption that connected the consumer marketplace to the political citizenship of young women. However, it is a mistake to assume composite marketing figures like Teena offer us an accurate picture of teenage girl culture or that *Seventeen* itself can provide a clear examples of how mass consumption shaped teen girl culture at mid-century at all. By treating Ellis’ work at *Seventeen* as the “discovery” of the teen market, a language Ellis herself often deployed, historians have failed to recognize the work of marketing.¹⁴ Through

¹⁴ Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls’ Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Samantha Yates Francois, “Girls With Influence: Selling Consumerism to Teenage Girls” PhD. Diss., (University of California at Davis, 2003); Kelly Massoni, “Teena Goes to Market: Seventeen Magazine and the Early Construction of the Teen Girl (as) Consumer” *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2006): 31-42.

Teena, Ellis sought to assert and naturalize the teen girl reader as a specific kind of person rather than a market category. In doing so, she purposefully aimed to define the terms by which merchandisers imagined and understood the evolving social context of *Seventeen* readers. Teena then must be understood as a marketing vehicle: an explicitly ideological package and defined vision of the buying habits, domestic influence, and long-term hopes and aspirations of teenage girls. Ironically, marketers succeeded in not only selling products to teens via *Seventeen* but also writing the first draft of this demographic's history—one that historians have uncritically endorsed.

Ellis was an unlikely employee at *Seventeen*. According to several oral history interviews from the early 1990s and early 2000s, Ellis secured her position in promotions through a chance meeting with editor Helen Valentine in the elevator. Such oral narratives of Ellis' life perform a kind of marketing themselves, as Ellis aspired to position herself in the history of post-war consumption. In a 1991 interview with Muriel Meyers for the American Jewish Women of Achievement Oral History Library, Ellis suggested that her family was not "sensitized" to questions regarding women's labor as it had shaped middle-class social expectations at mid-century. Rather, as she told it, there was an expectation she would work as soon as she was capable. Born in 1920 to working-class parents, Ellis began her career in publishing after completing a degree in political science at Hunter College in 1942. Ellis recounted how, from an early age, she had sought to be a "girl reporter" (a frequent image in film and popular culture of the period). Her career on the peripherals of journalism began through a placement agency

following graduation from Hunter College, when she secured a position as a secretary to a promotion director at *Popular Science*.¹⁵

Popular Science was a magazine targeted at boys and men, but Ellis gained a promotion by convincing the publisher to experiment with a parallel publication for young women. Since 1872, *Popular Science* had offered news on scientific advancements to lay readers. When it was purchased by The Modern Publishing Company in 1915, the magazine was recast with a more engaging tone in order to expand readership, introducing line drawings and shorter articles. In 1941, a year after Ellis' arrival, Vice President Raymond J. Brown sought to expand Popular Science Publishing into the booming school-aged teen market, as *Popular Science* itself had found success as a teaching tool in science classrooms in the United States. Brown believed that just as magazines like *Popular Science* were marketed to young men and their fathers, there was room for a new magazine aimed at young women in high schools. This teenage publication would be tailored to home economics and the domestic sciences and sold as a teaching tool for educators. The publisher eventually moved Ellis from *Popular Science* to this new venture, titled *Design for Living*. Ellis argued that this move was thanks to her age and gender: at 22, she brought the magazine's sales team closer to its own imagined readership.¹⁶ The publisher sent out promotional copies of the magazine to high school teachers in 1941, pitching *Design For Living* as "The Magazine for Smart Young Homemakers"; however, it folded after only three issues due to restrictions on paper use during the war.¹⁷ Nonetheless, working in the promotional office between *Popular Science* and *Design for Living* sparked Ellis' interest in marketing.

¹⁵ Muriel Meyers, "Interview with Estelle Ellis," transcript of an oral history conducted September 1990 by Muriel Meyers, American Jewish Women of Achievement, New York Public Library, New York City, pp 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷ "New Magazines", *Tide: News Magazine of Advertising and Marketing*, April 1941, p. 33.

During her preparation for *Design for Living*, Ellis involved herself with collecting and studying the marketing materials of *Mademoiselle*, a magazine aimed at college-aged women, in order to acclimatize herself to the teenage girl market.¹⁸

After the shuttering of *Design for Living*, Ellis found work with Walter Annenberg's Triangle Publications, which was soon to launch *Seventeen* as a competitor magazine to *Mademoiselle*. In early 1944, Walter Annenberg hired *Mademoiselle* promotions director Helen Valentine away from publisher Street and Smith, inviting her to rework Triangle's failing movie fan magazine, *Stardom*. Valentine rejected Annenberg's first proposal, arguing that an iteration of *Mademoiselle* targeting younger audiences would have a stronger market share than another magazine dedicated to movie fans (a dragging genre at this time). Annenberg agreed, and in September 1944, *Seventeen*'s first issue was published.

According to Ellis' oral history testimony completed from 1990, a chance meeting between her and Helen Valentine secured her transition to the new *Seventeen* and began a decades-long mentorship between the two.¹⁹ Ellis herself understood her entrance into publishing was an unlikely one, owing to the lack of employment opportunities for working-class Jewish women in the field at mid-century. In a 1991 interview, Ellis argued that she "wasn't of the social class or of the religious persuasion that they were looking for [...] They were hiring debutantes." She described her competitors in the job market as "rich kids out of the Ivy League schools who were happy to work for practically nothing to be part of the chic world of the fashion magazine." She explained that, as a "kid from Brooklyn with a big behind and no

¹⁸ Muriel Meyers, "Interview with Estelle Ellis," transcript of an oral history conducted September 1990 by Muriel Meyers, American Jewish Women of Achievement, New York Public Library, New York City, 2015, pp 6.

¹⁹ Meyers, "Interview with Estelle Ellis," 9-12.

knowledge of what the social smarts were, I wasn't their candidate."²⁰ Indeed, the cultivation of a WASP position at these magazines meant that working-class Catholic and Jewish white women, let alone women of color, lacked access to such career options. "[I]f you went to a Wellesley or a Bryn Mawr, you had a chance on these magazines," argued Ellis, "[a] kid who came from Brooklyn didn't get a job at Condé Nast or at Street and Smith."²¹ Ellis' affiliation with Valentine, however, allowed her to bypass the ethnic boundaries of American publishing and begin to capitalize on articulations like *Teena the Teenage Girl*.

As a promotional director for *Seventeen*, Ellis was tasked with constructing a market category and consumer profile based on Valentine's editorial vision for the magazine and pitching that profile to organizations and institutions throughout regional markets in the United States. Valentine's vision for *Seventeen* was that of a civic-minded young white woman whose future involved companionate marriage and gainful white-collar employment, which enabled her to make autonomous purchasing decisions for herself. Ellis packaged *Seventeen*'s hypothetical readers in a distinct way, emphasizing their political, civic, and economic perspectives and combining now-familiar commercial advertising tropes of teen magazines with content that spoke to the major social issues of the day. As a promotional director, Ellis explicated this vision for merchandisers and built marketing and merchandising plans that enabled merchandisers to sell their wares to *Seventeen* readers.

Ellis' work involved the cultivation of relationships between the magazine itself, advertisers in the magazine, and retailers in regional markets throughout the United States. In doing so, she constructed new kinds of spaces—both in popular media and commercial markets—for the teenage girl to inhabit. In mid-century publishing, promotional staff worked to

²⁰ Meyers, "Interview with Estelle Ellis," 7.

²¹ Meyers, "Interview with Estelle Ellis," 8.

develop relationships with both ad agencies and merchandisers who would purchase ad space in magazines; develop commercial tie-ins between the magazine and institutions like movie theatres and department stores; and run local and regional promotional events throughout the United States that drew attention to different sections in the magazine. For Ellis, this meant tying specific fashion lines or outfits profiled in the magazine to a regional department store. A local department store might co-sponsor an afternoon high school fashion runway show with *Seventeen*, featuring students in outfits profiled in the magazine. Photographs of these shows, alongside depictions of in-store displays, would then be featured in the magazine. The goal of magazine marketing was therefore far more than directly advocating for the buying power of their teenaged readership. Ellis' marketing material drew together this new teenage demographic, the magazine, fashion designers, and local and regional retailing establishments throughout the United States in a complex merchandising relationship centered upon *Seventeen* and its readers.

Ellis built her merchandising strategy out of editor Helen Valentine's distinct editorial vision for *Seventeen*. By arguing that *Seventeen* should take young women's political and social perspectives seriously, Valentine pushed the magazine away from earlier youth periodicals, such as *Miss America*, *Debs*, and *Calling All Girls*. These publications had traditionally targeted the teenage market with what Valentine considered a cartoonish approach, offering little substantive editorial material to potential readers. Valentine's editorial vision drew together everything from the latest fashions to concerns over contemporary geopolitics of the day, including profiles on the United Nations, the rise of nuclear power, and Cold War politics. In her own column as editor, Valentine doubled-down on the call for engaged dialogue and perspectives, conveying to the readership that she took their thoughts and worldviews seriously. In turn, she advocated for

their own time and investment in the project of liberal, post-war citizenship.²² The magazine thus departed from the usual content of women's service magazines, which capitalized on social class and "coffee table prestige," to develop a consumer base. Instead, Valentine cultivated (and Ellis sold) a readership based on the social mores and organization of young women rather than class position. The two emphasized the intersections of gender and age in their marketing, eschewing a consumer category bound to any (openly stated) set of specific class-based preferences. Such a strategy was a success, with subscriptions growing rapidly in the magazine's first year.

The work of constructing *Seventeen's* readership for potential advertisers began when Ellis commissioned a survey study of the magazine's first-year readership, titled *Life with Teena*. To complete the study, Ellis and Triangle Publications hired Benson and Benson, Inc. of Princeton, New Jersey, an independent research organization whose interviewers worked in close collaborations with the Gallup Poll. Using subscriber rolls from *Seventeen*, Benson and Benson called readers at random across the United States in regional proportions relative to the magazine's subscriptions. The firm deployed interviewers who were residents of their target communities and were registered with the American Institute of Public Opinion, which had been established in 1935 as a commercial research center directed by Gallup. The firm interviewed 1075 young female subscribers and 637 of their mothers between February 23rd and March 16th, 1945.²³

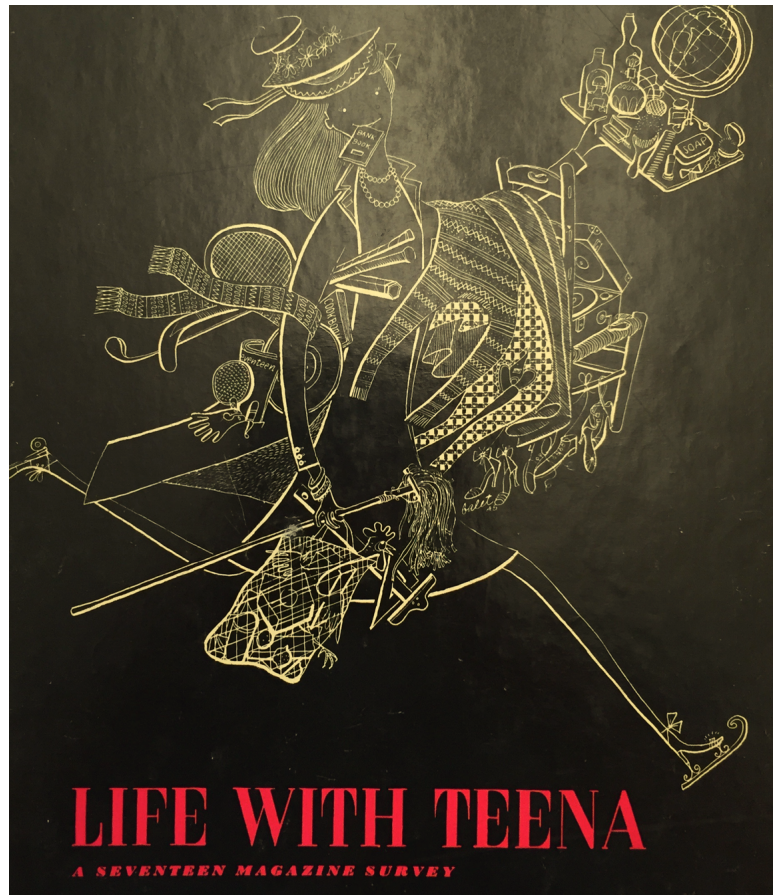
Life with Teena was published in 1944. The study was visually narrated by a fictional, normative, and ideologically powerful composite profile invented by Ellis named Teena the Teenage Girl. Teena did not simply translate young women's needs and wants for potential advertisers curious about the often-discussed youth market. Instead, Ellis deployed this consumer

²² Helen Valentine, *Seventeen*, September 1944, 33.

²³ *Life with Teena: A Seventeen Magazine Survey*, 88-91. Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 18, Folder 1-2.

composite to pitch young white women as ideal candidates for investment on the part of merchandisers' advertising teams, connecting data on the consumption habits of their teenage readers to the economic power of the future careers that Ellis and Valentine envisioned for them. Teena was derived from the sum of interviews with magazine subscribers and was deployed as a visual tool to "teach" *Seventeen's* interested merchandisers all about the teen market.

The published version of the study compiled survey findings alongside stencil illustrations of the eponymous Teena the Teenage girl, both of which guided the reader through the study. The stylized cover from *Life with Teena* featured a stencil illustration of Teena in an impressive balancing act reflecting all of her many interests (figure 1). She carries all manner of products, some under her arm, others draped over her body. On one foot she wears a roller skate and on the other a rollerblade, all the while holding a checkbook in mouth. With a mop and algebra study set in her right hand, her left arm is outstretched above her head. In it, young Teena props up a tray full of cosmetics that surround a globe. The cover visually indicated to merchandisers that *Seventeen* readers had ambition. Just like Teena, they were keen to seize the world.



(Figure 1: *Life with Teena: A Seventeen Magazine Survey*)

If Teena sounds familiar, it is because mid-century social and political thought was awash with statistically normative composites designed to represent everyday Americans. As historians Julian Carter and Sarah Igo have noted in their respective works on the history of normativity and survey methodologies, visual figures like Teena manifested ideas about social patterns and commonality out of the mass of Americans' statistical data. Representations of statistical averages like Teena, the Gallup opinions polls detailed in Igo's work, or Carter's study of alabaster statues Norma and Normann rendered the mass public legible at scales that had previously been unthinkable.²⁴ These constructions projected a "race-evasive" normativity which

²⁴ In its race-evasive formation, mid-century whiteness drew its power from the ability to not identify itself, to become a laden component of what it meant to be typical. While the "teenager" was a seemingly

embedded heterosexuality and whiteness within what it meant to be typical or average in the United States.

This duality of whiteness and heterosexuality were central to *Teena's* long-term investability, even if they were not explicitly stated as such. The promise of motherhood and companionate marriage was emphasized throughout the study, suggesting to merchandisers the long-term returns advertising in the magazine might promise. Indeed, Ellis was not interested in constructing national averages but rather a much more specific and bounded average animated by a certain vision of the future. Where Norma and Normman were anchored to a history of whiteness as it traversed ideas about civilization, race, and eventually statistical normality, *Teena* looked toward *future* consumption. Her whiteness was secure and embedded in the ways that most American averages by mid-century had been shaped to communicate ideas about racial investability.²⁵

The *Life with Teena* survey focused on aspiration and interest, interviewing both young women who read the magazine as well as their mothers with separate questionnaires, and then using those materials to conjure up a market profile that was palatable to merchandisers. If the

neutral category in market research, it in fact articulated a vision of white heterosexuality that offered a promising future anchored to a post-war life cycle embedded in specific heterosexual rites of passage: upward mobility, marriage, and parenthood. The sheer cultural weight placed onto questions of teenage deviance, maladjustment, and the risks of juvenile delinquency reveal how the fixation on producing the normative teen did not merely reflect a growing sociological problem, but a broader cultural anxiety. In short, the “containment” politics of Cold War domesticity and anxieties over the teenager were about securing their heterosexuality and whiteness, both of which combined to create ‘normal sexuality.’ See: Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness*, 1-17, esp. 2-3; Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American*. On racial difference as a queer aberration, see: Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

²⁵ On statistical normativity and its power to define status quo, see Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American*. On whiteness as a form of possessive investment see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). On the benefits accruing to whiteness at mid-century, see Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005).

participants were aged between 12 and 18, the interviewer would proceed to ask whether they were enrolled in public, parochial, private, or business schools or if they were in college. The survey asked these young women to think forward: if they were in high school, what did they hope to do once they graduated? If they were going to attend college, who would pay for further education? What would their majors be, and would they work after graduation? The study mapped out young women's buying habits and their employment situation—parsing out whether they were currently employed, received an allowance from their parents, or if they requested cash as they needed it. The interview then proceeded to place young women in relationship to broader patterns of domestic purchasing in the household, asking for examples of the products they had encouraged their family to purchase. Finally, the interview concluded on how *Seventeen* ranked against magazines of a similar ilk, asking young women to expand on their relationship to reading the magazine, the circulation of articles and issues between them and their friends, and where such circulation occurred. In interviews with mothers, the study focused on questions about purchasing patterns, asking how frequently goods like girdles, skirts, sweaters, and party dresses were replaced and, critically, the influence daughters had on family purchasing decisions. Finally, the study ended on an open-ended question: “what plans do you have for [your daughter] when she leaves high school?” This question attempted to measure where mothers saw their daughters lives taking them in the coming years.²⁶

Ellis went to great lengths to personify *Seventeen's* readership by deploying survey data that went well beyond consumer habits and preferences in order to lend veracity to Teena as a *person* rather than a statistical composite: “Our girl Teena is sixteen years old. She's five feet four and a quarter inches tall and tips the scales at 118 pounds. She goes to a public high school,

²⁶ *Life with Teena*, 92-93. Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 18, Folder 1-2.

expects to graduate next year at the age of 17 and go on to college with a B.A. or B.S. in mind.”

The profile located Teena in the web of family relations to establish her class position and her sense of the future: “Her chances of going to college are good, since Teena’s mother is in favor of higher education! And her father can afford to foot all her college bills. He’s a professional man [...] a business man [...] a white-collar worker.” The demographics and financial elements that *Life with Teena* offered lent the composite the more subjective elements of personhood.

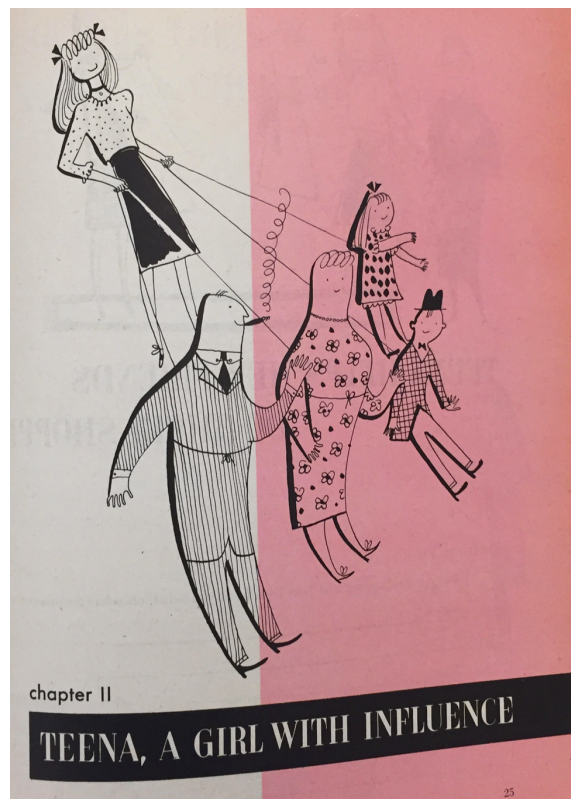
Teena suggested a magazine’s readership that was middle- or upper-middle-class. It argued that sixty-three percent of their fathers worked as business executives, owners, professionals, or other white-collar occupations and an additional 19% earned their living as skilled workers. The text framed Teena as both a consumer *and* a worker, although their primary concern was not the work undertaken but the income it generated. “Teena could work her way through college if she had to [...] she earns money even now, minding babies after school. And it’s not just ‘pin money’ she’s working for either [...] when Teena works she earns \$13.48 a month—all of which she keeps for her own expenses. This, in addition to a regular family allowance—\$2.13 a week. Which she spends on movies, bus fares, cokes, school supplies, lunches, candy, etc.”²⁷

Personification of Teena’s body alongside her earning power rendered the market category real. It provided a means of conjuring up a kind of reader, inviting potential merchandisers to imagine exactly the kind of young woman Ellis wanted them to believe read *Seventeen*.

Ellis went to great lengths to locate Teena within a web of familial and social relationships, emphasizing *Seventeen*’s immense power over their immediate family’s buying decisions and framing the magazine as the centerpiece in its readers’ lives through leading questions. The second section of the study, “Teena, A Girl with Influence,” opened with an

²⁷ *Life with Teena*, 1. Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 18, Folder 1-2.

illustration of a young woman acting as a puppeteer, manipulating her father, mother, and younger siblings by pulling strings (figure 2). The marketing study’s copy reinforced this sense of manipulation: “It’s because of her that mother is redoing the living room [...] that father is thinking of added insurance, a new car, and a post-war home of their own.” Throughout, the study promised that “when the buying is done, Teena will influence style and brand choice. For Teena has a mind of her own.”²⁸ In doing so, Ellis took the magazine’s emphasis on young women’s agency and ambition and used it to appeal to a much larger cross-section of potential advertisers, constructing a vision of teen girl’s social world that centered entirely upon *Seventeen*.



(Figure 2: “Teena, a girl with influence” from *Life with Teena*, 25.)

²⁸ The narrative construction of Teena at times departed from the data Benson & Benson had collected. For example, less than 10% of young women remarked that they influenced their father’s decisions. *Life with Teena*, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 18, Folder 1-2.

Teena's success spelled big business for *Seventeen* and in the process remade the teenage girl as a marketing vehicle. By February 1947, two years after the publication of *Life with Teena*, circulation hit one million copies per issue; only two years later in July 1949, circulation hit two and a half million.²⁹ Marketing material sent to *Women's Wear Daily*, *Advertising Age*, and *Printer's Ink* suggested that *Seventeen* played a crucial role in setting social group interest and activities. These materials emphasized that the magazine promised authorship and ownership to readers through programs like its teen advisory panel, which invited young women to give formal feedback on the magazine, or the local fashion shows that it sponsored throughout the United States.³⁰ One set of promotional pamphlets that went out to advertising and marketing trade press in 1949 asked "When is a girl worth \$11,690,499?" and followed this question with a series of answers: "when 1738 advertisers spent that much money in four years—to sell her their product and their name in the magazine she reads [...]"; "when manufactures and retailers run special advertising campaigns to promote special products and special departments just for her—via the magazine she and her friend call their very own"; and "when the magazine devoted to her interests surveys her needs—sets up a research department, a consumer panel, a library of fifteen market studies to determine her powerful present, her promising future."³¹ The promotional material did more than construct this young reader as a marketable investment: it placed the magazine at the heart of their imagined teenage girl's distinct and unique social world.

Crucially, Teena was not simply a story of what a teenage girl's social world looked like as they read *Seventeen*. The composite spoke to the long-term possibilities of advertising in the magazine. Ellis suggested that by selling through *Seventeen*, advertisers would build a lifelong

²⁹ *Seventeen Magazine*, March 1947.

³⁰ *Seventeen* promotional material, Ellis Papers. Series 1, Box 25, Folder 7.

³¹ *Seventeen* promotional campaign material, 1946, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 25, Folder 6.

commitment to their brands by emphasizing Teena's own commitment to her social relationships and by insisting upon the fierce loyalty of their readership to the magazine. Promotional material celebrated Teena as a young woman who would become "a career girl, a college student, a mother! The happy ending writes itself. Teena got what she wanted—her own magazine *SEVENTEEN*. If you want to talk to Teena, do it through *SEVENTEEN*."³² Through such marketing promotions produced in the first years of *Seventeen*'s operation, Ellis endowed Teena and *Seventeen*'s readership with a bright future—one which was structured around routine and continued engagements with brands and services advertised in *Seventeen*.

While *Life with Teena* generated considerable profit for *Seventeen*, conflicts between the editorial and ownership teams regarding what a teenage girl magazine should be challenged Valentine's direction and eventually led to Ellis and Valentine's formal departure from *Seventeen* and Triangle Publications as a whole. Publisher Walter Annenberg harshly criticized the liberal tone the magazine took when it covered international affairs, its chiding language about respectability and careerism, and its approach to racism and gender inequality.³³ Annenberg also critiqued Valentine's narrow demographics, arguing that the magazine could handle a wider demographic sweep up to the mid-20s, a strategy which would undermine the success of *Life with Teena*.

Annenberg's first spat with Valentine arose with the November 1946 issue, when photography for the articles "They Do Unto Others" (on an integrated Quaker summer camp) and "Swing Your Partner" (on a barn dance sponsored by Pepsi-Cola) both featured black and white models intermingling. Annenberg argued that the images would alienate advertisers and

³² *Seventeen* promotional campaign material, 1946, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 25, Folder 6.

³³ Kelley Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of Seventeen Magazine* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Left Coast Press, 2010).

readership. Valentine argued that readers would take no objection, especially given that Jewish names occupied the masthead. Valentine had even sought to feature African American models on the cover early on in the publication's run but Annenberg vetoed the request.³⁴ Although Annenberg protested the visuals, writing by African American girls had been previously featured in the magazine's op-ed section. Valentine had published a number of letters from young African American readers criticizing the lack of product reviews for cosmetics which matched their skin tone and even included a number of letters criticizing the failure of the federal government to fulfill the promises of the double V campaign. However, even as she made room for young women of color in the magazine's editorial vision, race was notably omitted in the marketing texts for *Seventeen*. Teena the Teenage Girl was fundamentally a vision of long-term white investability. In order to assert more editorial control over the magazine, Annenberg installed an executive editor over Valentine in mid-1948. As a result, the late 1940s saw a narrowing of *Seventeen*'s narrative of political agency for young women. By 1950, the rift between publisher Annenberg and editor Valentine had grown so wide that Valentine exited the magazine, poaching Ellis and other members of the editorial and sales staff to work with her on Street & Smith's *Charm* magazine, developing a new vision of mass consumption oriented around the working woman.

Life with Teena spelled dividends for *Seventeen*. It invited merchandisers to imagine a commercial future for the young white women who Ellis suggested centered their lives upon the magazine. For Ellis, Teena became more than a marketing strategy. The development of this composite and *Seventeen*'s commercial success signaled her capacity as a marketing professional in the teen girl market. Ellis often spoke of her work at *Seventeen* as the "discovery" of the teen

³⁴ Valentine Kass, quoted in Marta Scotford, *Cipe Pineles: A Life of Design* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

market. Rather than following Ellis' naturalization of this construction, Teena must be understood as an explicitly ideological category, one that packaged and defined a vision of teen girlhood that centered teen girls' buying habits, their influence in the family home, and their long-term hopes and aspirations on *Seventeen*. In its success, Teena became a powerful organizing logic for how merchandisers, *Seventeen's* editorial team, its young readership, and even historians understand white teen girlhood's place in a post-war world.

***Charm* and the Making of a “Working Women’s World”**

Upon their arrival at *Charm* in 1950, Ellis and Valentine announced a new vision for the magazine. When it was founded in 1940, Street & Smith's *Charm* sold itself as the magazine for the “business girl,” a pink-collar figure of mid-century industry who worked in secretarial labor until marriage. According to Street & Smith, this readership had evaporated as newlyweds left the workforce and transitioned to service magazines that spoke to domestic management needs. Ellis and Valentine rejected this marketing composite. In its place, they brought to *Charm* the commitment to the long-term buying power of white womanhood that they had established at *Seventeen*.

This commitment signaled an expansion and extension of Ellis' professional marketing work; as the young readers of *Seventeen* grew up, their future would be at work and with *Charm*. Ellis' initial press release drastically widened *Charm's* market. “CHARM, the magazine for 9,000,000 business girls,” read the announcement in *Women's Wear Daily*, “expands an editorial concept and spans a market. In August, CHARM becomes the magazine devoted to and edited exclusively for the nation's 18,000,000 women who work.” The relaunch brought with it the

addition of the new subtitle “*The Magazine for Women who Work.*” The announcement’s statistical doubling of its potential market signaled to merchandisers in the fashion trades an expansive new direction for *Charm*.³⁵ To construct this market category, Ellis would go far beyond the interviews and reader surveys undertaken for *Seventeen*. She would bring *Charm* to municipal government offices, downtown business associations, and department stores. The effort to render working woman legible to these organizations and institutions would include everything from negotiating for mayoral proclamations to redesigning department store displays and services with a new focus on speed, efficiency, and service. As this section illustrates, together these strategies worked to constitute, monetize, and standardize the normative consumer of *Charm* – working women. This figure stood in tension against the suburban housewife figure, the hegemonic norm of the post-World War II period.

Ellis’ reinvention of *Charm* troubles our understanding of post-war mass consumption. She explicitly rejected the suburbs and housewife as the central subject of 1950s consumer society. Rather, she located working women in the urban core, advising municipalities and department stores on the changes needed to generate sales from this expansive market category. Historians have argued that from the 1920s onwards, retailers increasingly imagined their primary buyers were suburbanites, charting how the state-funded expansion of suburbia reshaped social norms and ushered in an automobile-based economy that would define the latter half of the twentieth century.³⁶ In such a narrative, we begin with the department stores and urban consumption from the 1880s through the 1920s and arrive at the suburban malls of the 1960s and

³⁵ Inserts, *Charm Magazine*, August 1950, ‘Mrs. Valentine To Edit Charm: Returns to Street & Smith After Seven Years With Seventeen Magazine’, *Women’s Wear Daily*, February 23, 1950; ‘Charm To Alter Editorial Policy: Will Revise Coverage From ‘Business Girl’ to Wider Audience of Working Women’, *Women’s Wear Daily*, April 14, 1950.

³⁶ Catherine Gudis, *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

the big box stores of the late twentieth century.³⁷ Where department stores have remained the focus of consumer culture studies, the emphasis has been on the formation of middle-class identities, framing the department store as an arbiter of official values and taste in a culture where the perks of consumer paradise were indicators of well-being and happiness.³⁸ Historians' near exclusive focus on suburban malls has caused them to miss the shift at the center of *Charm*: that department stores and post-war urban cores might become what Ellis called a "working woman's world."³⁹

While Ellis' working womanhood must be understood as a carefully articulated marketing trope much like Teena the Teenage Girl, her constructions for *Charm* did in fact follow the employment trends of women's participation in the labor force in the decades following the Second World War. By 1955, women's employment matched the artificially high rates produced by wartime. By the end of the 1950s, 30% of married women worked in the formal labor force, including 39% of mothers with school-aged children.⁴⁰ *Charm* would be built on the argument that these women held purchasing power as not only housewives but also autonomous subjects interested in cultivating and satisfying their own needs and sense of self.

³⁷ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic* (New York, 2004); Vicki Howard, *From Main Street to Mall: The Rise and Fall of the American Department Store* (Philadelphia, 2015); Emily Remus, *A Shopper's Paradise: How the Ladies of Chicago Claimed Power and Pleasure in the New Downtown* (Chicago, 2019). On post-mall transitions in consumer service see Richard Popp, "The Anywhere, Anytime Market: The 800-Number, Direct Marketing, and the New Network of Consumption" *Enterprise & Society*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2018): 702-732.

³⁸ Jan Whitaker, *Service and Style: How the American Department Store Fashioned the Middle Class*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006).

³⁹ Estelle Ellis, "Women Who Work: *Charm* Magazine's Survey and the Way to Capitalize on the findings," 1953, pg 5. Ellis Papers, Series 2, Box 40, Folder 13.

⁴⁰ Claudia Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 119-158 cited in Susan M. Hartmann, "Women's Employment and the Domestic Ideal" in *Not June Cleaver*, edited by Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 86-87.

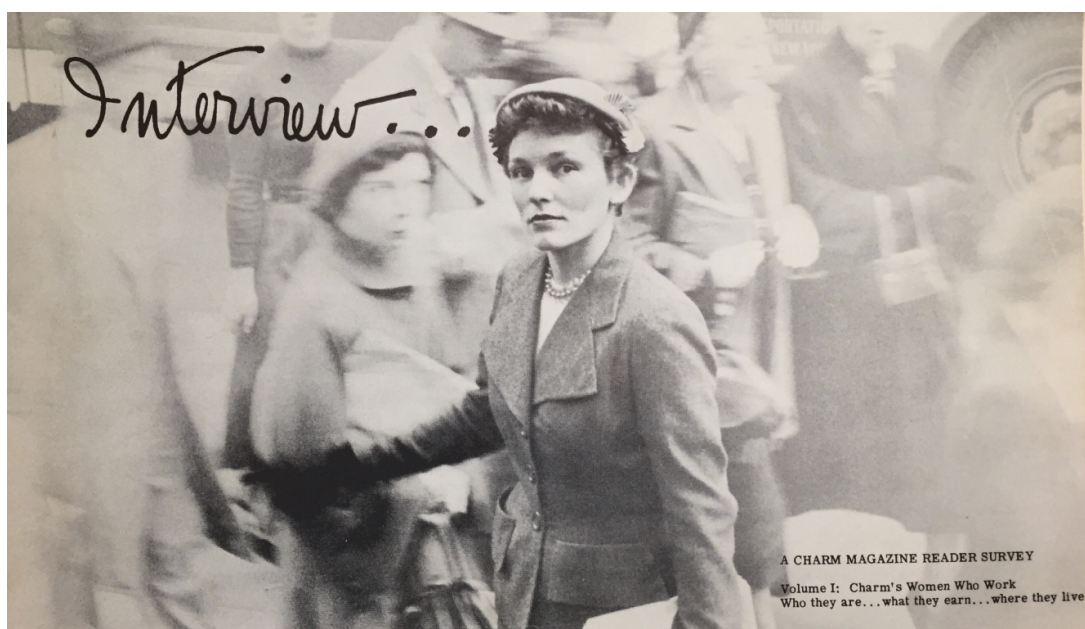
Just as with *Seventeen*, Ellis began her work at *Charm* with a survey that would render working woman a distinct market segment. However, unlike the ubiquitous *Teena*, this readership would not be collapsed into a single figure. Titled *Interview*, the *Charm* study emphasized the class diversity of working womanhood, framing their readers as united by a shared set of commercial concerns and needs. 22,461 American women were surveyed for the study over the first months of 1951. *Interview* detailed their demographics, employment situation, preferences in consumer disposables, and buying habits related to food, fashion, and housewares. Furthermore, the study broke responses down into seven job descriptions and positions common among the women who they argued read the magazine. Unlike teens, working women as a market segment cut across different ages, levels of income, kinds of employment, and life stages—and *Interview* repeatedly emphasized these distinctions within *Charm*'s readership.⁴¹

Ellis' use of statistical breakdowns by age, profession, and marital status in lieu of a marketing vehicle like *Teena* aimed to cause merchandisers to reevaluate their assumptions regarding why women joined the workforce, emphasizing their own interests and needs over domestic management (reasons that, of course, also better suited the interests of *Charm*). Ellis broke *Charm*'s ideal reader into two categories: women who worked briefly and women whose work experience stretched between 3 and 30 years.⁴² The study insisted that marital status told merchandisers little about a consumer's buying habits or preferences, as increasing numbers of married women undertook both employment and household management. Employment, *Interview* suggested, could be a joyful and autonomous experience. For example, Ellis argued

⁴¹ *Interview: A Charm Magazine Readers Survey. Volume 1: Charm's Women Who Work*. Street & Smith Productions, 1951, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Folder 2, Box 6.

⁴² *Interview*, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Folder 2, Box 6.

that the income working women earned was not earmarked solely for the household budget. Although 35% of the magazine's readers contributed 45% or more of their salaries to household budgets, 12% kept their pay packet entirely for themselves. When advertisers and merchandisers pursued working women as though they were simply secretaries waiting for marriage, they undermined both their individual desire to buy as well as the value of their work. *Interview* suggested that frankly acknowledging the reality of "two pay cheque households"—rather than framing women who worked as mothers and housewives who ached to leave their employment—would better serve merchandisers in the long run by not alienating a growing consumer base. Across the class and income spectrum, the vast number of *Charm* readers were financially secure, had life insurance, and had savings in the form of investments through their employer or of their own accord.⁴³



(Figure 3: Cover of *Interview...A Charm Magazine Reader Survey, Vol 1.*)

⁴³ *Interview*, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Folder 2, Box 6.

Like *Life with Teena*, the pages of *Interview* brimmed with images that worked to further its construction of a normative consumer of *Charm* (Figure 3). Each part of the four-part study featured in-action close snapshots of white women, with blurred silhouettes of other people moving about busy urban streets. Throughout, these portraits emphasized the role efficiency and service would play in establishing this consumer niche. The photos constructed a vision of the working women's social world where the consumer's age, marital status, and social class were not critical determinants. While professional workers, such as lawyers, made much more than secretaries, teachers, or other administrators, *Charm* hammered home shared shopping needs, similar work and leisure patterns, and buying habits as well.⁴⁴

In constructing *Charm*'s market, Ellis argued that merchandisers would require significant changes to how retailers operated to create downtown shopping cores, which she called a "working woman's world." Merchandisers and advertisers would have to rely on the twin sells of convenience and efficient service, a departure from the sales techniques that had dominated the department stores during the first half of the twentieth century. In a speech billed around the *Interview* study to retail and consultant firm Frederick Atkins in New York in 1953, Ellis argued that to capture the working day realities of *Charm* readers, retailers would have to make alterations that catered to women's working schedules. Gone were the days of mid-afternoon leisurely shopping, announced Ellis. Managers would now schedule their floor salesforce to come in later and stay later; to concentrate saleswomen working the floor between noon and 2pm, when many white collar workers took lunch; to offer higher commissions to those who took on extensive service work with customers; and to extend operating hours into the

⁴⁴ *Interview*, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Folder 2, Box 6.

evening a night or two a week, which 85% of the stores *Charm* had worked with between 1950 and 1953 had found profitable.⁴⁵

Beyond changing workforce models, Ellis advised department stores to begin to shift the kind of services that they offered to emphasize speed, affordability, and convenience. To be successful in urban areas with high employment rates among women, department stores had to move from full service models that catered to a casual, middle-class shopper to more efficient models that functioned better for consumers on a tighter schedule.⁴⁶ This included amenities like lunch bars and alteration programs as well as altering the very design of the department store. Post-war services, especially those with commercial tie-ins from magazines like *Charm*, had to make sense in the context of white-collar employment. This meant developing sandwich-soup bars to attract women to the store, even if on their lunch hours; express elevators to ready-to-wear floors where it was easy for a shopper to pick up their purchases; and crucially, office deliveries and pick-up doors open until 7 pm. If one-stop shopping was to be the defining commercial strategy for new suburban malls, Ellis argued downtown department stores had to cater to similar needs for urban workers going about their day, whether that was heading into work, heading home, or on break. Otherwise, these stores risked failing to meet the needs of the consumers that *Charm* purported to represent.

This reinvention of the urban department store also included changing the kinds of commercial address and entertainment made available to shoppers, fundamentally re-engineering the design of the department sales floor itself. In 1953, Ellis advised Frederick Atkins that urban

⁴⁵ Estelle Ellis, "Women Who Work: Charm Magazine's Survey and the way to capitalize on the findings." Delivered to Frederick Atkins, Inc. New York, New York. 1953. Estelle Papers, Series 2, Box 40, Folder 13.

⁴⁶ Estelle Ellis, "Women Who Work," 1953. Ellis Papers, Series 2, Box 40, Folder 13.

shoppers who worked replaced durable consumer goods faster than non-working women. This meant that the design of advertising displays featuring goods profiled in *Charm* had to change as well. Thematic window displays assumed a consumer who had time to take in a show.⁴⁷ For working women, floor and window designers ought to focus on ready-to-buy merchandising floor space designs that allowed shoppers to quickly pluck a hat or set of gloves off of the display itself and then carry it on their way. Coordination between buyers, the magazine, and department store display managers would mean whole looks could be established in print and then premiered in the department store, whether that was dresses and foundation garments or sweaters and bras. To emphasize self-service and convenience, suggested Ellis, was to capitalize on impulse and desire in the efficient and speedy shopping experience demanded by working womanhood.

Urban department stores across the United States adopted Ellis' marketing strategy. Where the new malls of the suburbs would cater to suburban housewives as home managers, reflecting the needs of a family unit, department stores following Ellis' advice would intuit a different kind of consumer entirely. In New York, Saks 34th Street rebranded itself as "The Specialty Shop for Women Who Work" through a *Charm* merchandising plan, as did Halle Brothers and Hochschild Kohn in Cleveland and A. Harris in Dallas.⁴⁸ Ellis established how urban merchandisers could reposition their businesses to capture a changing women's market. While *Seventeen* had worked in tandem with department stores, high schools, and merchandisers, *Charm* took this further, offering substantive changes to the nature of retailing itself to a consumer category that Ellis constructed. Indeed, the creation of what Ellis called a "working

⁴⁷ William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1994); Marlis Schweitzer, *When Broadway was the Runway: Theatre, Fashion, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

⁴⁸ Estelle Ellis, "Women Who Work," 1953. Ellis Papers, Series 2, Box 40, Folder 13.

women's world" was not just an abstract marketing trope used to envision working women as a viable consumer market. It was a material construction made up of stopovers at stores before and after commutes and lunch breaks spent rushing over to the local department store, all of which Ellis aimed to center on *Charm*.

Ellis' articulation of a working women's world went beyond the department stores and into the downtown cores of the 1950s United States. Throughout 1957, as promotional director for *Charm*, Ellis coordinated municipal governments of several major American cities, their department stores, and their business associations to celebrate and profile "working womanhood" across the United States. Throughout the year, *Charm* ran a "She Works In..." series that profiled for readers and merchandisers alike the working lives of *Charm* readers in the city. On the afternoon of Monday, March 18, 1957, Mayor Albert E. Cobo of Detroit joined the city's Central Business District Association to hold a "Salute to Women at Work in Detroit," offering a mayoral proclamation that recognized the role of working women in maintaining the city's downtown economy. The following September, the Downtown Council of Minneapolis celebrated a "Salute to Downtown Working Women" with a series of luncheons and a special commemoration celebrating the role of working women in the daily life of Minneapolis' urban core. In that same year, five Seattle department stores co-produced a massive fashion show that combined military might with couture, inviting an audience of four thousand working women to take in designer looks in an aircraft factory to celebrate the West Coast's booming, government-financed aeronautics industry. *Charm* profiled a local apparel market that Cleveland launched in 1957 as well, pitched to busy downtown working woman on the go, alongside the announcement of the Cleveland Public Library's new "Women's Wing" featuring a "Business Woman's Bookshelf" that offered resources for those who might begin their own small businesses. In

Dallas, in addition to a “Meet Me at Six” after-work fashion show for working women, the public library displayed an exhibit celebrating “One hundred years of working women” in the city. And in New York City, 17 department stores in Manhattan created 83 simultaneous window displays celebrating the white-collar working women who arrived in and exited the borough on a daily basis.⁴⁹ While each store worked out commercial tie-ins individually, they shared in planning commercial advertising directed at the working women of their respective cities.

It is critical to understand that while *Charm* pitched itself to merchandisers as a voice for and home of working women, Ellis stayed a careful course while constructing working women as a consumer category, being careful to never challenge the dominance of male breadwinners or engage in questions of organizing working women. For example, a woman’s income within *Charm* was exclusively framed as contributing to total household income and never as the breadwinner. Magazines like *Charm* captured the critical ways post-war women’s employment were providing both autonomy and financial opportunity for women in the United States. However, Ellis’ marketing strategy managed a careful balancing act, calling for a new form of commercial consumption that emphasized women’s labor while side-stepping the political critiques forwarded by labor feminists in the post-war years. Ultimately, *Charm* claimed it offered a space for a form of white working womanhood that cut across the class divisions within a professional office work context. However, it elided the working concerns of these women – inequitable pay, the experience of workplace sexual harassment, and the glass ceiling – while ignoring entirely the worlds of blue-collar workers and women of color.

Even so, within the universe of marketing and publishing, *Charm*’s construction of a pink-collar working womanhood looked nothing like the divisions of the mass market made by

⁴⁹ “Downtown Council of Minneapolis: Salute to Downtown Working Women Week,” Promotion Subcommittee & Executive Committee, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 5, Folder 9.

other retailers, publishers, or marketing firms of the same period. Ellis' construction of the "working woman" stood in stark contrast against both typical pre-war modes of price class segmentation as well as popular market research contemporaneous with her work, which generally reified a male breadwinner framework and sought to forward the housewife as home manager. Even if a working woman was both those things, *Charm* argued that purchasing power and labor outside the home constituted a consumer position that had largely gone ignored. Indeed, the magazine became a space for the articulation of the role of work and employment for women as its sales strategy transformed department stores across the urban centers of the United States. These stores became defined by the same sort of sales strategies deployed by suburban malls, but with social worlds committed to a white working womanhood.

Ellis departed *Charm* in 1958 to open a creative marketing firm of her own, Business Image, Inc., where she began to develop her own profile as a marketer. At Business Image, Ellis entwined her work at *Seventeen* and *Charm* with her own personal story. The firm offered to translate social change into sales for businesses concerned that their brand and approach to merchandising had become antiquated during the social changes of the 1950s and 1960s. In pitches to potential clients, the company was described as excelling at "segmentizing [sic] the marketplace into viable consumer groups" as well as studying the changing "American cultural scene" and its impact on the economy. Promotional language tethered Ellis and Business Image to demographic and generational changes, placing the firm at the forefront of youth culture. Ellis cast the firm, and therefore herself, as "sensitive to the shift in population balance and to the volatile lifestyle changes that [...] [are] transforming the consumption patterns of the nation." Business Image promised to reveal the distinct demographic trends of post-World War II women and young people who bought and lived in ways unfamiliar to major organizations. Unlike large

advertising firms or polling organizations, Business Image was in line with a new breed of commercial marketing and consulting firms that emerged during the 1950s. By joining this movement, Ellis accrued significant influence in the universe of women's commercial advertising and marketing, advising some of the largest merchandisers in the United States on the future of the women's market.

Kotex and the Life Cycle Concept in Marketing

In 1967, Estelle Ellis proposed an ambitious new sex education program to the Kimberly-Clark corporation, makers of Kotex sanitary napkins. Ellis' proposal called for the creation of a sex ed service program and educational research center called The Life Cycle Center and Library. The Center would offer its library of free sex education materials directly to public school teachers and nurses across the United States. The Life Cycle Library would divide the life cycle into distinct stages. As its student readers grew up, the Center would distribute new materials that discussed upcoming life cycle stages as well as relevant Kotex or Kimberly-Clark products and services. Ellis argued that by expanding their educational services to "encompass all menstruating women from pubescence to menopause[,]" Kimberly-Clark could drastically expand its commercial influence. "For each woman," suggested Ellis, "the 'image' she reflects, as well as her personal responses to the so-called sexual revolution stems directly from the quality of her acceptance of her menstrual and biological life. The way is wide open for Kotex to pioneer in educating (and, if need be, in re-educating) women of all ages to new, constructive perspectives on their own sexuality."⁵⁰ The materials generated by the Center would define "life

⁵⁰ "February 2nd, 1967 Market Analysis" Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 16. Institution. The Life Cycle Center: Where It's at and Where It's Going. A Business Image Overview", 1970, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 1.

cycle” stages for these young women on Kimberly-Clark’s long-term marketing and merchandising terms. The Center was the culmination of Ellis’ work at *Seventeen* and *Charm*: a life cycle marketing concept that would follow young women from puberty to motherhood.

In this section, I illustrate how, through the Life Cycle Center, Ellis divided a vision of the idealized, normative female life into marketable life stages. I argue that Ellis translated the very idea of the life cycle into a marketing concept, one that promised enduring profits to Kimberly-Clark. As a framework, its commercial viability was rooted in how the life cycle concept yoked readers into the expectation of a teleological reproductive heterosexuality. As young women grew up and became new mothers—and indeed, the Life Cycle Center framed motherhood as essential to the lives its young readers would lead—booklets with titles like *Your First Pregnancy* and *Your Daughter and You* would start the cycle again. In doing so, these materials would bring the child into the very same Kotex-branded commercial life cycle upon which mother herself had come to understand and imagine her own sexual and reproductive health, life, and future. In this way, the Center segmented the entirety of the post-war lifecycle, folding a highly regulated, normative vision of sexual intimacy and reproduction into the reproduction of the consumer market itself.

When Ellis suggested Kimberly-Clark could engineer new, “constructive” perspectives on reproductive health for young women, the perspectives would be new only because the Life Cycle Center and Library would be positioned *against* Kimberly-Clark’s own historical advertising strategies. Previously, Kimberly-Clark relied on building a sense of shame and anxiety through their advertising in order to frame their products as an authority on menstruation and reproductive health. In their first forays onto the market in 1921, Kotex sanitary napkins had been promoted through a joint military-public health discourse, an emphasis on white

respectability, and a focus on shame and silence to create room for a marketing of sanitary napkins.⁵¹ Early Kotex advertisements suggested the napkins had been devised to use up leftover wood pulp-based absorbent materials that had been mass produced and supplied to the U.S. federal government by Kimberly-Clark during the First World War. These ads featured illustrations of white female nurses who affirmed the sanitary quality of surgical materials. In the text, advertisements spoke to notions of social hygiene that defined early twentieth century cultural mores surrounding whiteness and respectability and tied use of the product to the bodily management demanded of modern womanhood.

Indeed, Kimberly-Clark's earliest merchandising and advertising strategies produced shame and silence, framing Kotex as a solution to the threat that menstruation presented to civilized respectability. In a series of advertisements in the late 1940s, for example, Kotex suggested that while a mother might broach the topic of menstruation with her daughter, proceeding without the guiding hand of Kotex educational materials was a risk. Relying on the specter of sexual deviance, and even death, one such series of advertisements warned keen mothers not to share "some of the bogey ideas you picked up when you were a teen-ager" and to send away for Kotex educational materials instead. "A girl's first experience with menstruation can and does condition her for life[.]" the ads cautioned, asking the mother: "Do You Scare Her to Death?"⁵² Claims such as this were more than the anxiety that classic advertisements for

⁵¹ The investment in public health-based marketing ventures has made Kimberly-Clark's Kotex product line an important case study in advertising history since Roland Marchand's 1985 *Advertising the American Dream*, mainly for Kimberly-Clark's innovative use of medical authority to promote the product. See: Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 22-25, 334.

⁵² Elizabeth Woodward, "Do You Scare Her to Death?", *Parents Magazine*, 1949 Kimberly-Clark advertisement appearing in *Parent's Magazine*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Good Housekeeping*. On shame as a central anxiety around sex education, see: Janice Irvine, *Talk About Sex: The Battles Over Sex Education in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). On the contestation between parents and doctors in the production of medical texts, see: Jennifer Burek Pierce, *What*

products like Listerine sought to create when they conjured up the social ill of bad breath. This was capital entering the most non-market of relationalities, attempting to perform a form of *in loco parentis* that undermined parents who sought to explain biological function to their own children.

By arguing that the Life Cycle Center and Library was a service venture through which users could come to understand both their reproductive health and their entire life cycle, Ellis positioned the center's commercial potential for Kimberly-Clark in three different ways. First, the Life Cycle Center's lifelong structure served as a mechanism for targeting ads and information at specific, critical moments in the life cycle of its readers, ensuring the gold standard of all marketing strategy: a homogenous market of uniform consumers that persisted over time. Ellis argued that moments like one's first period, first sexual experience, going to college, moving out, eventual marriage, and the birth of a child were not only significant emotional events, but were also moments when consumers either switched brands or intensified their relationship to their current product of choice. For example, the fourth booklet in the library, *The Years of Independence*, defined one life segment as late-teens finishing high school and entering college or the workforce. Offering advice on navigating work and educational commitments alongside the potential social obligations of sex, Ellis' suggested that this period of change "correlates with the period in her life when the first truly independent buying patterns are set up."⁵³ Syncing bodily change with changing consumer desires, the booklets targeted moments

Adolescents Ought to Know: Sexual Health Texts in Early Twentieth-Century America (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011).

⁵³ *The Years of Independence* (Neenah, WI: Kimberly-Clark Corporation, 1978). Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 21.

of physical and emotional transition that “frequently motivate brand and product switching” and in turn, could tether powerful emotional experiences to the Kotex brand.⁵⁴

Second, the library’s educational approach was distinct from earlier strategies deployed by Kotex in advertisements. These educational booklets sought to marry frank discussions of sexuality with the social concerns of family life that had characterized sex education since the 1950s. No service literature, Ellis argued, had effectively brought together both the “physiological and emotional problems related to menstruation.” As she envisioned it, marrying these two literatures would allow “the opportunity for Kotex to re-educate women, starting with the pubescent girl to the natural acceptance of menstruation [...]” In the marketing benefits to be derived from the educational program, Ellis promised that “Kotex would be creating new, healthy consumer attitudes toward the menstrual process. This, in turn, would favor the marketing of the company’s feminine hygiene product line.”⁵⁵ Instead of relying on a fictional parent to guide the conversation, such as in *Marjorie May*, the Life Cycle Library pamphlets would use an authoritative medical discourse – one couched in the Kotex platform – to connect young women’s biological changes to emotional ones.

Third and finally, Ellis argued that positioning Kotex as a scientific brand and embracing a sexual politics that valued pleasure might even undo the legacy of shame that dogged menstruation, in turn creating a positive relationship between women and their bodies mediated by the Kotex brand. Of course, the “negative thinking associated with menstruation” had been a strategy undertaken by Kimberly-Clark through the IPIC years, as the firm sought to control how and what parents communicated to their children about sexual health. By embracing a scientific

⁵⁴ *The Years of Independence* (Neenah, WI: Kimberly-Clark Corporation, 1978). Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 21.

⁵⁵ “February 2nd 1967 Market Analysis,” Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 16.

and pedagogical discourse, Ellis argued the booklets would emphasize sexual health awareness and render these physiological functions into “positive” experiences from the beginning of puberty to the end of life. More than this, such a strategy also meant that Kotex might open new approaches to promoting its products that years of shaming had previously rendered impossible. If the booklets helped to reframe bodily function as positive, then the narrow advertising nomenclature around sexual health – what Ellis called “corporate restraints” on the marketing and sale of pads, tampons, and other hygiene products – could be undone.⁵⁶

By offering parents the opportunity to use the booklets and marketing the Center using the language of consumer service, Kimberly-Clark could pitch its products outside the languages of military innovation and public health and instead through the seemingly-neutral, scientific position of menstrual education and commercial service. As Ellis argued, “The point cannot be over-emphasized since educational material can provide the added ‘product benefit’ so essential in establishing a competitive edge for the Kotex feminine hygiene products division [...]. There is reason to believe in time K-C [Kimberly-Clark] may discover that soundly researched consumer service literature is the most wanted ‘product premium’ of all.”⁵⁷ Such a position signaled an early recognition of the 1970s transition to service and data collection in market research, cultivating long-term relationships with consumers through tailored and personalized engagement developed via data surveillance.

Ellis and Kimberly-Clark launched the Life Cycle Center in 1968. Business Image, Inc., advised on the Center’s day-to-day operations, development, programming, and promotion, especially around the content of the booklets and their distribution. In order to get materials into

⁵⁶ February 2nd 1967 Market Analysis” Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 16.

⁵⁷ February 2nd 1967 Market Analysis” Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 16.

teachers' hands, the booklets were sent to school boards with a teaching guide emphasizing that the materials explained menstruation rather than sex ed. Through a public-facing nurse hired to author materials in and out of the center and lend it the bona fides of medicine, the Life Cycle Library offered educators the following:

As a member of the educational community, you are well aware of the changing concepts of sex education [...] In every part of the nation, parents, educators, religious, medical and community leaders are engaged in a dialogue about the nature of such programs. Naturally, there are differences of opinions about course content for the various age groups. All authorities, however, are in agreement on one point: the subject of menstruation must be taught in context of a young woman's physical maturation and her healthy identification of self as a female.⁵⁸

In this description, the center proposed a way for educators to balance the need for sex education with evading the ire of parents and community activists, focusing on menstruation as a biological function concerning "physical maturation" and "healthy identification of self as a female." By emphasizing the construction of a sexed subject through the texts, the letter suggested that teaching menstruation served to produce the female subject, regardless of what other topics might be ignored. The letter went on to suggest Kimberly-Clark had followed the debate over sex education with a keen interest and were eager to revamp their education program "to the needs of the time", offering the booklets in any quantity along with the still popular (if now twenty years old) Disney film, *The Story of Menstruation*. Middle school teachers and school nurses would also freely receive special teaching pamphlets that detailed the vast number of educational services available through the Life Cycle Center. In addition to targeting teachers through direct

⁵⁸ "Letter Addressed to Educators Regarding Kimberly-Clark Life Cycle Center and Library," Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 25, Folder 1.

appeal, the booklets were also advertised on the side of Kotex boxes, which invited mothers and daughter alike to write into the Center to receive Library materials in the mail.

The Life Cycle Center's central marketing logic was predicated on the cyclical nature of the life cycle concept, which promised a variety of commercial possibilities to Kimberly-Clark as the Center's young readers grew up. Ellis's emphasis on the segmentation of the life cycle as a commercial strategy was not necessarily new in American corporate marketing. Since the 1920s, many service industries had placed an intense focus on life stages in advertising directed toward potential clients.

The Life Cycle Center went well beyond this kind of marketing strategy, however. Through booklets distributed in the classroom, the Center did not simply educate students on life cycle stages; it intentionally constructed them and enforced their cyclicity. From *The Miracle of You to Your First Pregnancy*, transitions between books were defined by social or biological changes which Ellis framed as opportunities for new product lines and brands introduced by Kimberly-Clark. At the end of Kimberly-Clark's Life Cycle Library, *Getting Married* and *Your First Pregnancy* primed readers for married life and motherhood, emphasizing the financial, emotional, and marital obligations of starting a family. *Your First Pregnancy* in particular spoke directly to a mother's connection with her newborn child, prompting the mother to use an additional guide published by the Center when their own child came of age. The Center's focus on cyclicity drew readers into a teleology of reproductive heterosexual intimacy both embedded in, and defined by, Kimberly-Clark and its brands.

The life cycle concept forwarded by the Life Cycle Center ended at reproduction—conceiving neither post-menopausal subjects or non-menstruating women as viable consumer markets. Intriguingly, Ellis's original proposal for the Center included booklets for pre- and post-

menopause; while *The Middle Years* would have targeted 40 to 55-year-old women, *The Mature Woman: Post-menopause—The Heritage of Femininity*, would have been geared toward those aged 50 to 85.⁵⁹ The proposed booklets would have discussed sex life during and after menopause, late-in-life marriage, the possibilities of hormone therapy, and remarriage after the death of a partner, with sections dedicated to “the expanded choices of Kotex Life-Cycle products with recommendations for use” in the “middle” and “mature years.”⁶⁰ Yet these booklets were never produced. Instead, the focus of the Life Cycle Center remained tethered to reproductive capacity. Reproduction was so central to how Kimberly-Clark viewed this program that Ellis went as far as to suggest that this consumer market might be extended through scientific advances in hormone therapy that would push menstruation years into their “sixties, seventies, and eighties.”⁶¹ As much as the teenager supplanted the mother as “household manager” within American consumer capitalism, the cultural weight of American youth culture meant that the female consumer lost her commercial viability post-menopause as an investable figure of American consumer capitalism.

The life cycle concept thus worked for both consumer and merchandiser. For Ellis and Kimberly-Clark, the model standardized life stages and managed moments of transition, enabling them to monitor how consumer needs would change. The life cycle model projected value onto the specific future it mapped out, promising homogenous markets of readers who shared in the same specific kinds of potential needs. It provided the firm with a blueprint to the life cycle of their consumers’ lives, one which could be capitalized upon through line extensions and specific

⁵⁹ “Market Analysis – February 2nd, 1967 – Marketing Benefits to be Derived from the Kotex Life Cycle Library,” page 9, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 16.

⁶⁰ “Market Analysis – February 2nd, 1967,” page 20-21, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 16.

⁶¹ “Educational Program Revitalization Effort - Marketing Benefits”, Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 16.

promotional outreach programs. For readers, the life cycle model broke their lives down into knowable moments. When handed out by teachers, school nurses, or parents, these booklets gained a tacit institutional or familial endorsement of their definitions, attaching social and personal value to the attainment of the norms laid out in their pages. At the same time, the Center's pursuit of coherent life stage categories as markets functionally marked those readers who fell outside the bounds of the "normative" life cycle as failures. This included those who experienced queer desire, those who did not get married, those who experienced childbirth before marriage, and those who did not menstruate—all framed as aberrations who failed to realize the norms the Center set out.

Consumer response to the library and the Center became part of a broader strategy of product development for Ellis and her team. In 1969, after the first year of operation, *Business Image* compiled forty pages of response letters, both positive and negative, broken down by region across North America. Responses came from public health departments, Planned Parenthood, Catholic school teachers, children, health services directors, educational consultants, advocates for children with disabilities, nurses, mothers, principals, and state supervisors.⁶² Across both positive and negative comments, individuals who wrote in seemed to recognize that the center was both an educational service as well as advertising and marketing strategy, though these comments often collapsed the three. In tabulated positive comments, Ellis emphasized that readers appreciated the journalistic and factual data about sexual health and especially the emphasis on emotional changes. One teacher from San Antonio, Texas praised the "company for making such excellent materials available [...] You are doing a real service for those who benefit

⁶² "Analysis of Complimentary Letters" and "Analysis of Complaint Letters" Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 24. The program was also marketed in Australia, but archived consumer responses are exclusively from the U.S. and Canada.

from these excellent materials [...]” An Associate Director of Public Aid in Chicago suggested the booklet sets had “been welcomed by our girls and their foster mothers.” Similarly, a School Nurse from St. Joseph, Michigan and a mother from Whippany, New Jersey agreed that the materials would be essential to the sex education programs being developed in their local school districts. Perhaps most compellingly, a mother from Detroit, Michigan remarked: “My hearty thanks for your wonder Life Cycle Center folder [...]. This is the best form of advertising any firm can do.”⁶³ These readers named the very project of the Life Cycle Library as a marketing vehicle: to commodify the experience of sexual maturation by rendering each stage of the life cycle as intelligible only through the platform itself.

Critiques tabulated by Business Images typically focused on frank discussions of sexual intimacy, including some concern around the detailing of the anatomy of the penis, and the use of animals to explain the function of sexual desire in different kinds of species, which appeared in earlier booklets. Some parents responded with the threat of boycott. A parent from Phoenix, Arizona argued that “advertising has reached the point of being repulsive” and noted an intention to “boycott your products until you can find your way back to decency.” A Utah State Board of Education specialist suggested it was “inappropriate to describe intercourse in some animals and in humans for these young students being introduced to maturation. It is true we are living in a day when topics of sex are discussed more openly and frankly than has been the case in past generations. Within this more open sitting [sic] to have the wisdom of what to do and what not to do for the good of youth is paramount.” A mother from Petaluma, California threatened the Life Cycle Library on obscenity grounds, arguing that the educational materials spelled the end of her

⁶³ “Analysis of Complimentary Letters,” Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 24. Letters from users of the Center suggest that it did in fact transmit ideas about changing social mores, even if complaint letters rejected these changes. It is reminiscent of historian Sarah Igo’s findings in respondents’ work for the Kinsey and Middletown studies. See Igo, *The Averaged American*, 68-103, 234-281.

support for Kotex: “I have bought Tampax and Kotex all the time but now I will not buy your products anymore [...] I am very much opposed to the filth that is being called ‘Sex Education’ and is pushed in our local schools [...] Us gals are passing the word around.” A parent from El Dorado, Texas made a similar suggestion: “I am terribly disappointed in the Kimberly-Clark Corp. and in the future shall be very selective in the brand of feminine products I buy.” Indeed, many negative respondents committed to switching brands in response to the program, cognizant of the commercial imperative at the heart of the materials.⁶⁴

The Center and other privately produced sex ed materials were largely condemned by educational researchers. One study, run by three clinical psychiatrists in the field of child and youth studies, interviewed women aged 9 to 18. The participants warned that such materials placed an emphasis on approaches to menstruation that framed products as solutions to menstruation and in turn, puberty as a market, arguing that “the major concern of these companies is with selling a product. Any educational endeavor they engage in must support their commercial interests. Their failure lies in their concern with avoiding controversial and unpleasant topics in communicating with potential consumers.”⁶⁵ However, by that same year, the model was relatively successful, at least in broad application: studies indicated that many young peoples’ first institutional encounters with sexual health education were now through commercially-sponsored films and texts in the classroom.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ “Analysis of Complaint Letters,” Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 24.

⁶⁵ Lynn E. Whisnant, Elizabeth Brett, and Leonard Zegans, “Implicit messages concerning menstruation in commercial educational material,” *Journal of Psychiatry* Vol. 125 (1975): 815–820.

⁶⁶ Whisnant, Brett, and Zegans, “Implicit messages concerning menstruation in commercial educational material,” *Journal of Psychiatry* Vol. 125 (1975): 815–820.

Kimberly-Clark and Ellis anticipated some of these critiques and attempted to insulate themselves from the fallout, especially those scrutinizing the imbrication of education and commercial market planning that recognized the Life Cycle Library as a marketing platform designed to capture consumers in the long term. As the booklets bore on and the narrative shifted to marital sex and the construction of ideal companionate heterosexuality, Ellis argued that these concerns would die off; further, the distinctions between sales and educational material could perhaps be passed over for more explicit targeted marketing. Beyond this, as young women who grew up with the platform began to have children of their own, the commitment to the platform would potentially allow them to dismiss concerns over the commercialization of sex education, let alone the very definition of the “life cycle.”

Data regarding engagement with the Center, however, suggested that Ellis’ strategy of separating sales and educational content in earlier booklets did not work. In their own usage studies of the Life Cycle Center materials, Ellis and her staff discovered that the texts had overlapping audiences. Even though specific booklets were targeted at child-rearing, puberty, or menopause, younger women frequently consulted across all of the published material, including those marketed to women above their age group. Indeed, Ellis framed “[t]he multiple readership of the books in the Life Cycle Library” as one of its greatest marketing strengths. When young women read ahead, they began to chart and think about the entirety of their reproductive life cycle through, and within the context of, the Kotex brand and its associated product lines.⁶⁷

Another strategy for mitigating critique was the employment of a trained nurse as the general director of the Life Cycle Library. In 1969, Ellis called for a director who understood

⁶⁷ “The Life Cycle Center: Where It’s at and Where It’s Going. A Business Image Overview”, 1970. Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 1.

that the Center was “serving up a unique business opportunity”, seeking someone who could balance the “growth of an educational division of a major industrial corporation” with the directing of “a corporate consumer service program unique in the nation.” Ellis emphasized that the director ought to be an academic with a background in the fields of sex education and public health. Such a figure legitimized the materials as a public health campaign in order to balance anxieties around commercial advertising with the value of public outreach.⁶⁸

The new educational director for the 1970s was Mary Louise Lennon, who had become educational director of the center in 1969 and often published in scholarly journals on industry, health education, and advertising through her position at Kimberly-Clark. Lennon, a graduate of Emmanuel College and Wellesley, had previously served as a community health representative for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New York. Moving to Kimberly-Clark in March 1970, the bulk of Lennon’s work framed industry’s role in sex education as a form of consumer training. In an essay published in 1974, Lennon argued that “[b]eginning in the early 60s the mail indicated that women’s questions were no longer in the narrow area of menstrual hygiene. Rather, women were [asking questions] on topics related to feminine development, such as developing sexuality, personal relationships, attitudes and behavior, as well as the role of women in society.”⁶⁹ Couching classroom-targeted marketing in the language of consumer demand, Lennon explained that “[o]nce again Kimberly-Clark is responding to the need being voiced by

⁶⁸ “Expanded Objectives for the Selection of a Director of Education for the Life Cycle Center,” 1969. Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 15.

⁶⁹ Mary Louise Lennon, “Kimberly-Clark and the Life Cycle Center” *School Health Review* (September 1973): 8; Mary Louise Lennon, “The Role of an Industry in Consumer Health Education” *Health Education & Behavior* (1972). While Lennon’s work addressed industry, her work also made her an important figure for journalists in lifestyle journalism. For her advice on honeymoon anxieties, see: Mary Louise Lennon, “How to Ease Those Honeymoon Tensions,” *Carroll Daily Times Herald*, May 5, 1971, 29; on girls leaving for college, Mary Louise Lennon, “Being ‘On Your Own’ Poses Certain Challenges” *Waukesha Daily Freeman*, August 19, 1970.

the general public.”⁷⁰ Typical of marketing firms, Business Image disappears in this narrative arc. In such framing, market plan and opportunity are redefined as educational duty, the service ethos, and a commitment to consumer education and wellbeing.

After two years of operation, Ellis issued a report and review advising on how the Center should develop in the coming decade. “The Life Cycle Center is a reality”, she proclaimed. “[I]t has substantial assets, most important of which is the point of view it reinforces with each periodical it publishes.” With an educational director hired, Ellis argued that the center was “ready to move forward--to expand the dissemination of materials built up in the past three years via educational and market channels.”⁷¹ The report determined that part of the appeal of the Center was that it established a ‘scientific’ and rationalized life cycle model in the commercial marketing of menstrual products and affiliated lines, one that ensured Kotex remained the brand women went to first in the product category throughout their lives. In examining its assets and development, the review argued that from the 1970s onward, the Center had to “intensify and extend communication between Kotex Products and the menstruating consumer [...]”. To do so would be to “[b]uild for Kotex products a bridge of intimacy and an image of service with menstruating females of all ages”, framing “Kotex as an authority in the area of menstrual-related health problems, relating service authority to product authority.”⁷² Reflective of the growing women’s health movement and the commitment to a vision of biological autonomy around reproductive health, the final goal of the company in the 1970s would be to see “Kotex

⁷⁰ Mary Louise Lennon, “Kimberly-Clark and the Life Cycle Center” *School Health Review* (September 1973): 8.

⁷¹ “The Life Cycle Center: Where It’s at and Where It’s Going. A Business Image Overview”, 1970. Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 1.

⁷² “The Life Cycle Center: Where It’s at and Where It’s Going. A Business Image Overview”, 1970. Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 1.

Products with the means for access to organized groups via classrooms, clubs, and private and government agencies.”⁷³

The report emphasized the important role Lennon played in fostering student trust and in turn, extracting precious marketing data for Kimberly-Clark. Lennon invited readers to write in directly to her with their questions and concerns about reproductive and sexual health. Ellis suggested these inquiries could serve as the foundation for highly tailored direct marketing campaigns. Going forward, Ellis suggested the “lists Mary Louise Lennon will be building in the coming years from requests for Life Cycle materials and information will provide the nucleus for future direct marketing ventures. Computerized, as all consumer and professional names gathered by the Life Cycle Center should be from here on in, they will serve to build a customer bank of immediate value to Kotex and its regional sales offices.”⁷⁴ Reader inquiries, many of which detailed their most pressing and intimate concerns about their sexual and reproductive health, would generate a database of anxieties that Kimberly-Clark could use to generate new campaigns, product lines, and services.

As a marketing regime, the Life Cycle Center extended into other realms of knowledge production, such as public health and education. They did so not only to seek legitimacy but to render these institutions more amiable to Kimberly-Clark’s long-term marketing goals. The Center’s market-driven vision of the life cycle, centered on the Kotex brand, reached into and informed many other institutions operating well beyond the business of sanitary napkins and tampons. In 1970, within its first two years of operation, Ellis undertook an aggressive campaign

⁷³ “The Life Cycle Center: Where It’s at and Where It’s Going. A Business Image Overview”, 1970. Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 1.

⁷⁴ “The Life Cycle Center: Where It’s at and Where It’s Going. A Business Image Overview”, 1970. Ellis Papers, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 1.

to expand the Center's civic, academic, and corporate engagement and outreach in order to make the program not only respectable but also authoritative. These strategies included hiring registered nurses to serve as the public face of the center; producing scholarly research authored by those nurses, extolling the benefits of sex education and consumer service literature appeared in academic public health and advertising trade journals; ensuring Life Cycle Center materials were accepted into university, medical, and national health organization libraries; coordinating with government consumer service entities, such as Nixon's proposed National Health Education Foundation, concerning consumer knowledge, engagement, and rights in the medical fields; and finally, working with teachers and sexual health educators using the Life Cycle booklets and teaching guides in the classroom. The Center did not simply participate in these various state, educational, and medical discussions: it led them.

Conclusion

Marketers like Estelle Ellis sought not only to measure and account for American lifeways but also to change them. Ellis is a critical actor in the histories of U.S. advertising, capitalism, and sexuality who constructed a vision of white womanhood for her corporate clients. Ellis' marketing creation, Teena the Teenage Girl, worked to shift how merchandisers understood and thought about the teenage girl, emphasizing her long-term buying power as she grew up, entered the workforce, got married, and had children. Drawing on her work at *Seventeen* and *Charm*, Ellis lead Business Image in the creation of an educational program that reached into public health policy, the home, the classroom, and beyond. This chapter reveals how niche marketing experts like Estelle Ellis sought to co-opt other sites of institutional power and

bend them to both their own needs and those of their clients.

Furthermore, Ellis parlayed her construction of post-war white womanhood to impressive heights for herself. As this chapter has illustrated, she put Teena, *Charm*, and Kotex to work to develop a career as one of the foremost marketing experts on white women's consumption habits and preferences. By the end of the twentieth century, Ellis advised on major changes to *Vogue* in the 1980s and later became a steward and donor to the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. She entered the field of philanthropic giving, donated her materials to the Smithsonian, and eagerly participated in a number of interviews about her career, mid-century marketing, and the construction of the teenage girl market. Ellis did more than mobilize a vision of the post-war market — she used this vision to cement her own historical legacy.

Ellis's work, however, competed with other formulations of women's consuming power in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. In many ways, it has been obscured by the historical legacy of commercial marketing research that has emphasized the buying power and discretion of the housewife. However, mid-century market researchers constructed a vision of the housewife that was very much distinct from Ellis' autonomous, liberal subject who would read *Seventeen* or *Charm* and then go onto a career. As chapter two examines, the motivational researchers and marketing experts at Social Research, Inc., of Chicago, Illinois saw the housewife as a deeply vexed and paranoid figure. Rising post-war wages shook the very foundations of her working-class social world, one which she, as mother and wife, was tasked with transferring to her children. For these motivational researchers, the working woman had no place outside the American home. Instead, she was best understood through the title of their landmark 1959 publication, *The Workingman's Wife*.

Chapter 2: Class in the Mass Market: Social Research and *The Workingman's Wife*

On August 14th, 1961, Macfadden Publications, the New York-based publisher of *True Story*, *True Detective*, and *True Romance* magazines, sent a team of salesmen out to all the major advertising agencies on Madison Avenue. Since the launch of its flagship magazine *True Story* in 1919, Macfadden had pitched itself to advertisers on the strength of its working-class, urban readership. In the years following the Second World War, however, the publisher had faced significant dips in circulation and advertising revenue. The advertising industry pegged this to the popular assumption that the average consumer's tastes were becoming decidedly middle brow as post-war wages grew. On Madison Avenue that August morning, Macfadden's marketing brass sought to undo that perception. Donning grey flannel suits, the marketing men carried not briefcases, but grey tin lunch pails into the meetings—a symbol, Macfadden suggested, of the commercial might of its post-war readership. When opened, the pails revealed themselves to be tape recorders that spoke, quite literally, about a now well-paid, but still very much blue-collar, working class.¹

Macfadden's "Operation Lunch Pail" argued that blue-collar housewives constituted the largest and most influential segment of the post-war market. This market construction looked decidedly different from the "working woman's world" that Estelle Ellis had developed. These consumers shopped primarily around filling their husband's lunch pails and managing household needs. Most importantly for Macfadden, they presided over which brands would stock the pantry. "[T]he future of national brand products in the United States is inextricably tied to the

¹ Peter Bart, "Blue Collars and Brand Names," *New York Times*, August 14, 1961, 34.

working class housewife” reported Peter Bart, the columnist for the *New York Times* who documented Macfadden’s marketing blitz, seemingly reproducing the publisher’s grand proclamation as factual and true. “Whereas the educated white collar wife is increasingly shifting to private label products,” branded lines specific to stores such as A&P and advertised as above the quality of nationally recognized brands, “the working class housewife continues to remain faithful to brand name products” such as Campbells and Heinz.² The Macfadden campaign conjured up a blue-collar housewife who was profoundly anxious about her place in a changing world. While “[t]he middle class wife feels free to serve any kind of private label soup,” suggested one Macfadden executive, “the working class wife derives status and confidence by serving Campbell’s Soup.”³ Such claims suggested Macfadden’s magazine was the place to find these buyers.

To construct this working class consumer, Macfadden turned to the world of university social science. The publisher had hired University of Chicago researchers and their marketing consultancy, Social Research, Inc., to develop their blue-collar composite. Social Research’s findings for Macfadden were published in a 1959 monograph titled *The Workingman’s Wife*.⁴ In the months following Operation Lunch Pail, Macfadden took out multiple full-page advertisements in the *New York Times* to promote the study’s findings as well as their magazine. The advertisements offered free copies of *The Workingman’s Wife* to any advertising agency or merchandiser that might be interested in discovering this consumer.⁵

² Bart, “Blue Collars and Brand Names.”

³ Bart, “Blue Collars and Brand Names.”

⁴ Lee Rainwater, Richard Coleman, and Gerald Handel, *The Workingman’s Wife: Her Personality, World, and Life Style* (New York: Oceana Publications, 1959).

⁵ This advertisement appeared simultaneously across a number of major U.S. newspapers on 15 May 1961. See: *Chicago Tribune*, p. c6; *New York Times*, p. 32, *Wall Street Journal*, p. 11. *New York Times*, December 20, 1961, p. 68.

Since its publication in 1959, *The Workingman's Wife* has served as a powerful documentation of mid-twentieth century working-class life for sociologists and historians alike.⁶ However, its origins are not academic—they are in marketing. As the text took on power as an academic work, their marketing constructions were ported over into other sites of knowledge production. *The Workingman's Wife* began as a series of contracts for Macfadden, which started in 1949 and culminated with the book's publication in 1959. Drawing upon Social Research's academic affiliations, the study endowed Macfadden's promotional blitz with the weight of scholarly fact, even though the publisher had commissioned the marketing study solely to support their magazines in the first place. The genesis of this text shaped both the vision of a heterosexual blue-collar family life that it constructed and the particular ways it defined class as a marketing concept.

As a marketing firm, Social Research, Inc. constructed and promoted ideas about who consumers were through their “social class” segmentation technique, a method developed by the anthropologist Lloyd Warner, a professor at the University of Chicago, and later founder of Social Research. Their research findings were not organic discoveries, but rather marketing constructions that bolstered the reputation (and in turn, coffers) of the firm and their clients. Indeed, as much as Social Research's stated aim was to ‘know the consumer,’ as suggested by the name of a marketing symposium they held in 1961, it was also commercial and ideological

⁶ A few examples of scholarship reproducing the anxious blue-collar housewife, see Herbert J. Gains, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1967); Jessie Barnard, *The Future of Marriage* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1972); David Gartman, *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design* (Routledge: New York, 1994). David R. Wells, *Consumerism and the Movement of Housewives into Wage Work* (Routledge: New York, 1998). For work that frames *The Workingman's Wife* as market research see Shelley Nickles, “More is Better: Mass Consumption, Gender, and Class Identity,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (2002): 581-622; C. Allen, “Discovering ‘Joe Six Pack’ Content in Television News: The Hidden History of Audience Research, News Consultants, and the Warner Class Model” *Journal of Broadcasting History*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2005): 363-382.

work. Their vision of class was one amiable to them and to Macfadden, not the consumers they claimed to represent. Even as their marketing techniques advanced in complexity (or at least were promoted in the press as cutting-edge social science) these techniques did not necessarily result in greater accuracy or a deeper knowledge of the consumer. At the heart of all market research runs a singular anxiety: marketers recognize that people exceed their categories. Thus, the next best thing is to define the terms through which the conversation about knowing is had.

In this chapter, I locate Social Research and *The Workingman's Wife* at the intersection of anthropology, psychology, and market research at mid-century. I show how Social Research's particular marketing methods imported conclusions from colonial anthropology and psychology into their marketing composite, constructing a blue-collar housewife whose "Personality, World, and Life Style," as the subtitle of the 1959 study read, bore a striking parallel to the American Indian constructed in their earlier colonial scholarship. Both of the firm's major intellectual figures, Lloyd Warner and William Henry, first developed their methods in fieldwork amongst Indigenous communities: Warner in Northern Australia and Henry in the American Southwest. Their work contributed to the construction of an American Indian who was anxious, deeply irrational and lacked agency. What's more, this figure was grounded in a longer historical trajectory, presented as a bearer of civilization and understood to be out of place in industrial modernity. Drawing on those same methods as market research, *The Workingman's Wife* constructed a blue-collar housewife who was appealing to merchandisers for the very same reasons. As a composite, this figure was profoundly alienated from the modern world, irrational in the face of technological change, and desperate for the guiding hand of American merchandisers to help her through the transition to post-war life. This figure was also crucial in shaping the brand preferences for the vast majority of Americans. Like the American Indian,

they too had a relationship to a longer historical trajectory, carrying with them the “deep and enduring values” of American culture, and “the central and largest core of our conscious and unconscious life.” *The Workingman’s Wife* presented these deep historical roots and this sense of dislocation as a commercial opportunity: to advertise in Macfadden would be to ease a brand into this consumer type’s sense of tradition, securing long-term purchasing commitment and therefore long-term return.

To establish this, this chapter begins by examining the methodological approaches deployed by the firm: Lloyd Warner’s anthropological social class analysis and William Henry’s iteration of the Thematic Apperception Test. It then moves to consider how Social Research mobilized their academic background in their self-promotion, framing their marketing conclusions as social science discoveries. This framework was picked up by magazines like *Printer’s Ink* and *LIFE*, both of which produced articles that presented the firm’s market research as anthropological fact, inviting readers to identify themselves within Warner’s theories of social class. In the last section of this chapter, I turn to *The Workingman’s Wife* itself. I document how the firm constructed this anxious, blue-collar housewife on Macfadden’s behalf.

Social Research has received scant historical attention, yet their approach to segmenting the consumer market by social class continues to shape contemporary media markets today. The lack of scholarship on the firm can be explained by a number of reasons. Their materials are not archived in a single location but rather strewn about many different corporate archives, some of which remain inaccessible. What’s more, they lacked the bombastic personality of Ernest Dichter, their direct competitor and a marketing professional who is now well-documented by historians of advertising and market research. Yet Social Research’s social class segmentation model has endured in surprising ways. The firm’s university affiliation and graduate student staff

permitted them to influence both the curriculum and development of business schools across the United States. Their work became instrumental to the early development of “consumer culture studies” within these schools beginning in the 1960s. Central to the firm’s legacy was Warner’s theory of social class stratification, which charted the transition from a “mass market” to a “general market,” the latter of which conjured up a market of consumers overwhelmingly concentrated in the lower social class brackets and who feared social change. Navigating these consumers would become the litmus test by which the value of all other forms of market segmentation would be measured and understood.

In its purposeful movement between the universes of marketing and academic research, Social Research achieved the goal of all marketing: they established the terms by which advertisers, merchandisers, ordinary consumers, and (as it turns out) historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have organized and understood the world of mid-century class. Historian Lizabeth Cohen has argued that mid-century market segmentation by class contributed “to [a] framing [of] social class in the postwar period increasingly as a set of lifestyle preferences rather than an economic and power relationship.”⁷ Similarly, historian Oliver Zunz has argued that such marketers deradicalized class by bringing it into “the marketing world [...] directing academic research away from issues of class conflicts toward questions of status and prestige.”⁸ Both these claims are true. Social Research did in fact create a grammar for class difference amiable to corporate America, one that suggested class, unlike labor, was manageable through the very marketing techniques Social Research offered. However, as I will illustrate, Social Research

⁷ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 312-313.

⁸ Oliver Zunz, *Why the American Century?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 99.

pushed their work well beyond the scope of marketing. They constructed an enduring vision of blue-collar social life which we remain stuck with today.

Warner and Social Class Segmentation

Social Research, Inc. capitalized upon its academic bona fides to sell its market research, using the techniques developed by one of its founders, Lloyd Warner, to argue that their client work was itself an anthropology of industrial life in the United States. In this section, I chart the development of Warner's social class theory and how it emerged as a market research technique. Warner developed his theory of social class while completing graduate research fieldwork in Northern Australia between 1925 and 1929. Upon his return to the United States, Warner began work on applying this method to the United States, developing a ten-year study of Newburyport, Massachusetts. When the first of his *Yankee City* studies was published in 1941, critics panned the work for the anthropological assumptions it ported into industrial life. They argued that Warner reified racial categories by not accounting for demographic change and that he relied on testimony to define social class rather than measuring a citizen's material wealth, power, and influence. However, as I suggest here, it was these very concerns that caught the eye of marketing professionals. Although critics claimed Warner had failed to understand the nature of class, his definition was productive for marketers: they believed it offered a consumer's specific perspective on their own position, tying their self-identification to Warner's hierarchy of social class positions and self-sorting consumers into a distinct set of class positions.

The roots of Warner's social class analysis were mapped out during his fieldwork in Australia. He was first introduced to the field of anthropology while attending Berkeley, where

he worked closely with the anthropologist Robert Lowie, who mentored him, provided financial support, and encouraged his interest in the field. Toward the ends of his degree in 1925, and with further assistance from Lowie, Warner secured a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to work as a research assistant in Australia at the University of Sydney's new anthropology department, where he was supervised by Radcliffe-Brown. Working at the Milingimbi Methodist Mission in the Australian Northern Territory, Warner developed a historical construction of Murgin history and their contact with Malay traders. His project involved charting out what he identified as fifty distinct social positions occupied by different members of the community. Warner's goal was to lay out how these social structures functioned as total entities. This early anthropological fieldwork amongst the Murgin would come to serve as what his colleague, and later life partner, Mildred Warner described as a "kind of screen through which to pass American contemporary industrialized society to ascertain what, if anything, he could find that would be analogous to the primitive, or what he had observed in the primitive, the detail of which might be discernible in the American society."⁹ Indeed, Warner's model constructed an indigenous subject through the lens of colonial anthropology. Later he would adopt many of his assumptions about this subject to the American industrial context and the construction of the blue-collar housewife as market category.¹⁰

⁹ Mildred Warner, *W. Lloyd Warner: Social Anthropologist* (New York: Publishing Center for Cultural Resources, 1988), 41.

¹⁰ While Warner was one of the first anthropologist to apply his techniques to industrial society in the United States, he was by no means the first social scientist to attempt to study the whole of industrial society through a community lens. In the mid-1920s, social science had become a powerful idiom for interrogating human subjects and their emotional and psychological drives in American industry and society. Scientific efficiency experts, 1920s state technocrats, and commercial marketing agents alike relied on statistical output and the study of humans through sociology to develop strategies for creating efficiencies in the management of industry, the promotion of consumption, and a conceptualization of an American normative type. In terms of community studies, perhaps the most well regarded of the period was Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd's Middletown studies, the first volume of which was published in 1929. See: R.S. Lynd and H.M. Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American*

Warner returned to the United States in 1929 to teach anthropology at Harvard, where he soon came into contact with the psychologist and founder of modern human resources, Elton Mayo. From 1924 to 1933, Mayo operated a series of studies at the Hawthorne Works Factory of the Western Electric Company in Cicero, Illinois.¹¹ In the early 1920s, Hawthorne Works had been lauded for its corporate paternalism owing to its night school, gymnasiums, women's clubs, libraries, and social clubs. With support from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Harvard Business School's Committee of Industrial Psychology, Mayo ran a series of studies examining the intersection of worker fatigue and morale at the plant. The studies at Hawthorne Works aimed to develop a science of motivation that industrialists could put to use to better manage labor across the United States.

Mayo was fascinated by the opportunity to utilize Warner's anthropological approach on the Hawthorne studies, believing that the methods of an anthropologist might bring a novel lens to the study of industrial capitalist societies. For the most part, Mayo's research had focused on individuated worker responses to conditions within the facility. Mayo believed Warner's anthropological interest would bring a larger context to the project, capturing the web of social relations the facility existed in. By turning an eye to the community that Hawthorne drew its labor force from, Mayo believed that Warner would enable them to better understand how and why workers forged the communities they did. Although Mayo brought Warner into the

Culture. (Oxford, England: Harcourt, Brace, 1929); Mildred Warner, *W. Lloyd Warner: Social Anthropologist*, 41.

¹¹ For the most comprehensive account of social science as it emerged to document American social process, see Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Mark C. Smith, *Social Science in the Crucible: The American Debate over Objectivity and Purpose* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994). On state use, see: Guy Alchon, *The Invisible Hand of Planning: Social Science and the State in the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). For a study of anthropology with a U.S. focus see John S. Gilkeson, *Anthropologists and the Rediscovery of America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Hawthorne program, the study of Cicero never came to fruition. The Western Electric Company refused financial support for the project, believing it to be well beyond their interest in labor management.¹²

Warner himself later rejected Cicero as well, arguing that it was not an ideal site for an anthropological examination of American industrial life because it “had a social organization which was highly dysfunctional. [sic] if not in partial disintegration.”¹³ Such comments are revealing of the assumptions that his anthropological approach imported into his study of industrial society. “Disintegration” referred to what Warner considered to be the destruction of long-standing social relations within a given community. Cicero’s had undergone drastic demographic changes since the 1920s with the arrival of Greek, Italian, Polish, and Czechoslovakian migrants into the community.¹⁴ This emphasis on long-standing social relations set Warner apart from other kinds of social system works completed by sociologists such as Robert Park or that of the Lynds in their 1920s *Middletown* studies. Whereas *Middletown* sought to understand social change on a municipal scale, and Chicago sociology examined questions of deviancy, family disorganization, and the dislocation of social experience over a short period of time, Warner’s anthropology of industrial America sought to locate the individual within a nexus of relationships produced by modes of living that he assumed were *static*. His approach relied on a kind of ahistoricity that took its subjects and crystalized them outside of time. In the industrial context, Warner argued that his method would reveal what he called “American social

¹² Richard Gillespie, *Manufacturing Knowledge: A History of the Hawthorne Experiments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 88–89, 155–156.

¹³ Warner and Lunt, *The Social Life System of a Modern Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), introduction.

¹⁴ Gillespie, *Manufacturing Knowledge*, 88–89, 155–156.

equilibrium” while that of urban sociology in the tradition of Robert Park interrogated fracture, dislocation, and the slow process by which new kinds of social structures came into view.¹⁵

With the proposal of a Cicero community study rejected, Warner’s project went ahead with a new focus on New England and the U.S. South. Both projects received support from Mayo’s Rockefeller grant (which covered both his salary and research costs) once Warner became a part-time member of the Department of Industrial Relations.¹⁶ Warner recruited several Harvard graduate students, including Allison Davis and his future Social Research colleague, Burleigh Gardner, for the U.S. South study and brought on Paul S. Lunt as well (a member of a family local to Newburyport, Massachusetts) for the *Yankee City* studies.¹⁷

Newburyport, Massachusetts was selected by Warner because he deemed it to be “well-integrated,” meaning it was a town that appeared to have static set of social and economic relations. “We did not want a city where the ordinary daily relations of the inhabitants were in confusion or conflict” argued Warner. Rather, their parameters demanded a “town whose population was predominantly old American [...] since our interest was in seeing how the stock which is usually thought of as the core of modern America – the group which ordinarily assimilates the newer ethnic group – organizes its behavior when not suffering from an overpowering impact of other ethnic groups.”¹⁸ By old stock, Warner meant white: a population that, at least in its own self-conception, could trace its lineage back to the colonial period. Newburyport’s African American population, which was not counted in this vision of old stock,

¹⁵ Warner, “Social Anthropology and the Modern Community,” *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 46, No. 6 (May 1941), pp. 787.

¹⁶ Warner and Lunt, *The Social Life System of a Modern Community*, 13.

¹⁷ Mildred Warner, *W. Lloyd Warner: Social Anthropologist*, 50–51, 79–92; Warner and Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community*, 38–75.

¹⁸ Warner and Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 13.

fell under .5% of the total population at the beginning of the study. Further, the immigrant communities that did exist in the town were largely Irish and French Canadian, with more recent migrations of Jewish, Italian, and Polish people from Southern and Eastern Europe.¹⁹ The study began in 1930 and ran for nearly a decade.

The *Yankee City* studies were defined by a data collection scale that was new to social scientific study. The study produced an enormous amount of data from which Warner would develop his social class analysis. Warner directed a team of 30 researchers in this large-scale study of Newburyport's residents, their community organizations, their daily on-goings, and more, capturing what one contemporary called "the Middletown to end all Middletowns" in its banal, factual, and everyday data collection practices.²⁰ Fieldworkers gathered a litany of ethnographic data by completing interviews, taking observations, and handing out questionnaires that profiled daily life. Meanwhile, other *Yankee City* researchers pored over local biographies, neighborhood maps, family and personal scrapbooks, and personal diaries. Staff members examined personal documents produced by residents that tracked their various forms of community engagement alongside the membership rolls of local clubs, police records, health records, newspaper notations and clippings, and even educational content from the local high school. Researchers held rapid-fire interviews at gas stations, by local lunch stands, and at stops along the highway. They took aerial photographs to document the scale of the city and even deployed close reading and content analysis to follow the plots of school plays, all to detect and map recurrent and critical themes in the daily life of the city's youth. The study gathered over 1700 pages of details about Newburyport, including over 200 charts, maps, and tables.

¹⁹ Warner and Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community*, 14.

²⁰ Stuart Chase, *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Inquiry into the Science of Human Relations* (New York: Harper, 1948), 132.

The Social Life of a Modern Community, the first text in the series, was published in 1941 and introduced Warner's theory of "social class." It proclaimed that through exhaustive data collection, the *Yankee City* team had documented the entirety of the town's social system. The study advanced no specific definition of social class, but rather suggested that in surveying the interactions between all "of the types of social structures and each of the thousands of families, thousands of cliques, and hundreds of associations [that] were, member by member, interrelated in our research," the research team had captured the subjective ways residents of Newburyport felt about their economic and social situation relative to other residents of the town.²¹ The study emphasized the role an individual's own particular sense of position played in shaping their social class. While income was certainly important (including whether it was derived from inheritances, salary, or hourly wages), so too were the signifiers of education, manners, speech, cliques, voluntary associations.

Warner's social class method divided the town into a six category framework that would become critical to future marketing work at Social Research: upper-upper, old families; lower-upper, newly arrived wealth; upper-middle, professionals and successful businessmen; lower-middle, white-collar salaried families; upper-lower, skilled, blue-collar wage earners; and finally, lower-lower, or what Warner understood to be unskilled labor. Warner's study suggested that more narrowly defined class distinction was deployed only amongst the highest rungs of social class. To distinguish themselves from lower brackets, elites drew on the language of "classes" versus the "masses" and performed a tightly regulated set of signifiers and symbols to manage where they fit within this strata.²² Crucially, Warner's study departed from earlier framings of class in community studies. Where the Lynds were disturbed by the power of class difference in

²¹ Warner and Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community*, introduction.

²² Warner and Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community*, 85-86.

Middletown, Warner's study instead argued that social class was simply how a person understood their own position as they moved through the world. In a later book from the study, *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups*, Warner and co-author Leo Srole documented how Polish, Jewish, Canadian, French, Irish, Armenian, Greek and Russian ethnic groups would assimilate into the Yankee tradition as upward mobility brought them into American culture. The race line, which Warner understood as a caste structure, meant African Americans could not ascend social class hierarchies in the United States, an argument first advanced in the companion study to the *Yankee City* studies, *Deep South*.²³

Upon publication in 1941, the first of the *Yankee City* series was criticized by scholars for what they considered methodological blunders. These critiques index the ways in which Warner's approach constructed a false sense of stable demographic relations in Newburyport and how his "social class" theory flattened class into a subjective experience that obfuscated power relations. The historian Oscar Handlin critiqued Warner for the kinds of anthropological assumptions he had imported into studying industrial communities as both unchanging and out of time. Warner's investment in 'old stock' relied entirely upon his assumptions rather than archival data about migration. "The misconception of the city's [static] character arises from the inadequacy of the research techniques used [...] Primitive peoples, the customary subjects of anthropology," he argued, "have no [written] history [...]" In Handlin's estimation, this meant that "[s]ince their past is not recorded, only their traditions, myths and rituals can be studied, and these may be examined by direct observation." The issue was using these techniques in the

²³ Gardner and Davis' study of Natchez, Mississippi deployed the 'caste' concept to delineate the work of race in structuring communities in the South. Warner would forward this argument amongst a number of studies, often using it to exclude African American communities from his studies. Burleigh Gardner and Allison Davis, *Deep South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); Warner and Leo Srole, *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945), 11.

United States: “to apply the same tools to the study of a modern society which has a history as well as a tradition produces many tables and charts, but little knowledge.”²⁴ By not addressing immigration patterns, Warner’s studies fundamentally missed the shifts in population that had happened through the 1910s and 1920s in Newburyport.²⁵ Further, Warner had constructed a false vision of “integration” as opposed to the disintegration of cities like Chicago. Handlin’s critique undermined the very reason for which Warner had opted to study New England in the first place. Warner’s argument was predicated on a sense of shared experience, rather than historical evidence.

Similarly, in a piece for the *American Sociological Review*, C. Wright Mills criticized Warner’s social class concept for its reliance on self-perceptions of class. Mills argued that Warner’s concept mixed “status” (the social nature of a stratified culture) with “class” (which Mills understood as one’s actual access to resources). These conflation obliterated class structure and obscured power dynamics within Newburyport. As a consequence, Warner could not effectively map the social or political reach of a subject who had access to more material resources relative to someone who merely believed they did. Warner’s study revealed what *felt* stable to his subjects, not their *actual* power; he had conflated “class” with what Mills called “class-awareness,” an individual’s perception of their position, rather than a material accounting of their position.²⁶

²⁴ Oscar Handlin, “The Social Life of a Modern Community by W. Lloyd Warner, Paul S. Lunt; The Status System of a Modern Community by W. Lloyd Warner, Paul S. Lunt” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1942): 556. Referring to Raglan, who along with the anthropologist Robert Lowrie, had maintained that oral traditions, after a certain historical time period, served as fiction. See: Lord Fitzroy Raglan, “Folk Traditions as Historical Facts,” *Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 73 (1960): 58-59.

²⁵ Oscar Handlin, review of *The Social System of the Modern Factory*, by W. Lloyd Warner, *Journal of Economic History* Vol. 7 (1947): 277; Oscar Handlin, “Anthropology on Main Street,” review of *American Life: Dream and Reality*, by W. Lloyd Warner, *New Leader*, September 21, 1953, 25–26.

²⁶ C. Wright Mills, “The Social Life of a Modern Community, Volume I, Yankee City Series by W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (April 1942): 265.

American marketing professionals, unlike Mills and Handlin, were strongly attracted to Warner's theorization of social class and his construction of a static and "integrated" community. Warner's definition of "old-stock" Americans and investment in "social equilibrium" promised a normative white subject, one verified by the sheer scale of *Yankee City* and the disciplinary facticity of anthropology. Instead of accounting for material difference, social class instead captured something far more appealing to commercial marketing experts. It emphasized how such "old-stock" Americans felt about their position in the world, providing advertisers with a sense of the consumer's interior mapping of the social system they lived in. Although Warner's six-stage social-class paradigm might have evolved out of what Mills deemed a conceptual shortcoming, this failure gave marketing professionals a model for intuiting their consumers' needs and anxieties. Warner's vision of social class therefore resolved an essential concern of the advertising and marketing class that had worried them since the 1910s: that they were simply too educated to speak to the ordinary or average consumer on their own terms.

Warner's social class method would form one plank of both Social Research's marketing work as well as the firm's self-promotional strategy. The second plank of the firm's method was developed by Bill Henry, who Warner supervised after joining the faculty at the University of Chicago. Henry would earn his PhD at Chicago for research undertaken in the American Southwest, where he developed a model application of the thematic apperception test among Indigenous youth. Much like Warner's social class method, Henry's Thematic Apperception Test was itself a product of a colonial knowledge regime.

Bill Henry's Thematic Apperception Test

The second half of Social Research's approach was Bill Henry's Thematic Apperceptive Test (TAT). TATs are a modern projective technique used in clinical psychology that involve asking a participant to construct a narrative around a series of images. The narrative is then analyzed for meaning. Henry's TAT was a form of motivational research (MR), a popular methodology of the 1950s that promised to reveal the interior dynamics informing consumer decision making. Social Research would operate at the intersection of Warner's social class segmentation and Henry's TAT methodology. In this section, I demonstrate the colonial roots of TAT and the role the TAT played in their market research. I argue that Social Research's use of both TAT and social class analysis enabled the firm to push marketers towards ideas on class that claimed distinct class positions had their own social universes, values, and interests.

Bill Henry's TAT model was but one version of MR in popular circulation amongst market researchers of the 1940s and 1950s, a field that historians have largely framed as the sole provenance of the Viennese marketer Ernest Dichter and his Institute for Mass Motivations in Hudson, New York. Dichter's firm, however, was by no means the only marketing game in town, nor does it tell the full story of the mid-century vogue for motivational research. The first marketers to measure motivation date back to the first decades of the twentieth century, when the applied psychologist Walter Dill Scot sought to measure irrationality and choice-making in the market. In the 1930s, Paul Lazarfeld's Princeton & Columbia studies were some of the earliest qualitative studies of consumer desire to use large samples to make qualified claims about consumer types. In the immediate post-war years, four firms dominated MR research: Dichter's Institute, Chicago's Social Research, Inc, and the advertising agencies J. Walter Thompson and Young & Rubicon.

Henry's work with TAT began with the study of Indigenous Hopi and Navaho children in his doctoral dissertation, completed as part of the Indian Education Research Project, a research project led by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier. The goal of the Indian Education Research Project (which ran from 1941 to the mid-1960s and was later renamed the Indian Education, Research, and Administration Project) was to study the development of personality among five Indigenous communities, including the effect of government policy. More broadly, the project fit into the construction of what the historian Rebecca Lemov has called a database of dreams, an attempt to catalogue human interiority undertaken at mid-century and a product itself of "big social science."²⁷

As part of this project, the goal of Henry's research was to establish the value of the TAT method against other models of measuring personality. In the project, Henry deployed a modified TAT consisting of eleven pictures administered to Hopi and Navaho children aged two to eighteen (using an interpreter when required), comparing TAT findings to completed life-histories, Rorschach test results, free-drawing tests, and moral judgement tests. The study was largely devoted to examining the accuracy of psychological generalizations produced through the TATs. Henry argued that "the TAT gave personality descriptions that were consistent with other known data on the case and which also contributed new and helpful information on the subject[,]” recommending the inclusion of the model into further research programs.²⁸

Indigenous subjects accounted for nearly two-thirds of the interviews that would constitute what Lemov has described as the mid-century project to catalogue humanity. These subjects appealed

²⁷ James Waldram, *Revenge of the Windigo: The Construction of the Mind and Mental Health of North American Aboriginal Peoples* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 31-38; Rebecca Lemov, *Database of Dreams: The Lost Quest to Catalog Humanity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 95-116.

²⁸ Henry, quoted in Gardner Lindzer, *Projective Techniques and Cross-Cultural Research* (East Norwalk: Irving Publishers, Inc., 1961), 279.

to researchers for both practical and sociological reasons. Researchers framed them as both distant in (cultural) time yet close in geography. Furthermore, Indigenous experiences of dispossession and dislocation as well as resistance and endurance amidst social change offered anthropologists and psychologist alike models by which to examine how communities persisted at moments of “acute cultural crisis.”²⁹ Thus, indigenous subjects, and indeed the American Southwest writ large, served as a crucial laboratory for attempting to document the lifeways of subjects who had navigated vast social transformations and to consider what might be discerned from these experiences.

In the study that resulted from his doctoral fieldwork in the U.S. Southwest, Henry argued that the TAT was a tool to interrogate how the stories participants recounted could be effectively used to make subconscious, irrational desire visible to researchers. “On the one hand,” he writes, “fantasy in storytelling derives from the less conscious and less structured aspects of the individual’s personality. To these areas of personality, the rules of logic and propriety do not apply. On the other hand, the task set for the storyteller is one that requires him to organize his fantasy into a recognizable form and to verbalize this story for the inspection of others.”³⁰ For Henry, the power of TAT was that a participant’s “particular rules of logic and propriety [...] found applicable to his own life” structured impulse and desire. Thematic Apperception Tests thus became tools to intuit both the private and unconscious desires of a subject as well as their life experiences and the “socially determined, more nearly rational

²⁹ Lemov, *Database of Dreams*, 13.

³⁰ Henry’s text appears across a number of Social Research studies explaining the value of the method to market research, including *The Workingman’s Wife*; William Henry, *The Analysis of Fantasy: The Thematic Apperception Test Technique in the Study of Personality* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1956).

framework of convention.”³¹ It was these desires, on the verge of conscious feeling, which would be cast as beneficial to merchandisers eager to make a sale.

As a whole, the kind of TAT narrations Henry produced could be used to construct a certain kind of subject through identified tendencies or trends—precisely the kind of inferences marketers would find appealing. The profession seized on the concept in the early 1950s, when the first marketing experts who used it began to publish pieces that dramatized the test’s ability to reveal aggregate inclinations of certain consumer groups. These inclinations could be used to develop tailored advertising appeals. A classic example study measured consumer attitudes regarding Nescafé instant coffee. In the study, researchers offered otherwise identical shopping lists featuring either Nescafé instant or drip grounds to fifty women. The respondents were asked to describe the women who wrote the list using the products that appeared. The descriptive nature of the responses allowed marketers to see *how* this evaluation was made and to infer the different values assigned to instant versus drip coffee.³² In the context of market research, the TAT could be used to index how perceptions of commercial goods operated. Where survey research would ask if someone used a certain set of products, where they bought them, and when, TAT instead offered marketers the emotional attachments and value judgements that a person made of those goods. The TAT, combined with social class analysis, enabled Henry and Warner to offer insights into how a product’s meaning operated at each of the six class positions in Warner’s framework.

³¹William Henry, *The Analysis of Fantasy: The Thematic Apperception Test Technique in the Study of Personality* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1956).

³²Mason Haire, “Projective Techniques in Marketing Research,” *Journal of Marketing* Vol. 14, No. 5 (April 1950): 650.

Social Research, Inc.

In this section, I examine how Social Research promoted both itself and Warner's work following its launch in 1946. The firm banked on Warner's reputation, his methods, and their joint connection to the University of Chicago to lend its market research credibility. In 1949 Warner published two texts that garnered significant public attention for the firm: *Social Class in America*, a programmatic guide for applying social class analysis, and *Democracy in Jonesville*, a study that applied the how-to model to Morris, Illinois. The texts were profiled in *Life* and, two years later, the advertising and marketing trade periodical *Printer's Ink*. Both the magazine and the trade periodical framed these studies as transparent documentations of class in American life for their respective readerships. *Life* would in fact use its review of *Social Class in America* to undertake its own mini-study of Rockford, Illinois. I argue that such pieces invited *Life's* massive readership to understand themselves through the very same segmented class categories that Warner and his colleagues constructed for their merchandiser clients.

Social Research was founded by Warner's former Harvard student, Burleigh Gardner. Gardner had joined Warner at the University of Chicago in the late 1930s, working in the business school to develop an employee counseling program at the Hawthorne plants in nearby Cicero. In 1942, he looked to leave the university entirely in order to begin a consulting business using his own anthropological training. The move was based on Gardner's belief that research from university physical science departments usually moved to industry with ease, especially with the wartime need for technological advancements, while humanities and social science research stagnated. Gardner was convinced to remain at the university, however, on the advice of local businessmen who recognized the value of a consulting organization that was associated with the school. The relationship would suggest the firm could draw on scholarly insights and

resources from the institution. In response, Gardner, Warner, and a number of business school associates founded the Committee on Human Relations and Industry (CHRI) in 1942.

The CHRI would quickly transform into Social Research, Inc, however. As a university research institute, the committee could not handle projects for which there was little research justification. Warner's projects for the CHRI included studying integrated workplaces in the defense industries, alternative models of factory organization, and other frameworks that could be justified as contributing to the war effort.³³ However, within a few years, the bulk of the corporate projects proposed to CHRI increasingly dealt with consumer demand. In 1945, Gardner decided to exit the University of Chicago entirely to found Social Research as its own distinct organization. Neither Henry nor Warner were willing to give up their academic posts at the school despite the important role their own methods played in developing the firm's approach. To resolve this, they decided that Gardner would handle accounts while Warner and Henry would serve in an advisory capacity, providing methodological guidance, an informal connection to the University of Chicago, and a crucial stream of graduate students to staff the organization and the research programs requested by its merchandiser clients.³⁴

With this novel arrangement, Social Research began to promote themselves, the university, and the city of Chicago as a hub of market research in the United States. Social Research rented offices close to campus in the Hyde Park Bank Building on 53rd street, bringing on a fleet of Warner and Henry's graduate students as staff. In an early 1950s profile, one *Printer's Ink* columnist remarked on the sheer scale of marketing data flowing out of the city, with Warner's social class concept at its center. "In Chicago, the fountainhead of this particular stream of influence has been Prof. Warner, theorist of the 'status system' and of 'symbolic

³³ Levy interview with Michael Karesh, 1991. In possession of author.

³⁴ Levy interview with Michael Karesh, 1991. In possession of author.

behavior' in U.S. culture" suggested the author. Where New York City's Madison Avenue would be known for its advertising agencies, Chicago and marketing would go hand-in-hand as Warner and "[h]is disciples have been writing copy as well as doing research for over a decade."³⁵

The firm's approach to market research was distinct from other motivational research firms of the period. They proceeded on a two-step basis, drawing together both Warner and Henry's work to construct who they believed the typical consumer of a good was for. First, Social Research would complete an analysis of an existing consumer market, dividing consumers into Warner's six-tiered hierarchy of social classes. From there, Social Research would enroll local women in participant studies for non-directive interviews using Henry's TAT method. Once those interviews were completed, graduate students who worked at Social Research would undertake thematic analyses of the interview transcriptions to construct representative perspectives from each of the relevant social class positions. This method can be seen in the firm's first consumer market research contract, which they secured from the greeting card company Gartner and Bender in 1946. In that year, Gartner and Bender set up the Office for the Study of Social Communication to produce qualitative research on greeting cards, bringing on Warner as a direct advisor to the study.³⁶ In the initial project, the firm deployed TAT depth interviews and word association studies to construct personality profiles which the greeting card company then used to tailor their cards.³⁷

³⁵ "Boomcity of Marketing: Chicago Report," *Printer's Ink*, August 15, 1958, 26.

³⁶ Cite 25, Michael Karesh, "The Social Scientific Origins of Symbolic Consumer Research: Social Research, Inc.," *7th Annual Marketing History Conference Proceedings*, Vol. 7 (1995): 95-111.

³⁷ Sidney Levy interview with author, April 2017.

As the business grew, Social Research worked directly with specific merchandisers as well as through their respective advertising agencies to provide market research data.³⁸ For example, work with Chevrolet came through the Detroit, Michigan advertising firm, Campbell-Ewald; work for Kimberly-Clark was completed through the New York advertising agency Foote, Cone, Belding; while other direct merchandiser contracts included Procter and Gamble, General Mills, Kraft, and the Sunbeam Corporation.³⁹ Social Research's work with the Chicago *Tribune* in particular would lead to a close and productive relationship with the publication's marketing director Pierre Martineau. Martineau himself became a source of significant promotion for the firm. He would write extensively about Social Research's methods and their role in bringing social science to the center of the *Tribune's* own marketing division.⁴⁰

To undertake their contracts, Social Research relied upon a bevy of graduate students from the University of Chicago, many of whom would go on to define the field of consumer culture theory as it emerged in business schools during the post-war years. Work at Social Research was defined by an open, horizontal organizational structure informed by Gardner's own interest in alternative management regimes. Former employees have documented long hours, shared meals, and an intellectual engagement that continued even after they left. In short, in drawing its labor supply from an interdisciplinary research committee at the university, Social Research retained a focus on its employees as researchers solving specific questions related to

³⁸ Sidney Levy interview with author, April 2017. According to Levy, Social Research also completed contracts with advertising agencies such as Gardner Advertising in St. Louis; Leo Burnett and J. Walter Thompson in Chicago; Needham, Harper and Steers in New York, and N. W. Ayers in Philadelphia.

³⁹ Sidney Levy interview with author, April 2017.

⁴⁰ Pierre Martineau, "Advertising Must Dig Deeper into Social Sciences Today: Chicago Tribune panel experience indicates need for greater attention to ad content and buying motivations," *Printer's Ink*, July 17, 1953, 42-43. See also Pierre Martineau, "Social Classes and Spending Behavior," *Journal of Marketing* Vol. 23 (1958): 121-130; Pierre Martineau, "Sharper Focus for the Corporate Image," *Harvard Business Review* (November-December 1958): 49-58.

marketing, merchandising and management, rather than adopting the mentality of a more traditional commercial firm. This was more than simply a promotional strategy: employees understood their work as anthropological and psychological scholarship on the nature of human desire first and as marketing second.

After Social Research had been in operation for three years, Lloyd Warner published both *Social Class in America* and *Democracy in Jonesville* in 1949. These texts streamlined his social class method and offered, as one trade press review suggested, techniques to “sell” merchandiser clients “the U.S. by class.”⁴¹ *Social Class in America* in particular was explicitly framed for businessmen who might be interested in contracting with the firm. “The businesses of men who make, sell, and advertise merchandise as diverse as houses and women’s garments, magazines, and motion pictures, or, for that matter, all of other mass products and media of communication,” Warner argued in the introduction, “are forever at the mercy of the status evaluation of their customers[,] for their products are not only items of utility for those who buy but powerful symbols of status and social class.”⁴² *Democracy in Jonesville: A Study of Quality and Inequality* illustrated the approach through a profile of Morris, Illinois. Morris had grown throughout the Second World War, when defense industry jobs brought substantial migration and high wages to the city. In the study, Warner argued that it was “a laboratory for studying Americans[.]” One that showed class stratification was accepted so long as the “channels of mobility” remained opened.⁴³ Of course, the relative racial homogeneity of these studies was telling for whom mobility was and was not possible. Warner’s social class model abstracted out African

⁴¹ Burleigh Gardner, introduction to Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman, and Gerald Handel, *Workingman’s Wife: Her Personality, World and Life Styles* (New York: Oceana Publications, 1959), ix–xiii; Zunz, *Why the American Century?* 103–105; Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 311–313.

⁴² W. Lloyd Warner, Marchia Meerk, and Kenneth Eells, *Social Class in America: A Manual of Procedure* (Chicago: Social Research Associates, 1949), 232–242.

⁴³ Burleigh Gardner and Allison Davis, *Deep South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

Americans. They were burdened by what Warner called the “caste” nature of race difference and therefore, did not count in this ‘social class’ paradigm, and by virtue of that, Social Research’s vision of the general market.⁴⁴

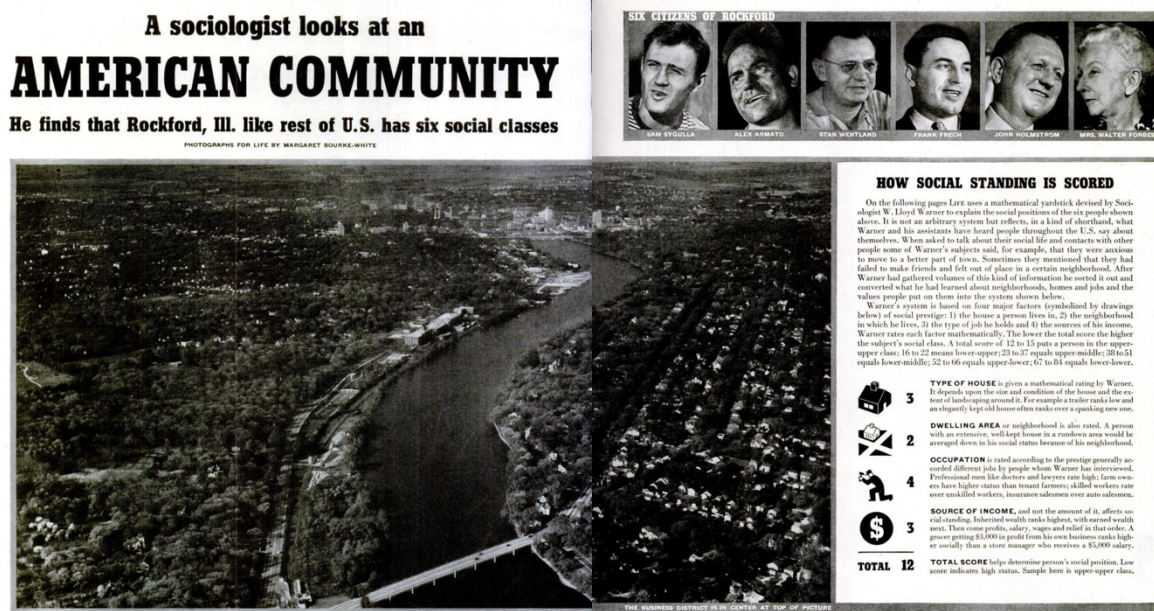
Magazine reviews of *Democracy in Jonesville* and *Social Class in America* brought Warner’s methods to an American reading public, inviting ordinary people to conceptualize themselves through the very same social class categories that Social Research sold to merchandisers. In 1949, *Life* magazine published a significant profile on Warner and *Social Class in America*, applying Warner’s method to its own mini-study of Rockford, Illinois. In the profile, *Life* deployed a six-class framework with four key criteria used to determine the social class position of specific community members within Rockford. This included the size of a person’s house, the neighborhood in which their home was located, the person’s occupation, and whether they earned a salary, inherited money, or received government-provided income. Each of these categories was assigned a weight, with an individual’s total score indicating their status in the community.

The *Life* article provided detailed profiles of specific community members, narrating their current social class position and their aspirations. The profiles included a “transient worker” who lived with his wife and daughter and who was mulling the “slow but feasible climb upwards” through “an air-conditioning training program in Chicago”; a “grocer”; a “civic booster”; the “matriarch of an old Rockford family” a number of other characters who fleshed out the mini-study.⁴⁵ Each profile was accompanied by a portrait taken by the documentary photographer

⁴⁴ The caste concept was a central finding of his students Burleigh Gardner and Allison Davis in their study of Natchez, Mississippi. Burleigh Gardner and Allison Davis, *Deep South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

⁴⁵ “A sociologist looks at an American Community: he finds that Rockford, Ill., like rest of U.S., has six social classes” *Life*, September 12, 1949, 108-109.

Margaret Bourke-White, set against aerial photographs of the community. The photographs worked to further naturalize the *Life* profile's primary claim: that Warner and his associates were filling "in a detailed picture of American society" and revealing the nature of class in an ostensibly classless society. With such a profile, *Life* naturalized Warner's findings and therefore the work of Social Research, inviting readers to think about the operation of class in American life on marketing terms.⁴⁶ (figure 1)



(Figure 1: "A sociologist looks at an American Community: he finds that Rockford, Ill., like rest of U.S., has six social classes" *Life*, September 12, 1949, 108-109)

Social Research's promotional strategy drew together the University of Chicago, Warner's methods, and the power of mid-century social science to frame their market research as

⁴⁶ "A Sociologist looks at an American community; he finds that Rockford, Ill. Like rest of U.S. has six social classes" *Life*, September 12, 1949, 108-119.

organic discoveries. This promotional framing would remain central to their work throughout the 1950s and 1960s. When Burleigh Gardner was profiled by *Printer's Ink* in 1960, the trade periodical emphasized the application of Warner's theories of social class segmentation to the American market as a distinctly scholarly approach to market research. The publication lauded Social Research for its "particularly indigenous point of view," staffed by American anthropologists and their graduate students who probed "the taboos, totems, and voodoo rites of U.S corporations executives, housewives, and other bizarre indigenes."⁴⁷ In the interview, Gardner pressed upon this parallel, arguing that where the academy rejected the applications of academic research to questions of industry, business interests were very much invested in what he and those working at Social Research had to say. "Every time you advertise, or merely package a product, you are involved with a complex set of symbols. Knowledge of what those symbols means, derived from social studies, is beginning to yield the understanding that will enable business to improve its skill[.]"⁴⁸ Gardner in fact deployed his own anthropological metaphors, pitching his work as operating at the very cusp of known knowledge in the 1960s: "We are always working at the frontiers of accepted knowledge. Lots of people don't feel comfortable with these new concepts. Some of them even deny the existence of social class structures in U.S. society. Academic sociologists have been more prone to do this than businessmen, who find that knowledge of the social structure enabled them to organize lots of facts about consumer behavior."⁴⁹ By presenting their work as anthropology, Social Research capitalized upon institutional expertise to make their claims about the American society travel much further than they might have otherwise.

⁴⁷ "Burleigh Gardner: selling the U.S by Class," *Printer's Ink*, March 25, 1960, 80.

⁴⁸ "Burleigh Gardner," *Printer's Ink*, 80.

⁴⁹ "Burleigh Gardner," *Printer's Ink*, 80.

Marketing the Workingman's Wife

In the final part of this chapter, I examine how Social Research's landmark study, *The Workingman's Wife*, became a critical set-piece in Macfadden's arguments regarding working-class buying power. *The Workingman's Wife* was built upon Warner's model of social class distinction. It argued that even though the consuming power of working-class Americans boomed during the 1940s, working-class consumers remained distinct from the middle or upper classes in how they navigated the commercial marketplace. Importantly, *The Workingman's Wife* did not seek to transform, or attempt to engender subjectivity for, the working-class wife. Rather, the text constructed a consumer composite displaced by modernity who could then be 'saved' by merchandisers through specific kinds of advertising claims.

In the years after the Second World War, Macfadden Publications had experienced a sharp decline in revenue due to dips in circulation. In an attempt to mitigate advertising-dollar losses, Macfadden hired Social Research beginning in 1949 to conduct motivational studies to examine why their reading public engaged with the magazine and how best to grow their ad revenue again. *The Workingman's Wife* would be the result of this nearly a decade-long relationship between the publisher and the marketing firm, a culmination of the studies Social Research completed for Macfadden, constructing an ideal reader for the publisher and placing her at the heart of the American mass consumer market.

Social Research had a specific subject in mind when they undertook field research for *The Workingman's Wife*. The firm drew upon studies completed for Macfadden's *True Story* between 1955 and 1958 and completed an additional 400 social class analyses and TAT interviews in Chicago, Louisville, Tacoma, and Trenton between 1957 and 1958. These

interviews specifically looked at migrant enclaves where many men were employed in industrial labor and the defense industry. The firm purposefully constructed a blue-collar housewife *outside* of the labor force. Their parameters narrowed participation further to focus on women between the ages of 20 and 44. The firm argued for this unique range based on the assumption that “the typical working class family’s living standard goes into decline” as “husbands begin to lose physical vigor and are unable to earn as much money. Illness and, sometimes, death begin to take their toll on the family’s balance sheet.”⁵⁰ In Trenton, the bulk of the participants were identified as the partners of shipyard employees and were Catholic Italian and Hungarian second-generation Americans. In Tacoma, several of the women interviewed were the partners of enlisted servicemen, draftees, or families stationed there for a short duration. Tacoma families were “less marked than any other community” in terms of religious or ethnic background. In Louisville, those interviewed were the partners of men working in the influx of new industry arriving in Kentucky after the Second World War, which included General Electric’s Appliance Park as well as a number of auto assembly plants. The arrival of wage work in Louisville had attracted “old American” immigrants, the men and women from Kentucky, the hill country of Southern Indiana, and Tennessee. Finally, in Chicago, they conducted their interviews on the Southwest side amongst Polish, Italian, Irish, Hungarian, Belgian, German, and Slovak emigres with husbands working in railroading, steelmaking, farm machinery, auto assembly, and meat packing.⁵¹

In his preface to *The Workingman’s Wife*, Warner framed the study as a critical tool for documenting the scale of change that the post-war world had brought to the lives of blue-collar

⁵⁰ Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman, and Gerald Handel, *The Workingman’s Wife: Her Personality, World, and Life Style*, 222.

⁵¹ Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman, and Gerald Handel, *The Workingman’s Wife*, 219-220.

housewives, casting them as outside the bounds of post-war modernity. As the largest segment of the U.S. population, Warner argued that working-class people were most dramatically transformed by post-war income growth. As a result, these consumers were forced to reckon with a fast-paced and changing set of social situations, cultural expectations, and experiences, all of which instilled a kind of existential dread in the housewife. Though “[t]hey cannot know whether their world is hell bent for heaven or hell bent for hell” he warned, “[t]he price they and other Americans pay for progress must necessarily include anxiety—anxiety about the real world, about them[,] and about the necessarily unresolved internal problems of personalities that have come into such a world.”⁵² The anxiety described by Warner did not simply refer to emotional stress but rather to the sense of alienation from society that social change and economic transformation brought about. *The Workingman’s Wife* offered its readers a portrait of how such women responded to these changes through their consumption. This included detailing the daily and weekly routines of the working-class household, these women’s perspectives on the possibility of a better life, and the collective financial and social habits that they held. Taken together, these profiles offered merchandisers strategies for mentally resolving the anxiety that Warner constructed in his preface and introduction.

The Workingman’s Wife produced a blue-collar housewife who was simultaneously alienated by technological and social change while still charged with what the researchers described as a cultural transfer rooted in deep historical time, akin to the experiences of their previous Indigenous subjects. They wrote that:

Within the women are imbedded the deep and enduring values of our culture. They carry the central and largest core of our conscious and unconscious life. Unlike those above them, they are trained to be women who are not the life time

⁵² W. Lloyd Warner, Preface to Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman, and Gerald Handel, *The Workingman’s Wife*, VIII.

competitors of men in the job market, but to grow as daughters into wives and mothers and then to train once again those of the new generation who in turn will be like them. Their roles are highly restricted, the principles and precepts that guide their thought and often rule their conduct are rooted in the early beginnings and foundations of American culture.⁵³

The idea of the workingman's wife as bearer of culture, yet alienated and out-of-time, was a parallel construction to the kind of person both Warner and Henry had produced in their colonial research. What's more, by grounding blue-collar housewives in "the early beginnings and foundations of American culture," the ethnic roots of the communities they studied were obscured, but their influence expanded. As anxious subjects unmoored by technological change, these women became a microcosm for the larger national culture and the collective buying power they held within the market.

This 'deep time' claim was integral to Macfadden's marketing blitz.⁵⁴ It established both the commercial scale and the influence of blue-collar housewives to the very fabric of the nation itself. By framing these women as crucial sites of "cultural transfer" rather than subjects unto themselves, the study provided an avenue by which merchandisers could implant their products into American life. As the study emphasized, "[t]he rapidly changing outside world has not only revolutionized the physical arena where they act out their lives, but drastically re-ordered the traditional sanctuaries of their immediate families and invaded the innermost recesses of their personalities, their unconscious privacies." By developing advertising strategies that highlighted how their products could improve working-class women's lives, merchandisers would both alleviate anxieties about social change, and in turn work their goods into the very "bedrock" of

⁵³ W. Lloyd Warner, Preface to Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman, and Gerald Handel, *The Workingman's Wife*, VII.

⁵⁴ It should be no surprise that this idea of the workingman's wife as bearer of culture, yet alienated and out-of-time is, in effect, constructed through the very same anthropological contours which Warner produced in *Yankee City* and his research in Northern Australia.

American culture. The housewife-consumer the study constructed was not a static subject. Social Research insisted that these women, much like their middle-class counterparts, were themselves “adaptive, flexible, [and] emergent beings.” While the “meaning of life for them is largely class bound and traditional,” the “fluid world of today is too rapidly being invaded by tomorrow for emotional comfort.”⁵⁵ Mitigating these anxieties would allow merchandisers access to this consumers segment as well as capitalize on the role of the housewife in transferring tastes and preferences to their children.

Throughout the study, Social Research offered a profile of the banal, everyday habits of blue-collar housewives and their relationship to post-war institutions. Contrasting their habits against those of middle-class women who were seen as more confident, the study framed the working-class housewife as an anxious subject in need of a guiding hand. In a chapter focused on financial management titled “dollar decisions”, the authors argued that while working-class housewives had more financial decision-making power than their middle-class counterparts, their habits were more rudimentary, often rooted in a deep suspicion of banking institutions and a reliance on consulting kinship networks. For example, they noted that as working-class incomes grew over the late 1940 and through the 1950s, working-class women continued to rely upon “gimmicks such as envelopes, various drawers, or tin cans to help them in budgeting their disbursements.” The study suggested that these methods of organizing wealth meant that “they are not given to abstract thinking,” and concluded that housewives preferred “definite place[s]” in which to store their money because they found it “relatively meaningless to abstractly earmark money in a bank account.” Suggesting the rationality of a savings account to manage cash flow, the study argued that the irrationality of the “tin can economy” of cash management reflected the

⁵⁵ W. Lloyd Warner, Preface to Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman, and Gerald Handel, *The Workingman's Wife*, VII.

working class wife's inability to cope with change. As the study argued, the "tin can economy" was not economical because families often "cheated" for birthdays, weddings, bridal showers, or getting family photographs done, whereas this sort of cheating supposedly did not happen when one held their money in a bank or financial institutions.⁵⁶

In constructing a blue-collar housewife for whom advertising would ease the transition into a post-war world, *The Workingman's Wife* enabled Macfadden to make a powerful new argument with "Operation Lunch Pail" and their subsequent media campaign. "The masses don't follow," argued the Macfadden campaign, reversing the popular assumption that commercial desire was a trickle-down phenomenon. "Not anymore," they continued. "The mass consumers, America's working class – the newest consumer sales phenomenon on the U.S. marketing scene – picks its own path [...]" argued one advertisement.⁵⁷ The advertising blitz that followed Operation Lunch Pail included full-page ads in the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune*. The advertisements emphasized that even mediums that claimed to address a national mass market such as *Life* failed to capture such consumers. "Macfadden's [commercial] expansion program is founded on one widely unrecognized, yet now fully documented truth: middle-class communications media, especially middle-class magazines, do NOT effectively reach the mass consumer [...] This is Macfadden's conviction [...] national brands will be won or lost depending on the attitudes of mass, not middle-class, consumers."⁵⁸ Building on the conclusions of *The Workingman's Wife*, Macfadden argued that anxieties around social change could be assuaged by commercial brands that promoted themselves as trustworthy and reliable to working-class women. "Many products are unfamiliar to them because heretofore they couldn't

⁵⁶ Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman, and Gerald Handel, *The Workingman's Wife*, 169-171.

⁵⁷ Macfadden publications advertisement, *New York Times*, December 20, 1961, p. 68.

⁵⁸ This advertisement appeared simultaneously across national editions of major U.S. newspapers on May 15, 1961. See *Chicago Tribune*, p. c6; *New York Times*, p. 32, *Wall Street Journal*, p. 11.

afford to give them a second thought” suggested the ad. “As a result, these women want to lean on the security derived from buying a brand name that is nationally advertised by a company they know will stand behind its brand.”⁵⁹

Macfadden found substantial success with the campaign, growing its advertising lineage by over a third throughout the year-long campaign. In April 1962, materials promoting the magazine’s mass market readership to potential advertisers self-reported a 35% boom in advertising lineage over the first quarter of that year, even as the national magazine market had seen an overall drop in advertising dollars.⁶⁰ “Conventional marketing strategy runs the risk of overlooking virtually half its market – the working class wives” proclaimed another Macfadden advertisement. “New research confirms the fact that the working class wife is the greatest supporter of national brands.”⁶¹

However, the text itself was panned by some critics, who argued it was too obviously market research to be any use. “Apparently sociologists are not alone in their quest for information about the class structure; they have the company of businessmen through their sponsorship of motivation research.” One critic suggested that the book’s primary audience was businessmen thanks to the tone and lack of statistical data in the study, complaining that the study too often turned to psychological explanations for the workingman’s wife’s actions over economic ones. “Perhaps it is irrelevant to stress this kind of economics when the book’s purpose is to stimulate the businessmen with visions of a mass market and how to get it [...] Perhaps out

⁵⁹ *New York Times*, December 20, 1961, p. 68.

⁶⁰ Macfadden Publications advertisement for “Women’s Group” magazine holdings, which included *True Story*, *Photoplay*, *TV Radio Mirror*, *True Experience*, *True Love*, and *True Romance*. For example, see *New York Times*, April 11, 1962, p. 88.

⁶¹ *Id.*

of such purposes successful advertising campaigns are born but not sociological knowledge.”⁶² Of course, even as some contemporary critics panned the text, it continued to be cited by a consider number of scholars looking to discuss working-class life in the 1950s.⁶³

In a final piece on “Lunch Pail Operation” reported nearly a year after Macfadden had launched the campaign, *New York Times* advertising journalist Peter Bart, who had chronicled the publishing house’s aggressive courting of national merchandisers with *The Workingman’s Wife*, suggested the publisher had successfully commanded the attention of national merchandisers and, in effect, redefined the average consumer of the working class. In the process, Bart suggested, Macfadden had “scrapped its grey pails and substituted gold ones.”⁶⁴ Indeed, with the publication of *The Workingman’s Wife*, a study entirely funded by Macfadden Publications, Social Research forwarded a marketing profile of mid-century American working-class life defined by both its roots in anthropology and a commitment to commercial marketing.

Beyond Macfadden, the marketing firm’s arguments about *The Workingman’s Wife* and social class would go on to change how marketing professionals thought about and understood the role of advertising media in cultivating identity. In 1962, Social Research academics Ira Glick and Sidney Levy reckoned with the newfound role of television in American life. They argued that Warner’s social class theory meant there was not a “great audience or the television audience,” so to speak, but “people of different social classes.”⁶⁵ Merchandisers could not take

⁶² Leonard Reissman, “Review of *The Workingman’s Wife: Her Personality, World, and Life Style*,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (1960): 196. Other reviews noted its commercial roots and suggested further research was required on this blue-collar housewife, see Sidney Rosen, “Review of *The Workingman’s Wife: Her Personality, World, and Life Style*,” *Contemporary Psychology*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1961): 42.

⁶³ See Cite 6 of this chapter.

⁶⁴ Peter Bart, “The Golden Pail,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1962, p. 51.

⁶⁵ Sidney Levy and Ira Glick, *Living with Television* (Chicago: Aldine Publications, 1962), 19

their clients and “exhort them to a position,” whatever that might be.⁶⁶ Following social class as a framework, Social Research encouraged media professionals, advertising executives, and merchandisers to meet consumers where they were, rather than trying to transform their perspectives or position. Indeed, Social Research’s vision of a nervous, working-class housewife who required advertising and media images that assuaged rather than challenged would go on to play a significant role in how broadcasters redeveloped their approach to television news throughout the 1960s. Since their inception, television news segments had followed the model of a magazine, with long narrations delivered by anchors and often interspersed with interviews and expert commentary that all contributed to cable news as a ‘medium of record.’ However, under the influence of Warner’s social class segmentation model of the 1960s, broadcasters began to develop a “man on the street” live-eye model. This new, personable approach to the news spoke directly to middle- and lower-positioned consumers rather than reproducing the structure of a magazine article or essay.⁶⁷ While advertising executives had always assumed that the average consumer reflected the lowest common denominator, Social Research endowed that consumer with a specific worldview and class position, one fraught with anxieties over social change. This consumer’s anxiety would define how merchandisers, advertising agencies, and the marketing class would react to new demands for segmentation—especially those emerging out of the ongoing struggle for Civil Rights, which will be the focus the next section and chapter of this dissertation.

Conclusion

⁶⁶ Levy and Glick, *Living with Television*, 17.

⁶⁷ Craig Allen, “Discovering ‘Joe Six Pack’ Content in Television News: The Hidden History of Audience Research, News Consultants, and the Warner Class Model,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* Vol. 49, No. 4 (December 2005): 363–82.

Social Research, Inc.'s vision of class segmentation drew enormous social and cultural power by cutting across both the academy and the marketing industry. When first imported to the United States from his Australian research, Warner's social class model was rejected by sociologists and historians of the day for both its ahistorical crystallization of whiteness and its failure to account for material access to resources in its definition of class. Yet for these very same reasons, his findings took off in the marketing press. Marketing professionals recognized social class analysis as a potential tool to close the social and cultural gaps between merchandisers and everyday consumers because it defined class on the consumer's terms: as their experience, rather than their material relations. At the University of Chicago and later Social Research, Bill Henry's TAT method enabled the firm to tap into the vogue of motivational research, and together, Henry's TAT and Warner's social class analysis set Social Research apart from other marketing firms of the period. It enabled their marketing work to gain new reach under the guise of anthropological and psychological research.

Social Research accrued significant attention through a self-promotional strategy that emphasized their scholarly bona fides. Warner redeveloped his work from the *Yankee City* studies as a programmatic how-to for understanding social class in the United States and then pitched these methods directly to American merchandisers. His work was taken up in the press as an anthropological account of American class. Straddling the position between academic and marketing consultant, such profiles presented Warner and his former student Burleigh Gardner as anthropologists, not market researchers, who had turned their eye to American industrial society. In feature articles across trade press magazines like *Printer's Ink*, and in popular press periodicals such as *LIFE* (which deployed their own Warnerian study of Rockford, Illinois,

featuring documentary photographer by Margaret Bourke-White), readers were invited to find themselves through Warner's social class system.

In the late 1950s, the firm's first landmark publication, *The Workingman's Wife*, constructed a blue-collar housewife through the very same tropes that defined Indigenous subjects in mid-century colonial anthropology. As a marketing composite, *The Workingman's Wife* argued that American advertisers and merchandisers would have to appeal to this blue-collar housewife's specific worldview in order to secure sales. The book solidified Social Research' marketing success. It enabled further circulation of their ideas about consumer subjectivity and desire, and affirmed Warner's vision of social class.

When Warner died in 1970, Social Research functionally shut its doors. However, its concepts persisted. Their vision of market segmentation did not challenge the heterosexuality or whiteness of the American public culture. Rather, through "social class" analysis, the firm offered merchandisers a new way to reckon with and define class difference, one entirely defined entirely upon marketing terms. The concepts that Social Research forwarded, however, were taken up by actors well-beyond market research. As the next chapter and section of this dissertation demonstrates, in the 1960s Civil Rights activists seized upon some of the concepts developed at the firm to argue that if marketing could influence a consumer's sense of the world, then both the profession and the mass media writ large had an obligation to reckon with American anti-black racism.

Chapter 3: Contesting the Brand Image

On each Saturday throughout the Spring of 1963, Harlem children gathered together to peer into the street-facing windows of the famed Hotel Theresa. The hotel's window display featured a battery of seven television sets, each tuned to one of New York City's local stations. For every African American spotted on the screens (excluding baseball players), the children could win a silver dollar. "After six weeks," recalled New York City Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) chapter president Clarence Funnye in an interview with *Newsweek*, only \$15.00 had been won. Indeed, "[a]side from Aunt Jemima and a few sports celebrities", reported *Newsweek* in their September 1963 interview with Funnye, "finding a Negro in any ad aimed at the general public was as difficult as finding a Southern congressman at last week's march on Washington."¹

The street-side stunt was the first step in the NYC CORE's 1963 TV Image Campaign. The campaign was organized shortly after the New York City Mayor's Commission on Job Advancement had announced the findings of a year-long study on black representation in the city's modeling and advertising industries. The committee concluded that throughout the entire 1962 print run of four nationally circulating American magazines, they had found only two advertising images where models of color were not placed in a subservient position to their white counterparts.² The CORE campaign sought to change this. Through media stunts like the one at Hotel Theresa and the threat of coordinated national boycotts, the organization would pressure merchandisers and their ad agencies to develop integrated, general market commercial

¹ "March on Madison," *Newsweek*, September 9, 1963, 68; "Employment," *Ebony*, January 1963.

² "The Mayor's Committee on Job Advancement, Preliminary Report on Advertising Practices, Mayor's Commission on Job Advancement, New York City, folder 2125, box 125, Robert F. Wagner Papers, New York City Municipal Archives. "March on Madison," *Newsweek*, September 9, 1963, 68.

advertisements that depicted either African American men and women alone or interacting with white models on equal footing.

CORE's TV Image Campaign challenged the deep historical archive of racist black representation in American advertising and commercial culture. As the historian Fath Davis Ruffins has documented, some of the earliest goods exported from the American colonies, such as hogsheads of tobacco, were branded with scenes of enslaved Africans.³ During the early nineteenth century and from the Civil War onwards, the booming image culture of American commercial media continued to assert visions of black subservience through recurrent, popular stock tropes: the happy slave; the firm, but loving mammy; and the quiet and dutiful porter.⁴ Such representations were central to the visual culture of Jim Crow, visually enforcing the power relations and inequities of white supremacy while shaping the working conditions of actors, musicians, and performers who were forced to navigate them.⁵ At the heart of the CORE TV Image campaign was the argument that these advertising images played a powerful role in shaping all Americans ideas about race. The TV Image Campaign suggested that if merchandisers directed their advertising agencies to develop integrated images of American life,

³ Fath Davis Ruffins, "Reflecting on ethnic imagery in the landscape of commerce, 1945–1975" in *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 379–406.

⁴ Grace Elizabeth Hale argues such an archive of advertising images *bolstered* whiteness by suggesting the normative consumer could call upon the racist archive of service tropes when they cooked with goods like Aunt Jemima branded syrups. Hale critically connects this to the production of an American consumer ethos. See Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage, 1999), "Making Whiteness" & "Bound Consumption." On the role of mass cultural forms and industry structures asserting reconciliation vaudeville and mass produced toys, see: Christopher Dingwall, *Selling Slavery: Race and the Industry of American Culture* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2020); Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

⁵ David W. Gilbert, *The Product of Our Souls: Ragtime, Race, and the Birth of the Manhattan Musical Marketplace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Elspeth Brown, *Work! A Queer History of Fashion Modeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

these representations would challenge this historical archive and perhaps begin to change American perceptions of race and race difference.

The TV Image campaign drew its conceptual language from a significant shift occurring in the marketing profession during the late 1950s and early 1960s: the growing popularity of the “brand image” concept. The concept was developed by Social Research, Inc. employees Sidney Levy and Burleigh Gardner in 1955 through a series of studies regarding the meanings different consumers associated with Betty Crocker. The brand image was far more than just visual representation, though it did trade in this language. The concept referred to the feelings, sensations, affects and experiences that were associated with a specific brand. Gardner and Levy believed marketers had the power to shape this image and, in turn, the meaning and ideas which consumers took from brands and incorporated into their sense of self and the world. The concept had become popular when the well-known advertising executive David Ogilvy made it the centerpiece of a major speech he delivered at the 1955 meeting of the Association of American Advertising Agencies (AAAA). Thanks to Ogilvy, the concept would become so essential to how marketers thought about their work that the 1950s and 1960s would later be dubbed the “image era” for the media professions.⁶

It was the meaning-making power of the image that CORE’s TV Image Campaign seized upon. CORE argued that if marketing professionals believed their work could shape ideas about American society, then it was the obligation of marketers, merchandisers, and other media professionals to create commercial images that envisioned the social possibilities of integration. But Gardner and Levy’s formulation came with a warning. Meaning was unstable. Brand images

⁶ Al Reis and Jack Trout, “The Positioning Era Cometh” *Advertising Age*, April 24, 1972, pg. 35, 38, 51-52. Trout and Reis sought this periodization in order to forward their own definition of marketing, one which they argued would redefine the profession, much the same way the ‘image concept’ had.

required constant monitoring and management. This was because brand images were not the sole domain of the marketing experts, public relations consultants, or advertisers; consumers brought their own repertoire of experiences to them. Levy and Gardner, as well as Ogilvy, warned merchandisers that they had to carefully control the meanings and associations brands took on as they circulated in public life. The slightest change might alienate the everyday consumer and spell a significant loss of market share.

The marketing profession was taken aback by CORE's call for racial integration precisely because it threatened the assumed whiteness of American brand images and therefore a brand's access to the general market. As the first section of this dissertation has established, the mid-century media culture that marketing professionals operated within was overwhelmingly white. Segmentation emerged in the immediate post-war years as a technique for defining new segment *within* this white market culture. To that end, the whiteness of marketing concepts like Teena, the workingman's wife, and the general market was de facto. This whiteness was, as the historian Julian Carter has described, "race-evasive" and bound to the typical or normal: it went unstated and unspoken.⁷

When CORE seized upon the image concept to argue that general market advertising campaigns should be integrated, the marketing profession responded with a new concern. If brand images were malleable, could nationally recognized advertising characters such as General Mills' Betty Crocker or Philip Morris' Marlboro Man take on blackness? Marketers feared that

⁷ On whiteness as unspoken norm, or "race-evasive", see Julian Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). On whiteness as investment, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). On state structures benefitting whiteness as affirmative action policies, see Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005)

the integration of general market campaigns would compromise the success of a brand in the general (white) market by rendering it too black, alienating the average, implicitly white consumer and driving her away.

This chapter examines how the ‘image era’ in American marketing intersected with calls for the integration of the mass market, revealing the bidirectional nature of influence in a profession often framed as a cabal of hidden persuaders. Although activist pressure from organizations like CORE forced marketers to publicly acknowledge the whiteness of the general market, these calls did not lead marketers to accept integration. Instead, in response to CORE, marketing professionals developed what was known as the ‘white backlash’ literature, a series of studies which attempted to measure the success of integrated advertising images by looking at how white consumers responded to advertisements featuring models of color. While this literature was largely inconclusive, the structure of these studies worked to change how ideas about segmentation operated. These studies posed blackness (in the form of black models) as a *risk* to the success of a new brand or product in the general market. They partitioned black consumers out of the general market, even as CORE suggested they belonged in it. The risk framework led marketers to further secure the idea of an implicitly white, general market. In this way, market segmentation in the 1960s did not ‘break up’ the general market, but instead served as a mechanism for sustaining it.

To demonstrate this, I begin with an examination of the image concept as it defined the marketing field in the 1950s and 1960s. I then consider the variety of approaches that marketing professionals deployed to think about the race line in the early years of the Civil Rights movement. I show that ‘backlash’ was not the only possible outcome of these contestations. Following this, I look at CORE’s 1963 TV Image Campaign and the specific arguments and

marketing theories that the activist group seized on to make their claims. Finally, I examine the marketing profession's response to CORE: the 'white backlash' studies and the ways in which these studies cast ideas about segmentation in the market.

By connecting the brand image with CORE's 1963 TV Image Campaign and the responses of market researchers, the chapter speaks to two historiographies. First, scholars of advertising and mass media have dated "image advertising" and management to the 1980s with the rise of corporations like Nike, Apple, and Starbucks that outsourced their production while investing heavily in their brand.⁸ These critics warned that such corporations were ushering in a new era in which brands had become platforms for self-articulation: a *logos* of both identity and global capitalism.⁹ This chapter destabilizes the historical framework media scholars have used to think about the brand. It pushes the image concept back to the 1960s to examine how theories of branding intersected with ideas about identity and subjectivity during this earlier period.¹⁰ Second, historians of the modern civil rights movement have documented the critical role

⁸ Historical treatments of branding typically begin with the branding of agricultural livestock and the use of guilds imprints as a guarantor of masterwork quality in the 18th and 19th centuries. This scholarship then shifts to the 1880s to argue that industrial production necessitated the brand through the construction of a national market. The literature then enters a murkily defined mid-twentieth century, when the cultural value of the brand became critical to the establishment of major corporation's good will. On branding, see Celia Lury, *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy* (London: Routledge, 2004); Liz Moor, *The Rise of Brands* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007); Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic TM: The Politics and Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2012); for a historical treatment of the brand via the history of public relations, see: Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁹ Lury, *Brands*, 1-33.

¹⁰ My thinking on public feelings and accumulating of unintended affects to a corporate image is indebted to Sarah Ahmed and Ann Cvetkovich. On how affect saturates a commodity or brand in its public circulation, see Sarah Ahmed, "Affective Economies" *Social Text* Vol. 22, No. 2 (2004): 117-139. On the public orientation of feeling, see Ann Cvetkovich, "Public Feelings" *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2007): 459-468. This instability of meaning owing to the public nature of brands is also essential to the work of the Birmingham School theorist Stuart Hall, especially the second half, and often less-read half of his seminal "Encoding/decoding." See Stuart Hall, "Encoding/decoding" in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*, eds. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Love, and Paul Wills, (London: Routledge, 1980): 128-38, esp. 135-138.

commercial culture has played in reshaping mid-century opportunities for African Americans, recognizing the complex and enmeshed realities of the market and politics.¹¹ This chapter contributes to this conversation by tying calls for integration to the theories marketing professionals used to bolster both themselves and their firms. As I show here, CORE's calls were far more than a bid upon major mid-century merchandisers. Rather, their campaign was a challenge to the very race logic of mid-century marketing.

Historicizing the Brand Image

CORE's 1963 campaign drew its major claim from the brand image concept, a theory of identification that had become fundamental to marketing and advertising thought only a few years earlier. In this section, I offer a short history of the brand image as a popular structuring concept in marketing during the 1960s. Like all marketing theories, the brand image served to garner power for the marketing experts who claimed it. I argue that it placed a significant emphasis on the *management* of brands and the associations that they accrued. Furthermore, I detail the absence of race discourse within marketer's thinking about these associations.

Although marketers spoke about the gendered and classed nature of brand images, they rarely

¹¹ Historians Brenna Greer, Adam Green, Jason Chambers, and Robert Weems had examined how black Americans operated as cultural intermediaries, examining how entrepreneurs and activists alike intervened in the mass market to foster a space for black cultural and economic life. More recently, Joshua Clark Davis has offered a framework for understanding how community run businesses worked outside the mass market to create such spaces. I bring to this conversation a discussion of how questions of integration played out in the marketing profession writ large, revealing how marketing and branding are constitutive sites of race making and valuation. See: Robert Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: NYU Press, 1998); Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line: African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Joshua Clark Davis, *From Headshops to Whole Foods* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Brenna Greer, *Represented: The Black Imagemakers Who Reimagined African American Citizenship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

spoke to race as a crucial element of the brand image. Rather, the whiteness of these images, and in turn, their role in enforcing a Jim Crow public culture, went unspoken. By contextualizing the brand image concept, we can better understand how marketers understood their own power within American media culture. We can also better appreciate how fundamentally CORE's 1963 campaign challenged the marketing profession.

The brand image must be understood as a commodity with its own history, a marketing elaboration which accrued power for specific professionals at specific times. In the 1950s and 1960s, Sidney Levy and Burleigh Gardner's brand image formulation built on a history of "image" metaphors in commercial and advertising thought. This is not to say Levy and Gardner's claims were not novel or generative; they were, for example, foundational to the rise of brand management and brand science.¹² Both of these fields rested on the brand image's primary innovation: that brands were sites of intense contestation where both merchandisers and consumers negotiated meaning. As public things, brands had to be carefully managed, monitored, and controlled by a team of corporate professionals.¹³

While the Gardner-Levy elaboration was new, the language of the image as a structural force for making sense of social worlds is much older, tied to the emergence of an industrial media culture in the United States. Well before the Second World War, the image concept had served as a central metaphor for explaining how technocrats might assert control over workers in an industrial democracy. Perhaps the most well-known example of this argument is Walter

¹² As a coherent set of practices, brand management emerged in the mid-1980s out of discussions over how to best maintain or control the specific associations that a brand and its 'image' took on in public life. See Thomas Reynolds and Jonathan Gutman, "Advertising as Image Management," *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1984): 27-38; C. Whan Park, Bernard J. Jaworski and Deborah J. MacInnis, "Strategic Brand Concept-Image Management," *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (1986): 135-145.

¹³ Burleigh Gardner and Sidney Levy, "The Product and the Brand" *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 33 (March/April 1955): 35.

Lippmann's 1922 *Public Opinion*. Lippman was a journalist and public relations expert who had served under President Wilson during World War I as a member of the Committee on Public Information. He spent the early 1920s examining the nature of information dissemination under industrial capitalism. In *Public Opinion*, he argued that with industrialization "the real environment" had simply become too complex for ordinary people. Lippmann argued that people constructed a pseudo-environment to deal with this complexity: a subjective interpretation informed by outside information: "they live in the same world, but they think and feel in different ones."¹⁴ Media "messages from the outside" world, he argued, interacted with "the stored up images, the preconceptions, and prejudices" that existed in a particular person's mind. It was within these 'pseudo-environments' that ordinary people squared away external stimuli "and in their turn powerfully direct the play of our attention, and our vision itself."¹⁵ Though Lippmann goes uncited by Levy and Gardner, his claim was one of many that strike a parallel with their theory.

Levy and Gardner's conception of the image was the result of work completed at Social Research, Inc. and the University of Chicago. Their firm launched the concept during the 1950s and 1960s, and it is their iteration that CORE's campaign seized upon. Offering a theory of the brand grounded in post-war social science, Levy drew from his formal training in psychology and Gardner from his own work in anthropology. As first detailed in a 1955 *Harvard Business Review* essay, the two argued that brands were "psychological things" which consumers took up and put to work in their daily lives.¹⁶ "The image of a product associated with the brand," they suggested, "may be clear-cut or relatively vague; it may be varied or simple; it may be intense or

¹⁴ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, 1922), "Approaches to the World Outside."

¹⁵ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, "Approaches to the World Outside."

¹⁶ Sidney Levy, "Symbols for Sale" *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 47 (July/August 1959): 117-124.

innocuous.” In some cases, “the notions people have about a brand do not even seem very sensible or relevant to those who know what the product is ‘really’ like. But they all contribute to the customer’s deciding whether or not the brand is the one ‘for [them].”¹⁷ In the proper hands, the brand image itself promised marketers an enormous measure of power to influence how ordinary people understood the world and their place in it.

Levy and Gardner’s argument was built on two assumptions, both of which emphasized the role of marketing and market research in managing a brand. First, they insisted upon the instability of meaning when it came to the brand image. The brand image was not simply anything a merchandiser claimed it was. It was also composed of what consumers brought with them when they encountered it: their perceptions, histories, and lived experience. Images were a kind of co-production that shaped the consumer’s subjectivity as well as the meaning of the brand in its public circulation. Second, they emphasized the crucial role of repetition and consistency in constructing and controlling the image. Taken together, these claims were designed to shift how merchandisers thought about branding, framing it as an anxious, ongoing, and precarious project that required constant monitoring by men such as themselves: marketing professionals who could measure meaning and augment it as needed. Levy and Gardner advised that merchandisers should think of the brand as a long-term project of management, containment, and control. “[A] single campaign,” they wrote, “is not the manufacturer’s only salesman, and he usually intends to remain in business for many following years.”¹⁸ Indeed, “[i]t is the business of advertising” they continued, “to assist in the creation of brand images, to give them structure and content, to develop a pattern of consumer attitudes likely to lead to brand purchase.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Burleigh Gardner and Sidney Levy, “The Product and the Brand” *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 33 (March/April 1955): 35.

¹⁸ Levy and Gardner, “The Product and the Brand,” 35.

¹⁹ Levy and Gardner, “The Product and the Brand,” 35.

To manage a brand, merchandisers would have to hire marketing professionals who could assist them in developing a keen sense of “the brand problems” that haunted their products. Levy and Gardner argued that answers to questions such as “[w]hat are the kinds of variables that have to be dealt with? [and] [h]ow can they be got across to the public?” would remain unknown to merchandisers without the assistance of such professionals.²⁰ The specific connotations a merchandiser sought for their brand would have to be asserted over and over again in order to sustain the brand and manage its meaning and place in ordinary people’s lives. Good marketers, they argued, had be sensitive to concerns such as: “Is it an “unfriendly” brand, an overly masculine brand, a weak-seeming brand, and so on?”²¹ In this approach, brands took on often unspoken connotations of gender, sex, class, (and race, although they did not say as much) that informed if and how a consumer might put a product to use in their daily lives. While these moves demanded close attention to the meanings that brands took on, they also promised generous returns. If a brand image could shape subjectivity, then merchandisers could work to make more deeply felt and profound connections between consumers, their brands, and their products. “From this point of view,” Levy and Gardner argued, “it is more profitable to think of an advertisement as a contribution to the complex symbol which is the brand image [...] as part of the long-term investment in the reputation of the brand.”²² This might mean charging high margins on a product or securing the long-term commitment of a consumer.

The concept became the newest vogue of the advertising and marketing industry when it was taken up by David Ogilvy in his keynote speech to the 1955 meeting of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA). Ogilvy’s interpretation of the argument went in a

²⁰ Levy and Gardner, “The Product and the Brand,” 39.

²¹ Levy and Gardner, “The Product and the Brand,” 39.

²² Levy and Gardner, “The Product and the Brand,” 39.

slightly different direction, although it maintained much of Levy & Gardner's original thinking. He emphasized that brands required a specific image cast along particular lines of identity. He argued that "most manufacturers are reluctant to accept any such limitation on the image and personality of their brands [...]." ²³ Too often merchandisers clung to a vision of a national market within which their products spoke to all sorts of consumers. "They want to be all things to all people. They want their brand to be a male brand and a female brand. An upper-crust brand and a plebian brand. And in their greed," he warned, "they almost always end up with a brand which has not any personality of a kind – a wishy-washy neuter brand. No capon ever rules the roost – and neuter brands get no place in today's market." ²⁴ Ogilvy suggested that not developing a specific, highly gendered image risked the success of a brand and its associated products. He pointed to the recently revamped Marlboro cigarette as an example of a well-constructed brand image and the future of the advertising profession. The Marlboro Man advertising character had radically reoriented the cigarette brand by offering suburban white men a vision of renegade, outsider white masculinity. It invited them to take part in the 'outcast' image themselves by smoking Marlboros. ²⁵

Along with Levy and Gardner, Ogilvy framed the image concept as a marketing innovation. In doing so, they erased the work of a number of thinkers in public relations and marketing (from Lippmann onwards) by constructing a historical narrative that rendered their version of the brand image concept novel and central. Their version did stick, however.

²³ David Ogilvy, "The Image of the Brand," speech to the *American Association of Advertising Agencies*, 1955.

²⁴ David Ogilvy, "The Image of the Brand."

²⁵ On Marlboro Men and the rebranding of Marlboro cigarettes as 'outsider masculine' products, see Elspeth Brown, "Marlboro Men: Outsider Masculinities and Commercial Modeling in Postwar America," in *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*, ed. Regina Blaszczyk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 187–207.

Advertising and marketing professionals periodized the 1960s as the “image era,” attributing its rise to Ogilvy’s speech at the 1955 AAAA. However, Ogilvy played no specific part in developing the concept. In his speech, he even admitted to encountering the concept on a flight to New York while casually flipping through the pages of the *Harvard Business Review*.²⁶

The image concept and its call for monitoring and management was not without critique, especially from those who feared the artifice of marketing and image-making both undermined democratic participation and obfuscated power relations. Daniel Boorstin, historian and University of Chicago colleague of Levy and Gardner, condemned the concept in *The Image*, a monograph published in 1962. He argued that the extension of image-making into civic life meant CEOs and politicians paid hefty fees to marketing consultants who crafted hero-myth images that purposefully misled both the public and government officials. When the mid-century public relations executive Benjamin Sonnenberg “built up an image of Charles Luckman (then president of Lever Brothers) as a supersalesman genius[,] the effort here was by Sonnenberg,” argued Boorstin, and “not by Luckman, much less by the corporation as a whole.”²⁷ All Luckman had to do was “not break the image.” In another instance, Boorstin suggested that the build-up of then president of U.S. Steel Benjamin Fairless was also artifice. Fairless’ bombastic speeches condemning Congress were attempts “to alter U.S. business economics” in favor of the firm. The speeches had little to do with Fairless himself.²⁸ They were written by “Phelps H. Adams, who had come from *The New York Sun*’s Washington Bureau” to the firm.²⁹ Much like Levy and Gardner, Boorstin recognized that image-making was an unstable, but highly

²⁶ David Ogilvy, “The Image of the Brand.”

²⁷ Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo Events in America* (New York, 1961), 190.

²⁸ Boorstin, *The Image*, 190.

²⁹ The success in building up Fairless helped make Adams a vice-president for public relations at U.S. Steel. Boorstin, *The Image*, 190.

influential enterprise requiring vast attention and tight surveillance of shifts in public perception.³⁰

The brand image concept was thus a commodity with a deep history, one that both critics and supporters alike recognized for its ability to structure how people understood and thought about the world. At mid-century, however, it took on a novel function in marketing and advertising circles. When David Ogilvy argued that merchandisers had for too long produced “neuter brands” with no distinct image, he prompted a new set of questions for the marketing and advertising profession. What kinds of meanings and associations should a brand articulate? Ogilvy called for them to select a “male brand” or a “female brand,” “an upper crust brand” or a “plebian brand” in their deliberations. The idea of race was absent from these concerns, however, for any brand that sought the general market would have to be white.³¹

Managing the Race Line

By 1963, when the CORE TV Image campaign launched, the buying power of African Americans had already drawn considerable attention from the marketing profession. This attention was complicated both by the worry that advertising to African American consumers might alienate general market consumers. Since the 1930s, African American publishers and white marketers alike had developed a number of different strategies for managing segregation in American advertising and commercial culture. In the years after the Second World War, some

³⁰ For work on managing mass communication, see Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1979); Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Scott M. Cutlip, *The Unseen Power: Public Relations, A History* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1994); Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

³¹ David Ogilvy, “The Image of the Brand.”

proposed a special ‘nation within a nation’ model, which suggested that the African American consumer market had comparable buying power to a state like California or even the entirety of Canada.³² These ‘special market’ models enabled black publishers such as Johnson (which produced *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines) to secure advertisements featuring black models from major merchandisers like Coca-Cola, Kimberly-Clark, and Chesterfield. As long as these advertisements appeared solely in special black media outlets, these merchandisers did not object to putting models of color front-and-center.

However segregated marketing models were not the only framework in circulation for thinking about the race line in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. In this section, I profile a large-scale 1961 study of black and white perceptions of advertising images completed by the African American sociologist and historian Henry Allen Bullock for the *Harvard Business Review*. Bullock’s report was of considerable import for marketers interested in determining how best to secure sales amongst African Americans. Unlike the “white backlash” studies that followed the CORE campaign and measured integration by framing blackness as a risk, Bullock instead adopted the brand image concept to argue that the race line could be managed through a set of visual strategies that were received the same way by different consumer groups. His study illustrates the variety of approaches that marketing professionals had at their disposal when it came to the race line. It suggests that the marketing profession’s later investment in “white backlash” and their framing of blackness as risk was not guaranteed, but a product of the profession’s deep investment in the whiteness of the general market writ large.

³² Kathy M. Newman, “The Forgotten Fifteen Million: Black Radio, the ‘Negro Market’ and the Civil Rights Movement,” *Radical History Review*, No. 76 (Winter 2000): 115.

Bullock was not a marketing professional. His piece for the *Harvard Business Review* drew upon the purchase of his own research in educational sociology. He had earned his PhD from the University of Michigan in sociology in 1932, spending the early part of his career teaching sociology from 1930 to 1949 at Prairie View A&M. In the 1950s, he served as the director of graduate research at Texas Southern University. He would later secure an appointment at the University of Texas at Austin in 1969, where he was the first black faculty member in the Arts and Sciences as well as the founder of the university's ethnic studies program. Throughout the 1930s, Bullock had worked with black teachers and administrators in Texas to improve the conditions of black education under Jim Crow. In 1957, he and colleagues produced a series of twelve short films titled *People are Taught to Be Different* for the National Educational Television and Radio Center. His *A History of Negro Education in the South* won the Bancroft Prize in 1968.³³

Bullock's two-part *Harvard Business Review* piece, "Consumer Motivations in Black and White," emerged out of his interest in how social factors influenced how a person interacted with external stimuli. Drawing on the brand image, the study argued that advertising played a crucial role in shaping self-perception. It opened by recognizing that most mass merchandisers conceived of the black consumer as a risk to their success: "[B]y drawing heavy Negro trade, he [the merchandiser or advertiser] might get his product or store labeled as exclusively for Negroes and, in the end, alienate Negroes as well as whites."³⁴ But advertisers, Bullock argued, had an obligation to develop productive and meaningful representations that cut across the race line.

³³ Naomi W. Ledé, "Henry Allen Bullock," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Accessed February 12th, 2019. Faculty Publications File, Texas Southern University. Vertical Files, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

³⁴ Henry Bullock, "Consumer Motivations in Black and White-II," *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 39, Issue 4 (1961): 111.

Referencing the findings of educational psychologists Mamie Phipps Clark and Kenneth Clark, whose research had shaped the arguments upon which *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided in 1954, he argued that “to the extent that advertisers gain control over the human mind, they also inherit some degree of responsibility for its content [...]. Does not the seller have some responsibility in this, the most serious problem area involving our national unity?”³⁵

Bullock’s study drew upon theories of the brand image and self-fashioning through advertising and mass media to argue that aesthetics could be deployed to manage the race line in a single mass market advertising campaign. Bullock pressed that “the idea that separate media [advertisements] are required to reach Negro and white consumers is more illusion than fact. There are certain strategic points at which the needs and the interest of these consumers converge in the stream of mass communication.”³⁶ Consumers brought their own personal “repertoire of motives embodying prejudices, aspirations, and anxieties” to advertisements, many of which were shared by both African American and white consumers.³⁷ Merchandisers did not need to ignore black consumers for fear of losing white ones. Rather, they merely needed to select images that operated similarly for both kinds of people.

In the study, Bullock evaluated three visual strategies for accomplishing this task: structured images, which provided a clear context and set of social relationships; unstructured images, which had no clear set of social relations; and cartoon images. Bullock argued that in order to manage the race line, advertisers should reject structured and cartoon images and instead rely on unstructured images, which enabled more room for projection and interpretation. Just as “people can be made to think of bread in all its softness without being bored by having to watch

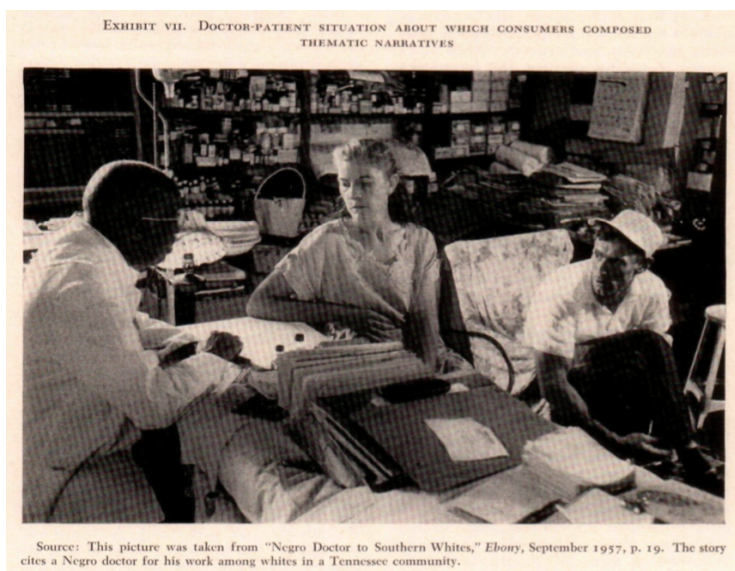
³⁵ Bullock, “Consumer Motivations in Black and White-II,” 124.

³⁶ Bullock, “Consumer Motivations in Black and White-II,” 114.

³⁷ Bullock, “Consumer Motivations in Black and White-II,” 114.

somebody squeeze a loaf,” he argued, “they can identify with an ad without seeing ‘themselves’ in it.”³⁸ He argued that unstructured visuals allowed a merchandiser to operate across the race line without offense because people would re-organize the image on their own terms.

To demonstrate this, Bullock undertook his own a version of the Thematic Apperception Test with a number of African American and white viewers. He used what he described as a “mildly structured” photograph selected from *Ebony* magazine, cleared of any contextual information, to explain why structured images were tricky to manage (figure 1).



(Figure 1: an image from *Ebony*, September 1957. Bullock removed any reference to the situation and then presented the photo to his participants)

The structured photo was presented to viewers without context. It was extracted from an article in the September 1957 issue of *Ebony* titled “Negro Doctor to Southern Whites.” As a ‘structured’ image, the photograph has a set of power relationships which can be inferred from its composition. The photograph depicts a messy office. A clustered desk divides the foreground. A black man in a white lab coat sits to the left of the desk. He speaks to a white woman who sits

³⁸ Bullock, “Consumer Motivations in Black and White-II,” 119.

to the right of the desk. Her eyes look down at his hands. Behind her is a white man leaning forward in a chair. He stares directly at the black man as he speaks to the woman. In the study, Bullock narrated the responses of different participants to whom he presented the image:

Responses to [this image] given by the white subjects ranged from complete rejection of the doctor-patient fact to guarded acceptance, toned by the implication that it did not happen in the South. One white female subject, after several futile attempts to compose a narrative, gave up in a desperation saying: ‘I can’t make this out. Never saw anything like it. It’s beyond me’[...]A variation from this perceptual block was shown by another white female who compromised with the picture’s impact by restructuring the stimulus in accord with acceptable Southern traditions. The main portion of the narrative reads this way: “This is a poor area. The woman wants advice. The man is her husband. The negro is a professional. It is a clinic? An apothecary? There’s something odd in the picture.”³⁹

Bullock argued that people responded to the image using their own lived experience “as a means of resolving the mental conflict it fostered.”⁴⁰ In other words, viewers attempted to restructure the photograph to suit them. For example, many white viewers restructured the image to meet the raced and classed social circumstances of Jim Crow. “The two white people are apparently working people”, suggested one white respondent. “Evidently this is a store the Negro man is running or owns. They are discussing something very serious, seem [sic] to be getting along together well. Looks like the Negro man said something that startled the white man. They will laugh it off, and the farm people will start back home before dark,” suggested another.⁴¹ Bullock noted that only three of the white respondents who viewed the picture admitted to a doctor-patient relationship. However, even then they placed the image in the U.S. North: “looks like a country doctor. The man is in a wheel chair. Must be up North as white people wouldn’t go to a colored doctor down here. Looks more like a store than an office.”⁴² In the case of black

³⁹ Bullock, “Consumer Motivations in Black and White-II”, 119.


⁴⁰ Bullock, “Consumer Motivations in Black and White-II”, 119.

⁴¹ Bullock, “Consumer Motivations in Black and White-II”, 119.

⁴² Bullock, “Consumer Motivations in Black and White-II”, 119.

respondents, two-thirds of viewers interpreted the image in the context of a doctor-patient relationship; however, these viewers “could see no specific good resulting from this incident.”⁴³

Time in The Equitable's Old American Heritage, Friday, January 13, NBC-TV.




Circle of responsibility

Remember the first year of your marriage? There was just you and your wife: a small circle of responsibility. You probably covered that responsibility with an insurance policy.

Since then, there have been a lot of changes. First, a child. Then a new house—with a mortgage. Then another child. Your circle of responsibility has certainly grown.

Will the life insurance you bought when you were first married cover this bigger responsibility? The fact is that it can still protect your wife—or take care of one child—or even pay off

the mortgage. But can your insurance meet your total needs? The best thing, the wisest thing to do when your insurance no longer fits your needs is to call The Man from Equitable. Let him help you work out a Living Insurance program designed to cover your circle of responsibility as it exists today.



THE EQUITABLE Life Assurance Society
of the United States
Home Office: 330 Seventh Avenue, New York 1, New York

(Figure 2: Equitable Life Insurance Ad, *Life*, January 13, 1961)

Bullock used the *Ebony* example to suggest that photographic images were not static texts. Rather, people approached these images with their own interpretive framework. The more structured an image (the more it articulated a set of social relationships), the more challenging it would be to a viewer. As such, he argued that ‘unstructured’ advertising images were ideal. These were images that adhered closely to popular, shared tropes of everyday life: personal bonds such as marriage, weddings, or children as well as banal phenomena like traffic or the weather. To demonstrate this argument, Bullock provided an unstructured image. This time an

⁴³ Bullock, “Consumer Motivations in Black and White-II”, 120.

advertisement for the Equitable Life Assurance Company drawn from the January 13, 1961 issue of *Life* magazine. (Figure 2) The advertisement features a large black and white photograph with a block of text below it. In the photo, a white hand slides an engagement ring onto the finger of another white hand. Beneath the visual is the statement “Circle of responsibility,” a block of text celebrating the first year of marriage, and the word ‘equitable’ in all capital letters.

Even with the absence of a black model, Bullock found that both black and white viewers were moved by the emotional resonance of the advertisement. The Equitable advertisement was “An ad with mobility” exclaimed one white housewife. It was “Just enough to set you off” declared a white man who, Bullock suggested, “appeared charmed by its simplicity.” Black viewers were equally moved by the photograph: “It lets you think awhile” responded one black minister. “The hands talk to you,” suggested a black seamstress when the researcher showed her the image. Across both these images, Bullock argued that the ability of the individual to “restructure situations he encounters in the form and shape of his own needs and hopes” was central to advertising. The ability to adopt an image to one’s own purpose meant that, for advertisers, visuals that drew upon shared experiences of everyday life without locating them within wider social relationships worked best: “an unstructured advertising policy is feasible and probably would be successful in a combined appeal to black and white markets.”⁴⁴ Bullock’s study also endorsed highly structured visuals that cued into recognizable tropes or figures. Black celebrities appealed across the race line, as did advertisements that pictured a product in its operation. Photographs of crowds, children, or exotic travel worked as well (Figure 3).

⁴⁴ Bullock, “Consumer Motivations in Black and White-II”, 120.



(Figure 3: An example of an advertisement that had “common racial appeal” from Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1961 calendar)

Bullock’s piece underscored that certain modes of advertising aesthetic and design could work across the race line without alienating audiences and in turn, undermining the sales pitch. His work is a reminder that ‘white backlash’ was not the only way in which the profession could have responded. Bullock’s work, however, did not embrace a vision of integration. His visuals were decidedly different than the advertisements that CORE would soon demand. Although his work was informed by a commitment to challenging the race line in the construction of distinct markets, Bullock provided advertising images that were largely divorced from the social context of Jim Crow.⁴⁵ Rather, he argued for brands and brand images that were abstracted and bound to

⁴⁵ "Same Ad, Intelligently Done, Can Sell Both Whites, Negroes: Bullock," *Advertising Age*, June 12, 1961, 23. Alongside Johnson’s publications, which offered a segmented market strategy for mass merchandisers, Bullock offered merchandisers a novel approach to managing the color line in commercial advertising through advertisements that could be used across mediums.

social phenomena and rituals which many different people encountered throughout their lives. CORE's 1963 TV Image Campaign would demand a very different kind of visual representation. They would call for integrated advertising images that interpolated all consumers into the multicultural United States which most Americans already lived in.

Changing the Brand Image

CORE's 1963 TV Image Campaign was part of a larger push undertaken by Civil Rights organizations in the advertising and marketing industry. While many organizations sought to improve black employment numbers in major general market advertising agencies, CORE took a different route, looking to change the representations of blackness depicted within general market advertising campaigns. New York City CORE Chapter president Clarence Funnye drew directly upon the vogue of the "brand image" to make his case. He believed that the absence of actual, honest depictions of American life in mass media culture was central to the endurance of white supremacy. In this section, I follow how Funnye and CORE seized upon the image as a rubric for organizing the meanings brands took on. I show how they used this concept to make their argument: that if marketing could shape subjectivity, then advertising could be used to foster a vision of integrated life that could undermine American racism. In calling for the integration of general market campaigns, CORE challenged the unstated whiteness of the American consumer market. This forced merchandisers and marketing professionals alike to speak plainly about the ways they thought about race.

CORE's call was distinct from both the marketing model used by Johnson at *Ebony* and *Jet* or even the claims Henry Bullock had made in his 1961 study. In their initial announcement, Funnye called for the creation of integrated advertising images to be produced for general market campaigns and not solely for the black consumer market. "What we want," argued Funnye, "is

for television to show things the way they are [...] all the way, in the shows and in commercials. We think its unrealistic the way advertising is now. Now wouldn't be nice if now and then on television a little Negro girl came running in shouting, 'Look, Ma, no cavities.' That's what we want; just ordinary things. We're not asking for anything revolutionary."⁴⁶ CORE's argument appealed to the benefits of an integrated society by framing integration as a form of realist representation that better reflected society as it was. In doing so, they suggested that the overwhelmingly white media culture of the United States failed to reflect the actual lived experiences of most Americans.

To make their case, the CORE campaign capitalized upon the massive scale of vertically integrated post-war American corporations. Rather than targeting individual advertising agencies or marketing firms, they instead directly addressed some of the largest merchandisers in the United States: Colgate-Palmolive, Lever Brothers, and Proctor & Gamble. Each of these organizations commanded the attention of multiple advertising and market research firms and agencies. These agencies relied on the patronage of large merchandisers to keep their own doors open. Over the course of 1963, Funnye met with more than sixty merchandisers and advertisers, securing commitments from each of these three major firms and using them as leverage to demand integrated campaigns from smaller merchandisers throughout the United States.⁴⁷

Funnye brought the campaign directly to top executives, bypassing middle management by deploying the twin specters of boycotts and bad PR. To initiate, CORE would send a letter to the executive leadership of a major merchandiser indicating their advertising did not include

⁴⁶ Quoted in Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line*, 137.

⁴⁷ "P&G is Next CORE Target; Agencies Later," *Advertising Age*, August 16, 1963, 3, 251; "CORE Seeks Cooperation From More Advertisers," *Advertising Age*, February 10, 1964, 91. Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line*, 137.

African American models and that CORE would like to meet with them. At these meetings, CORE put forward agreements that called for a company to begin integrating advertisements within the general market. These were not formal contracts; rather, these agreements cultivated an understanding that the company would pursue the creation of such a campaign within 90 days. During this 90-day period, these firms would send interim updates in the form of storyboards and mock-ups so that CORE could confirm that merchandisers were crafting a visual representation of integration that adhered to their vision. The contracts were not legally enforceable. However, they operated with the weight of CORE's network of grass roots organizations and their willingness to run boycotts targeting firms which refused. Even if a boycott did not hit a firm's bottom line, the PR which followed risked their public image, now so essential to driving sales.

The first firm CORE secured an agreement from was the English soap and cleaning supply merchandiser Lever Brothers. The company's sweeping scale signaled to the advertising and marketing industries that CORE's Image Campaign was serious business. The historian Jason Chambers has detailed some of the first commercial spots produced by Lever Brothers as a result of CORE. In one, television host Ari Linkletter interviewed a black studio audience member about using Lever Brothers detergent to handle her family's washing. The banality of this ad met the exact expectations that CORE had laid out. Both trade periodicals and Lever Brothers leadership lauded the spot, especially when it appeared to generate no negative responses amongst white buyers.⁴⁸

Even as CORE's campaign generated a flurry of positive headlines for participating firms, a number of different merchandisers responded to the campaign with relentless obfuscation. Goodyear Tires provides one such example. In 1964, Funnye wrote a letter on

⁴⁸ Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line*, 136.

behalf of the Image Campaign directly to Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company president, Russel De Young. The letter suggested that CORE's "committee on research and statistics" had completed an exhaustive analysis of Goodyear's media output. Their committee had concluded that Goodyear had never used black models in their general market advertising. As such, Funnyc invited Goodyear to meet with them in March 1964 in order to discuss how best to create integrated advertising images for the mass market.⁴⁹

Internally, Goodyear surveyed the responses of other merchandisers who had declined to meet CORE's demands, examining the strategies these firms undertook to manage this rejection. Texaco, for example, had turned down CORE by pointing to the non-integrated advertising campaigns that they had previously produced targeting black consumers (guided by the special markets tradition). Other firms had refused to meet CORE's call for integration and their 90-day timeline, offering up general, less structured commitments instead. Goodyear director of advertising J.P. Kelley suggested there was "much to be gained by our acting as [...] Proctor & Gamble did. That is, make no definite commitments of any kind, offer to show the committee all the things we're doing in promotion and advertising to Negroes (*Ebony*, *Negro* newspapers and radio, etc.) indicate that we're working on the problem—and take our time in finding a few places where we can include Negroes in our advertising without forcing the ad or calling undue attention to Negroes." Proctor & Gamble had offered CORE no agreement to integrate, but instead argued that their "first responsibility was to prepare effective advertising—and that any

⁴⁹ I thank Katherine Parkin for these materials. See Katherine Parkin, "'Bring Them Back Alive!' Fear and the Macabre in US Automobile Tire Advertising," *Advertising and Society Quarterly* (2017): 17-21; J. P. Kelly, Director of Advertising at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, to Victor Holt Jr., Executive Vice President at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, "Report on CORE," March 6, 1964, Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company Records, University of Akron Libraries.

forcing of the racial question would be against their principles.”⁵⁰ Good advertising drove sales, they argued, and had no necessary relationship to meeting a social good.

When Goodyear made concessions to the Campaign, it did so on terms that its leadership believed would help protect the whiteness of their brand image. Kelly suggested the company confine “use of Negroes to TV commercials” (the central focus on the TV Image Campaign) but push back and delay when it came to calls for integration in print images. He advised that Goodyear “Stall as long as possible the use of Negroes in general public advertising in print—because print becomes a semi-permanent record and is more closely scrutinized.”⁵¹ Kelly’s suggestions are indicative of a relationship between medium and segmentation in the 1960s. The ephemerality of TV commercials meant that Goodyear television advertisements featuring models of color were less of a risk to the viability of the brand in a national market tacitly coded as white. They were isolated to short multi-week runs and (most importantly) could be aired on specific stations in specific communities across the United States. Major magazines, however, were far broader in orientation and lacked the kind of localization TV promised; their large readerships stood in for the national market and public culture of the United States. His suggestion that Goodyear “stall as long as possible” in print thus reflected an attempt to isolate, by geography, integrated advertising images to certain locales.

Despite resistance, CORE earned a considerable amount of press coverage for their call to integrate American brand images. The organization was joined by the NAACP in the Autumn of 1963. In September, the American Association of Advertising Agencies held a meeting at the

⁵⁰ J. P. Kelly, Director of Advertising at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, to Victor Holt Jr., Executive Vice President at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, “Report on CORE,” March 6, 1964, Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company Records, University of Akron Libraries.

⁵¹ *Id.*

behest of the NAACP to implement the “sponsorship of television programs and commercials free of all racial barriers including unrestricted use of Negro performers” and to encourage the use of “Negro models in advertising in general media as well as Negro media.” During the East Coast meeting of the AAAA in November of the same year, the NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins doubled down on their call to develop better portrayals of blacks in advertising. As the *New York Times* reported on the conference, “the wider representation of Negroes in conventional middle-class settings will (Negro groups) [sic] believe do much to erase the undesirable stereotypes of the Negro that exist in the white community.”⁵² In a similar recognition of the growing calls for integrated commercial advertising, the *Saturday Review* suggested “No question the color line has been irrevocably splintered in national advertising as of the fall of 1963.”⁵³ This was not the case.

Constructing White Backlash

CORE’s TV Image Campaign sent a shockwave through the advertising and marketing professions. Suddenly, marketers were forced to confront the centrality of whiteness to the media landscape they had created. In response, marketing experts began to question what effect black models would have on the brand image. This concern became the focus of market researchers working in advertising companies, business school marketing departments, and private market research firms alike. The industry had previously favored the special markets approach that black media outlets and market researchers had fostered through the 1950s and into the early 1960s. In much the same way, they recognized the important role Bullock’s work had played in providing

⁵² *New York Times*, January 6, 1964, p. 88.

⁵³ *Saturday Review*, November 9, 1963, p. 67.

methods to *manage* the race line rather than transcend it. The call for integrated images forwarded by Civil Rights activists complicated such frameworks.

Marketing experts responded to CORE by publishing experimental reports designed to measure how white consumers responded to integrated advertising images. These studies were published across both the scholarly and trade journals that formed the knowledge base of the profession: the *Journal of Advertising Research*, the *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Advertising Age*, *Printer's Ink*, and *Mass/Communications*. From the mid-to-late 1960s through to the 1970s, this literature came to be understood as “white backlash” studies. Even while marketing experts found negligible differences in the use of models of color in general campaigns compared to all-white images, the concern endured well into the 1980s and 1990s.

In this section, I argue that even though the “white backlash” studies proved at best inconclusive, they established and enforced a mode of market segmentation that rejected integration in favor of insulating the mass market from black representation, a framing which positioned blackness as a *risk* to the success of a mass market product or brand. Although we cannot examine each of these studies individually, this section offers a review of the genre as evidence, scrutinizing the assumptions these experimental studies shared and the risk discourse they adopted in placing the ‘stakes’ of integration on the responses of white consumers. I examine how the studies were predicated upon (and therefore also worked to produce) a highly-valued white consumer and a minority black consumer who was posed as a risk to the success of the product.⁵⁴ This risk was structured through the visual relationship of models of color to the product being sold.

⁵⁴ Arnold M. Barban and Edward W. Cundiff, "Negro and White Response to Advertising Stimuli," *Journal of Marketing Research* Vol. 1 (November 1964): 53-56; Arnold Barban, "The Dilemma of 'Integrated' Advertising," *Journal of Business* Vol. 42 (October 1969): 477-96; James Stafford, Al

During the early 1960s, as the demands of Civil Rights activists were percolating, marketers attempted to undermine calls for integrated mass media images by arguing that race was not as important as income in determining where a consumer fit in the market. A number of marketing professionals argued that black consumer could not be distinguished from “any other lower-income, lower-educated and geographically concentrated groups.”⁵⁵ These critics butted heads with both activist calls for integration as well as a robust network of black publishers and marketers who had forwarded the special markets thesis throughout the 1950s. Special markets experts argued that the black consumer was defined in economic terms because little substantive work had been done to define them through social and cultural contexts.

In the marketing work that followed the CORE campaign, marketing professionals began to examine two threads of concern: the immediate response of white consumers to black models appearing in mainstream advertising images as well as how the presence of black models might shift the long-term image of a mass market brands. In 1972, Mary Jane Schlinger, professor of marketing at the University of Illinois, and Joseph Plummer, a copy and creative research manager at the Leo Burnett agency, argued that since the 1963 CORE Campaign and subsequent advocacy by the NAACP, merchandisers and agencies had become cautious about allowing prominent displays of black models in commercial advertising campaigns targeting the mass

Birdwell, and Charles Van Tassel, "Integrated Advertising - White Backlash?," *Journal of Advertising Research* Vol. 10 (April 1970): 15-20; Lester Guest, "How Negro Models Affect Company Image," *Journal of Advertising Research* Vol. 10 (April 1970): 29-33; James W. Cagley and Richard N. Cardozo, "White Response to Integrated Advertising," *Journal of Advertising Research* Vol. 10 (April 1970): 35-39; William V. Muse, "Product-Related Response to Use of Black Models in Advertising," *Journal of Marketing Research* Vol. 8 (February 1971): 107-109; Carl E. Block, "White Backlash to Negro Ads: Fact or Fantasy," *Journalism Quarterly* Vol. 49 (Summer 1972): 258-62; Ronald F. Bush, Robert F. Gwinner, and Paul J. Solomon, "White Consumer Sales Response to Black Models," *Journal of Marketing* Vol. 38 (April 1974): 25-29; Pravat K. Choudhury and Lawrence. S. Schmid, "Black Models in Advertising to Blacks," *Journal of Advertising Research* Vol. 14 (June 1974): 19-22.

⁵⁵ “The Marketing Dilemma of Negroes,” *The Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (1965): 2.

market. “A number of researchers have noted the possibility that all-black or integrated advertising might generate a white ‘backlash’” and “result in adverse effect on product image and sales.”⁵⁶ It was within these sorts of formulations that the use of black models (and the figure of the black consumer as a whole) was understood as an inherent risk that could shift the race connotations of a brand.

Despite these anxieties, most white backlash studies found little variation in the reaction of white consumers whether a product was pitched by white models or models of color. For example, in Schlinger and Plummer’s own research on the topic, they attempted to measure how both black and white consumers responded to two iterations of the same television commercial. The commercial depicted two couples enjoying the gift and their cigarettes, offering a special premium gift with the purchase of an unstated cigarette brand. The first version of the commercial featured an all-black cast and the second one was integrated. When they asked participants their perspectives on the brand, the marketers did not find any substantive difference. White consumers expressed that they found the black cast less “professional,” but suggested black models did not particularly deter them from the product. Although Schlinger and Plummer concluded that race difference played little role in the brand perception of white consumers, they tellingly called for further research on the topic.⁵⁷

The challenge with such studies was that they were experimental, had small sample sizes, or reduced race to distinct categories of difference. First, experimental studies were not the banal situations or spur-of-the-moment interactions which shaped advertising images and everyday

⁵⁶ Mary Jane Schlinger and Joseph T. Plummer, “Advertising in Black and White” *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (May 1972): 149.

⁵⁷ Mary Jane Schlinger and Joseph T. Plummer, “Advertising in Black and White” *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (May 1972): 149.

encounters with them. Participants showed up to a university or advertising firm research facility where they were then asked a series of questions about an advertisement. Although one could control for prejudice or screen for certain kinds of participants, the artificial circumstances of these studies shaped the content and candidness of participant responses. Second, these studies participated in longer historical trajectories of race making and management in the market. The brand of a cigarette for sale, for example, would profoundly shape who did or did not seek out the product, yet the study did not take this into account. A menthol Kool or a Marlboro would draw in or alienate different kinds of consumers no matter who was featured in the commercial. Thirdly, such studies assumed that models of color had never been in advertising images. Rarely did these studies actually control for what the authors meant by “integrated” ads, even when they referenced the influence of CORE and the NAACP in them choosing to develop their white backlash study. Failing to reach the conclusions they desired, marketers turned to increasingly sophisticated kinds of assessment technologies, often with dithering results. For example, in a study of white responses to integrated advertising images amongst college-aged consumers, one marketer used an “eye camera” to follow the viewer’s retina as they scrutinized the ad. The results found negative responses, but the authors conceded that “it was not clear if this reaction is a function of race, of the ad being ‘poor’ in a creative sense, or a function of other factors which are not discernable at this point because of the significant interactions [between an advertisement and the viewer] taking place.”⁵⁸

Even with the gaps in its claims, the white backlash literature did come to serve a critical purpose in shaping how marketing professionals would deploy black models in their campaigns,

⁵⁸ James Stafford, Al Birdwell, Charles Van Tassel, “Integrated Advertising—White Backlash?” *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 10 (April 1970): 20.

if at all. In “White Backlash to Negro Ads: Fact or Fantasy?”, market researcher Carl Block offered an analysis of models of color and their relative placement to the product being sold. In a study of 104 white adults from three Missouri communities, participants were shown 21 brands in three generic product categories: soft drinks, life insurance, and cigarettes. Of the six brands featured in the study, Block found that one brand of soft drink, Coca-Cola, was ranked significantly lower by the group of white consumers who were shown an advertisement featuring only black models. Given the near-universal recognition of both the Coca-Cola product and brand, Block surmised that the response had to do with several causes:

First, the Negro models in this ad were darker than the Negroes who appeared in the five other ads. Second, the Coca-Cola advertisement located the models more prominent in the scene. In no other case were the models so prominent. This definitely makes it a Negro-dominated advertisement. Some of the subjects indicated they felt the models in the Coca-Cola ad appeared as young militants, while the Negro model in the Camel ad, for example, was labeled an Uncle Tom.⁵⁹

Even as Block’s study concluded that most of the integrated ads elicited no response, he wondered over the role of “the darker cast of the models in this ad or the prominence produced this result is a matter of speculation. It may serve to alert advertisers, however, that there could be a limit to the cultural acceptability of the Negro as a model in certain product advertising.”⁶⁰ His speculations gestured to new kinds of questions: that it was not necessarily the presence of black models in the advertisement that had turned off viewers, but their visual relation to the product at hand. While these were merely assumptions, Block suggested that nationally circulating brands like Coca-Cola, with a century of commercial advertising to bolster them, would need to be wary of how black models related to the product. The proximity of a model

⁵⁹ Carl E. Block, “White Backlash to Negro Ads: Fact or Fantasy?” *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (1971): 261.

⁶⁰ Carl E. Block, “White Backlash to Negro Ads: Fact or Fantasy?” 262.

“represented a form of Negro involvement in advertising which was beyond the current level of tolerance, at least of the individuals in this experiment.”⁶¹ Within such a framework, an advertisement that depicted a black model claiming some sort of relationship to owning the commodity at hand *might* risk the racialization of the product, even if the brand had nearly a century of advertising to bank on. In other words, was only when advertisements reflected CORE’s vision of ‘integrated’ life, representing both whites and African Americans on an even keel, that marketers worried over how a brand might change.

The white backlash studies help us understand the ways in which the marketing profession strived to manage and isolate CORE’s calls for integration. Block’s study reflects how marketers navigated segmentation well into the 1970s and 1980s. Black models could use or consume a product only in ads targeted for the black consumer market; in any other instance, such an advertising image was a risk. When it came to the mainstream market, black models could only be presented without risk if advertising images retained subservience or insured physical distance. In short, the industry would not reject models of color, but products would be insulated from their touch for fear that the brand itself might become black. Such studies were generated by a fear that black models depicted in mainstream advertising images might shift the meanings and connotation of brands. While these studies offered no definitive answer, they approached integration by framing blackness as a risk to commercial viability in the mainstream. They measured the success of integration of the response of white consumers. In doing so, they asserted a definition of the general market as white, defying CORE’s argument that American life was far more multicultural than the advertising landscape suggested.

⁶¹ Carl E. Block, “White Backlash to Negro Ads: Fact or Fantasy?”, 261.

Conclusion

Fears over blackness in the general market during the 1960s and the 1970s greatly outweighed the actual gains in total representation. In 1966, three years after commitments were made by advertising industry leaders to CORE, a UCLA study commissioned by the Southern California chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union revealed that only .65% of speaking roles in television commercials and 1.39% of non-speaking roles were secured by black talent.⁶² A 1972 study found similarly disappointing results in the content of these advertisements: only 1.3% of all advertising in 1969 contained a black actor at all. These figures lead the authors to conclude that, less than a decade after *Saturday Review* suggested the color line had been broken, the industry had “very little to be proud of – the Black model quite clearly is still a token Negro.”⁶³

While marketers had made the transition from mass to general through the 1940s and 1950s, this transition did not include black life. The civil rights movement generally and CORE’s campaign more specifically challenged this thinking. The 1963 TV Image Campaign rendered race a critical concern of the marketing profession precisely because that profession understood the mass market, national brands, and the average consumer through a highly profitable vision of American whiteness. Drawing upon marketing experts’ own theories of the brand image as a site for meaning-making that ordered how consumers understood the world, CORE argued that if marketing could shape perception, then media images could be put to work to challenge

⁶² “TV Ads, Shows Still Lag in Use of Negro, Other Races: ACLU,” *Advertising Age*, April 11, 1966, 128.

⁶³ Harold H. Kassrajain, “Blacks in Advertising: A Further Comment,” *Journal of Marketing Research* Vol. 8 (August 1971): 393. Kassrajain’s original findings were contested by John Wheatley two years later, who argued that consistent improvement had been made, even if the markers of success for the hiring of Black models were not yet met. See: John J. Wheatley, “The Use of Black Models in Advertising,” *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 8 (August 1971): 390-393. For the original study, see Harold H. Kassrajain, “The Negro and American Advertising,” *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 6 (1969): 29-39.

American racism. Their campaigns were met with fears of ‘white backlash,’ marketing studies that asserted a model of segmentation that sought to contain blackness and isolate it from the general market.

In the mid-1960s, NYC CORE moved away from calls for integration and toward advocacy of black nationalism, leaving the Image Campaign to fall by the wayside. However, the campaign had a significant effect on the marketing and advertising industries in the years to come. First, the Image Campaign had succeeded in challenging major merchandisers and advertising industry actors to develop integrated images of American life. Second, they had forced the marketing class to speak plainly about the whiteness of their own brand images. In the process, the campaign pushed the limits of marketing and what might count as normative or typical within American market research.

In addition to hard-fought battles over representation, other Civil Rights organizations had pressured the advertising and marketing industries to develop opportunity programs that would see these lily-white institutions transformed through the gainful employment of people of color. Chapter four follows one of the actors involved in this movement, Caroline Jones. Her career would play out in the tension between the drive of the marketing profession to incorporate new consumers into the market and its careful protection and investment in a general market that was coded as white.

Chapter 4: Caroline Jones and the Black Consumer Market

In 1979, the black-owned and operated advertising agency, Mingo-Jones, received a contract from Kentucky Fried Chicken to develop a new campaign for their New York, Chicago, and Detroit urban markets. Founded two years earlier in 1977, the agency brought together two African American heavyweights of the advertising and marketing industry: Frank Mingo, a former account executive at J. Walter Thompson and Caroline Jones, a creative director who had held executive posts at a number of general market agencies. Marshalling their collective expertise, these two founders made it no secret that they aspired to do work in the general market and become as large an agency as J. Walter Thompson itself. Despite the fanfare announcing their arrival, however, Caroline Jones and Frank Mingo struggled to secure major accounts.

Their work, however, did meet the scale of their aspirations. Their 1979 KFC campaign, titled “We Do Chicken Right,” was so successful that the fast-food retailer made it their national slogan in the early 1980s. It soon became one of the company’s most recognizable brand properties, running well into the 1990s. Yet even after Mingo-Jones saw the “We Do Chicken Right” slogan and jingle go national, KFC continued to direct the majority of their advertising dollars to Young & Rubicon, their “agency of record.”¹ While Mingo-Jones was lauded, the firm was unable to leverage it into further accounts with the fast-food giant.

Mingo-Jones quickly grew to become the second-largest black-owned agency in the United States, but this milestone meant little in terms of financial return. Their aesthetics were valuable: for one, Jones had won significant accolades throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Yet the logic of market segmentation cut against the commercial viability of Mingo-Jones. As a shop

¹ “Mingo-Jones: Doing the Colonel Right,” *Black Enterprise*, December 1981, 56.

owned by black principals, they were immediately deemed a black agency and therefore dismissed by merchandisers when it came to general market campaigns. There was a pattern frequent enough to merit comment by industry critics during the 1980s. A number of articles in the *New York Times*' advertising column and in the *Advertising Age* suggested that despite lofty aspirations, blockbuster talent, and a number of successful campaigns, many black-owned firms in the 1980s were stuck working with black accounts and generally denied access to more ambitious billings.²

Historians such as Robert Weems and Jason Chambers have documented the origins of this story in African American marketing at mid-century, exploring the various activist and corporate actors who demanded recognition for black consumer power in the advertising and marketing industry writ large. Chambers in particular has examined how many African American advertising and marketing executives began to open agencies of their own in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These new agencies promised merchandisers the opportunity to speak to black consumers in distinct and meaningful ways.³ As these firms opened and closed, some of their employees, such as Caroline Jones, moved between these smaller firms and general market agencies. As they climbed the ranks, these professionals began to open a second generation of advertising and marketing agencies owned by African Americans, but operating in the general market. It was at this second generation of black-owned agencies that, despite their accolades and considerable experience with general market campaigns, black marketing professionals struggled to land accounts.

² P. H. Dougherty, "General Accounts for Black Agencies," *New York Times*, September 22, 1977, pg. 73.

³ Robert E Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: NYU Press, 1998); Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line: African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2008).

This chapter examines these tensions through the career of Caroline Robinson Jones. Jones' career reaches from Civil Rights bids for the integration of mass market advertising images to the end of the twentieth century. She began her career at the general agency J. Walter Thompson in 1963, the same year CORE launched their TV Image Campaign. At Thompson she became the first African American copywriter to be trained in the firm's near century-long history. In 1968 she left Thompson, spending the 1970s moving between a number of major advertising firms and smaller agencies, such as Zebra Associates and the Black Creative Group. In the late 1980s, Jones moved into executive leadership roles, working as co-owner and later owner of a number of higher profile agencies, including Mingo-Jones and Caroline Jones Advertising.

In this chapter, I argue that while market segmentation created opportunities for Jones and other marketing professionals of color in the 1960s and 1970s, the enduring racial logic of segmentation severely limited their access to general market campaigns in the 1980s. In the 1970s, African American marketing professionals like Jones constructed a low-income, black consumer composite that they alone could access. A decade later, however, marketers like Jones found themselves in a double bind. Their construction of a black composite had succeeded in framing black consumers as a separate niche with buying power. However, this strategy had not challenged the whiteness of the general market. Instead, it banked on it. Indeed, by the early 1990s, even when Jones could prove that the assumed "white" general consumer did not exist and that black consumers constituted a significant block of buyers across a variety product sectors, it made little difference. Segmentation may have created visibility for black consumers and opportunity for marketers like Jones, but it simultaneously enforced the association between

whiteness and the general market. The ‘particularity’ of blackness (as these marketers constructed it) meant they could not break into the national market.

To demonstrate this double bind, I follow how Jones and the agencies she worked for navigated the opportunities and limitations segmentation created for black marketing professionals. I track the marketing context that marketing professionals of color navigated through the 1960s and 1970s; the specific ideas about low-income blackness they marshalled to construct a black consumer amiable to merchandisers; and the ways this strategy reinforced the racialized logic of market segmentation. Taken together, this chapter looks to Caroline Jones’s career as a way into the racial work marketing professionals do as they construct consumer composites and how this work both enables and restricts black mobility within American consumer capitalism.

Jones at J. Walter Thompson

Caroline Jones joined J. Walter Thompson at the height of Civil Rights contestations over the advertising industry. In this section, I establish Jones’ early history, her arrival at Thompson, her movement throughout the firm, and her eventual decision to exit it. While activist pressure had succeeded in forcing large industry actors to train marketing and advertising professionals of color, the enduring racial logic of the general market assured that, both in front of and behind the camera, merchandisers understood blackness as a risk. Jones’ assignments at the firm reveal that Thompson responded to calls for integration by carefully managing gender and race difference in the production of market research and advertising images within the firm. They did so in order to mitigate the dangers they believed integration presented to the general market.

For Jones, advertising and marketing were not the original plan. She had intended to become a medical doctor, but opted to pursue advertising and marketing industry instead because

of the raced and gendered limitations placed on medicine during her college years. Jones was born in 1942 in Benton Harbor, Michigan, the eldest of ten children and the first to attend college in her family. She earned a full-ride scholarship from the University of Michigan, where she majored in general sciences and English. Towards the end of her time at Michigan, as she was preparing to sort out potential careers, Jones encountered recruiters from J. Walter Thompson during a campus employment fair. She opted to visit the company in New York City over the summer of her graduating year. She decided to pursue a position at Thompson during that summer. Her decision was based on the advice of the African American journalist Tomasina Norford and the author Ellen Tarry, who she stayed with during her initial visit to New York. Both Norford and Tarry had emphasized to Jones that the advertising field was changing and might provide new opportunities for women of color.⁴

J. Walter Thompson was then considered a progressive agency, although one still defined by middle-class whiteness and highly gendered respectability politics. The agency had been heavily influenced by the copywriter Helen Lansdowne Resor, whose 1910 Woodbury campaign, “The Skin You Love to Touch,” had introduced erotic elements into commercial advertising appeals in the 1920s. Resor’s infamous campaign was storied within the profession, and her partner Stanley Resor had led Thompson until 1961. While both had left the agency by the time Jones arrived, their influence suggested the firm was open to women in creative and research-based roles. Indeed, during the early 1960s, Thompson’s was one of the few agencies with any female Vice Presidents at all — including Rena Bartos, who headed up a number of

⁴ Caroline Jones, “A glance at my life up till now at J. Walter Thompson”, 1968, Caroline Jones Papers, Series 3, Box 10, Folder 1, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

research projects on blue-collar housewives and the African American consumer market well into the 1970s.

While opportunities were available to women at Thompson, a gendered division of labor shaped how the institution sorted job candidates and their pathways through the agency. “I wasn’t qualified to be a secretary, but Thompson only let women enter the firm as secretaries at that time,” noted Jones in an oral history interview about her early life and career. “The turnover in workers was incredible. A new group would be coming in as an old one would be leaving.”⁵ Jones began in August 1963, immediately following her graduation from Michigan. She began as the secretary to Arnold Grisman, then creative director on Thompson’s most essential account, Ford Motors. While at Thompson, Jones recognized the gendered and raced logic that shaped white-collar employment in the advertising industry. It was “very much cutthroat business, fueled by a glamorous, good-ole-boy network and a prep school and Ivy League image[.]” Since these concerns defined access, opportunity, and mobility for employees, Jones modeled her own comportment and performance at the agency on senior administrators like Georgia Demarest (who had hired her in 1963), seeking to reproduce the same sort of respectability that Demarest had cultivated.⁶

Jones’ first exposure to creative came through the agency’s Copywriter’s Workshop, a yearly training opportunity used to develop research and creative writing skills for junior employees and a tool Thompson used to foster its black advertising professionals. Among the 200 women who applied in 1963, Jones was one of 18 applicants accepted into the annual cohort. Her entrance into the Copywriter’s Workshop program coincided with growing calls from both

⁵ Fleming, *The Success of Caroline Jones Advertising, Inc.: An Advertising Success Story*, (New York: Walker & Co., 1996), 8.

⁶ Fleming, *The Success of Caroline Jones Advertising, Inc.*, 10.

state and activist organizers to see the commercial advertising system integrated. These pressures led merchandisers and agencies alike to train, hire, and develop black talent. In 1963, then chairman of Thompson, Dan Seymour, directed management to begin to recruit African Americans into clerical work and train these new employees on the creative side of the business. This training would provide Thompson a team of African American copywriters who could navigate major merchandisers' interest in the burgeoning African American consumer market while satisfying demands from organizations like NYC CORE. Indeed, Jones herself would later remark that she had been the first African American person to attend the workshop, let alone be trained as a copywriter at Thompson. She framed her time at the copywriter's workshop as an opportunity to become intimately familiar with the ins and outs of commercial advertising. Here, she was granted the opportunity to read and closely review not only advertising trade materials but also the mass market magazines, newspapers, and successful campaigns that set the tone of the industry.⁷

After the Copywriter's Workshop, Jones did not move directly into developing advertising campaigns, but was sent into market research on the black consumer market instead. The reasons for this decision are not entirely clear, but the industry context provides some framing. As chapter three discussed, until the mid-1960s, most general market advertising agencies remained white. This meant that they lacked black creative talent as well as robust internal market research about African American consumers. In training a team of black professionals who could both develop good creative and pursue market research within African American communities, Thompson was developing its own expertise within the industry. One of Jones' earliest market research assignments involved completing field work in Harlem on black

⁷ Fleming, *The Success of Caroline Jones Advertising, Inc.*, 12.

women's cosmetics use. The research resulted in a 1965 study wherein Jones argued that there were lucrative opportunities for multi-ethnic marketing in cosmetics. The report suggested that the inclusion of non-white models in ads for hair dyes, make ups, and other cosmetics could expand the appeal of these lines by capturing multiple consumer groups in mass market magazines at once. Jones argued that by featuring integrated cosmetic advertisements with an emphasis on instructional-style campaigns that depicted African American women applying new product lines featuring colors designed just for them, cosmetic manufacturers could build good will with African American women who had historically been ignored by mass market cosmetic manufacturers that did not produce shades for darker skin tones.⁸

Jones' exposure to market research at Thompson became a narrative she deployed in her own self-promotional work later on in her career, using the experience to demonstrate the industry's limits when it came to the black consumer market. In a story Jones frequently told in later speaking engagements, the hair dye manufacturer Alberto-Culver declined to hire models of color in commercial advertisements for a new line of brunette hair products despite the fact that Black and Latino women would likely be interested in the product line.⁹ Brunette articulated whiteness to Alberto-Culver, and the merchandiser did not dare hire black models to sell to white consumers. After a year in the research unit, Jones threatened to walk unless she received a creative copywriting assignment. Thompson assigned her to Prince Mitchabelli fragrance line following her threat to walk.¹⁰ Throughout her seven years at Thompson, Jones generally moved back and forth between copywriting and research.

⁸ Caroline Jones, "Short Term Research and Observations re: Cosmetics and the Negro Woman", May 21, 1965, Caroline Jones Papers, Series 3, Subseries A, Box 22, Folder 10.

⁹ Caroline Jones, untitled speech, Caroline Jones Papers, uncategorized folder.

¹⁰ Caroline Jones, "A glance at my life up till now at J. Walter Thompson", unpublished manuscript, 1968, Caroline Jones Papers, Series 3, Box 10, Folder 1.

While at Thompson Jones joined two networks of African American advertising and marketing professionals who sought to improve both the standing of African Americans within the industry and their visibility as a recognizable consumer group: the National Association of Market Developers (NAMD), an organization founded in the early 1950s which generated market research on black families as an ideal consumer market, and the Group for Advertising Progress (GAP). Founded in 1968, GAP aimed to build a black professional network that could serve as an in-industry advocacy organization, liaising between civil rights organizations, the advertising industry, and government actors to better investigate how discrimination operated in the industry. At GAP Jones began to examine how the reluctant-to-integrate industry assessed black employee talent, the role of blackness in advertising images, and market research. She understood each of these concerns to be interrelated.¹¹

During this period Jones became more vocal about the ways in which inequities between white and black employees materialized in pay for creative assignments and in executive leadership. In many cases, she concluded, advertising agencies continued to profile non-white talent in order to meet the demands of activist organizations and state actors. “Management is at a loss,” she suggested, as “to determine the true value of a non-white employee.”¹² In this systemic critique of the industry, Jones argued that while employees of color were now generating creative and market research for general market agencies, few were remunerated fairly at all because these institutions had little conceptual understanding of how to intuit the value of black employees. In such a framing, employment and remuneration were the

¹¹ On GAP and NAMD, see Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line*, 197-199.

¹² Caroline Jones, “Panel Presentation: Group for Advertising Progress,” October 22, 1968, American Association of Advertising Agencies, Caroline Jones Papers, Series 2A, Box 2, Folder 25.

result of diversity programs rather than any meaningful recognition of the ability of these marketers to perform their work.

Jones' time at GAP shaped her decision to leave Thompson in 1968. She emphasized questions of value in her resignation letter, noting that despite the diversity of experience she had across the agency, from marketing to creative copy, she had not received formal remuneration that reflected her broad skill set. "I feel that I have been associated with a greater variety of advertising activities than most young writers. Yet as I look around me and into the future, I feel I am at the crossroads of my career. Ironically, for having been faithful to my company, I have fallen behind in salary." She regularly saw "younger people being given greater compensation for less experience and talent. I like my work and my surroundings, and I feel that it is unfortunate that traditionally in advertising, companies are remiss in rewarding their own, and it is indeed those people who choose to move around and 'get all they can' who can get ahead in the game."¹³ In leaving Thompson, she suggested the firm had little capacity to recognize the capability of marketing talent that stuck with the agency, let alone its black advertising and marketing professionals.

As this section argued, Jones' horizons were limited by the ways in which segmentation shaped career prospects for marketing and advertising professionals of color within the industry, many of whom were pushed into African American consumer market accounts. When they attempted to make claims about merchandising possibilities across the race line, they were shut out either by merchandisers or the agency itself. Finally, with comparatively little data on the black consumer market, general market firms had no model to assess the success of their black talent. In 1969, after six years at Thompson, Jones joined the black-owned advertising and

¹³ Caroline Jones, "A glance at my life up till now at J. Walter Thompson" 1968, Caroline Jones Papers, Series 3, Box 10, Folder 1.

marketing agency Zebra Associates, where she served as a vice president and co-creative director. Zebra sold a very different kind of consumer market: low-income, urban black consumers who, by virtue of their sheer numbers, represented an enormous untapped market for major merchandisers.

Constructing the Black Consumer in the 1970s: Jones at Zebra Associates & the Black Creative Group.

This section documents the strategies Jones' deployed to render black consumers viable for major merchandisers. It is broken up into two parts, each focused on a specific firm: Zebra Associates and then the Black Creative Group. At Zebra, I argue that Jones and her colleagues looked to change how merchandisers intuited blackness in the marketplace. Zebra pitched itself to clients as a black-owned, but integrated firm, with a multiracial staff capable of working across the race line. However, the firm explicitly specialized in black urban consumers. Their claims took part in a larger discourse regarding a black, urban underclass, suggest that while these buyers might be low-income, they were nonetheless profitable at scale. In doing so, Jones and her colleagues reframed this cultural construction as a potentially lucrative, significant marketing opportunity for large American merchandisers. While Jones developed a number of successful campaigns for Zebra, she left the firm in the early 1970s. She argued that the firm's claims of integration were in fact a strategy deployed to manage the stigmatization of blackness in marketing, deploying black staff for specialized black campaigns and white staff for general market campaigns. To demonstrate these claims, I examine the framing of the black urban consumer which Zebra forwarded; I follow Zebra's first set of self-promotional claims; its intervention in larger marketing debates regarding low-income consumers, and two campaigns ran by Jones at the firm: Coca-Cola's *Rappin' on the Roof* and Clairol's *Born Beautiful*.

In the second part of this section, I turn to Jones' work at the Black Creative Group with marketing consultant Kelvin Wall during the mid-1970s. At BCG, Jones and Wall navigated the 70s marketing fad of "positioning," a concept which suggested consumers understand brands in relationship to one another. The concept emphasized the importance of social and cultural context to understanding how brands were positioned against one another. I show how Jones and Wall used the concept to make the case for the heterogeneity of the black consumer market at scale. Taken together, both Zebra and BCG animate the strategies black marketing and advertising professionals used in the 1970s to forward a vision of the black consumer market as both profitable and distinct onto itself.

Zebra Associates

Zebra was founded by the black advertising executive Raymond League and news media personality Joan Murray. They did not pitch Zebra as a black agency, but as an "integrated" firm owned by two black executives who employed a multiracial staff instead. The two principals brought significant training in advertising and media to the agency, as well as a roster of contacts across both industries. League had spent six years at J. Walter Thompson as a producer and account executive while Murray had been the first black woman hired as a newscaster for CBS. Zebra garnered significant attention by focusing on the class of consumers they promised to deliver, framing the intersection of blackness, urban life, and low-income economic position as crucial to a consumer market that looked nothing like the kinds of buyers most merchandisers were familiar with.

Zebra made its claims within a larger debate over the failures of the marketing and advertising industries to draw urban, largely black consumers into the wealth of post-war

capitalism. Understanding these debates is crucial to recognizing Zebra's self-promotion and their marketing composite. Following the Civil Rights contestations of the early 1960s, marketers, sociologists, and a number of non-profit organizations had begun to examine urban consumers and the micro-economies which they navigated in daily life. The 1963 publication of David Caplovitz's *The Poor Pay More* was the first study to alert merchandisers and marketers alike to the ways in which urban consumer markets were distinct from larger national, suburban, or regional ones. Caplovitz's study was the result of a joint effort by three settlement houses in New York, each of which wanted to examine how the working-poor navigated the costs of setting up a new life. The study examined the working-class consumer through local durable goods markets in which merchandisers undertook a number of unethical practices.¹⁴

As his title suggests, Caplovitz argued that amongst local retailers in an urban context, the poor in fact paid more on average because of the debt economy these retailers enforced. Retailers worked together, relying on pressure tactics to coerce potential customers into high prices and punitive credit terms. For example, with no state regulation to list prices, a merchant could gouge a consumer who didn't have a robust knowledge of what a durable product, such as a bed frame, might cost. If a consumer rejected a retailer's proposal and sought a better deal elsewhere, the retailer might phone ahead to another local salesman to let them know they should jack up their price and interest rate when that consumer came along.¹⁵

Even when they were aware of being ripped off, Caplovitz noted that the urban poor were often unwilling to take merchandisers to court, meaning such merchants had little deterrent and could continue to capitalize on new immigrants and their communities. Thus such an economy

¹⁴ David Caplovitz, *The Poor Pay More: Consumer Practices of Low-Income Families* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 140.

¹⁵ Caplovitz, *The Poor Pay More*, p. xix.

typically pulled the working poor into a constellation of artificially inflated prices and interest rates, increasing the cost of goods well beyond what a middle-class family would pay and leaving them with little legal recourse. For Caplovitz, the position of these consumers as both working-poor and people of color, combined with a debt economy spurred by bad-faith merchants, resulted in feelings of powerlessness in the face of a commercial system explicitly designed to extract their wealth.

Caplovitz's became the foundation of what the marketers Alan R. Andreasen called in 1978 "the problems of ghetto marketing," which asked what, if anything, marketing might do to improve upon the situation urban consumers faced.¹⁶ Several marketers worried that the "marketing system" of urban life was failing to perform "its vaunted goal of improving America's standard of living, at least as it affected America's most disadvantaged consumers."¹⁷ In the years after the Caplovitz study, a number of congressional committee findings on supermarket operations in low income areas in 1967, alongside a series of U.S. Department of Labor and Agricultural studies between 1966 and 1968, confirmed that grocery stores prices in low-income neighborhoods were often higher than in mid- to high-income neighborhoods.¹⁸ Of the studies which built on these concerns, D. Parke Gibson's 1969 *The 30 Billion Dollar Negro* provided a powerful guide to white merchandisers who sought to reach into black consumer

¹⁶ Alan R. Andreasen, "The Ghetto Marketing Life Cycle: A Case of Underachievement," *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (February 1978): 22.

¹⁷ 22; Sturdivant, "Better Deal for Ghetto Shoppers," *Harvard Business Review* (March-April 1968): 130; Andreasen, "The Ghetto Marketing Life Cycle: A Case of Underachievement," 22.

¹⁸ U.S. House of Representatives, *Government Operations Committee. Consumer Problems of the Poor: Supermarket Operations in Low-Income Areas and the Federal Response: Hearings*. (Washington: U.S.: Government Printing Office, 1968); U.D. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Prices Charged in Stores in Low and High Income Areas" in *National Commission on Food Marketing: Special Studies in Food Marketing*, Technical Report No. 10, June 1966, 121-140; U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Comparison of Prices Paid for Selected Foods in Chain stores in High and Low Income Areas of Six Cities*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1968).

markets.¹⁹ Taken together, these reports emphasized for marketers and merchandisers alike how little market research had been completed on the African American consumer market writ large, let alone low income consumers.²⁰

African American marketing professionals impressed upon merchandisers the need to do more than simply “show up” in urban locales—a critique which Zebra would seize upon. For example, the African American marketing consultant Kelvin Wall, who would later open the Black Creative Group with Jones offered a set of arguments for how merchandisers ought to navigate urban market structures. Wall came from the academy. He had worked as a lecturer at Georgia Institute of Technology, Harvard Business School, and Atlanta University, in addition to having worked as a consultant at Artur D. Little, Lever Brothers, and as vice-president of market development at Coca-Cola. Wall had published a number of scholarly and trade pieces on black merchandising and marketing in the United States across his various positions.

Wall’s work drew on the findings of David Caplovitz in *The Poor Pay More* as well as Social Research, Inc.’s *The Workingman’s Wife* to make arguments about the nature of class in the urban American consumer marketplace. In a 1969 essay published in the *University of Washington Business Review*, Wall offered a systematic review of both academic and trade market research on low-income communities titled “Marketing to Low-Income Neighborhoods.” In the piece, Wall argued that urban neighborhoods were indeed isolated from a larger national merchandising system, but he emphasized an element missing in earlier works, such as the

¹⁹ As Robert Weems has noted, D. Parke Gibson Associates, Inc., which opened in 1960, offered to create marketing vehicles for corporations like Avon, Coca Cola, Columbia Pictures, and the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company.¹⁹ Such firms and publications assisted mass merchandisers in developing campaigns which not only spoke to a de-segregated society, but which capitalized upon racial pride and nascent Black Power as well to sell the “soul market.”¹⁹ Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar*, 78.

²⁰ See Frederick Sturdivant, “Better Deal for Ghetto Shoppers,” *Harvard Business Review* (March-April 1968): 130-9; Sturdivant and Walter T. Wilhelm. “Poverty, Minorities, and Consumer Exploitation,” *Social Science Quarterly* Vol. 49 (December 1968): 643-50.

Caplovitz study: while newcomers were often taken advantage of in such settings, the community itself served as a check against unfair retailers. Wall argued that low-income consumers lived and shopped within tightly bound geographies and communities, frequenting the same shops throughout the week. For long-term residents of these neighborhoods, banal forms of consumption occurred within a family, social, and peer network, meaning the community often had some measure of power to exert pressure on retailers who potentially took advantage of local members.²¹

Wall's study emphasized how advertising could be a pedagogical tool in black low-income markets, both to fend off unscrupulous retailers and to grow sales by embedding oneself in the community. Advertising, he argued, "function[s] as a persuasive vehicle that stimulates the desire to consume. The educational function that advertising performs in this regard is important. Many low-income housewives, both white and black, look to advertising to fulfill an educational role." For Wall, "[o]ne reason why the variety of selling activities needs to be tailored to low-income consumers is the uniqueness of their lifestyle patterns, including their language and communication patterns and attitudes towards advertising."²² For example, Wall argued that amongst African American low-income consumers, a company's posture towards minority groups – especially their hiring practices – strongly influenced their purchasing habits. A study from the Center for Research and Marketing had concluded in 1963 that a "company which advertises in Negro media, contributes to the United Negro College Fund, and employs Negroes is perceived as being concerned with the welfare of Negroes, and therefore is entitled to special concern and patronage." While these were the strategies of national merchandisers, Wall argued

²¹ Kelvin Wall, "Marketing to Low-Income Neighbourhoods: A Systems Approach" Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University Reprint Series, originally published in the *University of Washington Business Review* (Autumn 1969), 22. Caroline Jones Papers, Series 3, Box 26, Folder 4.

²² Wall, "Marketing to Low-Income Neighbourhoods," 23.

they could be scaled down to community stores as well. Selective patronage, after all, was a local affair, despite the national headlines it produced.²³

Wall's emphasis on community also revealed some of the tensions which national merchandisers faced in attempting to advertise to urban buyers. Wall argued that in order to successfully speak to these consumers, merchandisers had to be embedded within the social life of the community—not simply replacing white models with black ones in a standardized advertising image. “[L]ow-income neighborhoods require [...] a clear understanding of their attitudes toward the world outside their environment. They often consider it hostile, and think in terms of ‘we’ and ‘them.’” Drawing on the work of the anthropologist Oscar Lewis, Wall argued that alienation from “major institutions” of U.S. society included national merchandisers, whose advertising images, so apart from the lives lived in these communities, reinforced this alienation.²⁴ Wall suggested that this is why supermarket chains operating in urban centers had struggled. Indeed, a study completed for *Chain Store Age* in 1969 had found that “Supermarkets operating in disadvantaged areas do not enjoy the confidence of their customers [...] Negroes believe that they are treated as undesirables or untouchables [...] there is a definite credibility gap between what the food chain says they are doing for ghetto residents and what these people think is being done.”²⁵ It was not enough to simply arrive in a neighborhood and expect returns. Wall's argument constructed a distinct market of low-income black consumers accessible only through him and his associates.

²³ “Negro Boycott Could Have Serious Lasting Effect on Sales, Study Shows,” *Advertising Age*, September 30, 1963, p. 3. On long-term impact of boycotts, see Thomas F. Pettigrew, *A Profile of the Negro American* (Princeton: Olympic Marketing Corp, 1964), 197-199.

²⁴ Wall, “A Systems Approach,” 24.

²⁵ “Poor Still Don’t Trust Chains,” *Chain Store Age*, February 1969, p. 63.

Wall concluded that a fundamental lack of understanding when it came to community dynamics meant low-income groups went vastly undercapitalized upon by merchandisers. This ignorance was partly the result of a continued focus on middle and upper-income people. Even by the late 1970s, the vast majority of market research, noted one researcher, remained “focused on middle and upper income people, but there is increasing awareness of the need to focus more on marketing attention to those in low-income groups.”²⁶ Even the well-known research firm A.C. Nielsen lacked a large enough sample to produce findings on the low-income consumer. “The marketing executive who relied on information derived from his own life experience,” Wall suggested, “is usually handicapped when faced with the problems of marketing to low-income groups, because their life style is quite different from his middle-class one.”²⁷ Such concerns had been central to market research since the 1920s, when advertising executives worried they were too far removed from the “masses” to know what the average buyer truly wanted. Under a rubric of segmentation, however, this concern took on a new valence: that individuals who had some personal relation to such communities via their own life experience might generate useful and productive insights for the American merchandising class.

Zebra Associates presented itself as a means of resolving the tensions which Wall, Caplovitz, and others had identified in their construction of the low-income consumer. In developing their own brand and self-promotional strategy, the firm drew together the language of class and race to argue that low-income black consumers were very much distinct from the white, general market. In 1970 Zebra placed advertisements in trade pamphlets, journals, and magazines promoting their integrated firm and their marketing philosophy. One advertisement

²⁶ “Lavidge Says Market Researchers Must Focus on Minorities” *Advertising Age*, May 16, 1969, 45.

²⁷ Wall, “Marketing to Low-Income Neighbourhoods,” 24.

published in *Marketing / Communications* in February 1970 is instructive. The advertisement features a photograph of a young black man in white face. He is shot in close frame from a low angle. His face dominates the image, as he looks down at the viewer (Figure 1). The visual is a shocking role reversal and provocation that plays upon generations of minstrelsy. It suggests that merchandisers addressing the young, black male consumer in the same way they addressed the general, mass market would be a kind of absurdity.



(Figure 1: Advertisement for Zebra Associates, *Marketing/Communications*, February 1970, pg 50.)

The Zebra campaign was a visually provocative call to the entirety of the advertising and marketing professions to rethink how they had imagined the black urban consumer. The headline of the ad announced that because mass advertising is color-blind, merchandisers tended to approach “the Black consumer as if he were somebody’s fair-haired boy.” The copy emphasized

that mass marketing missed the purchasing power of the black consumer: “The most effective communication technique ever devised isn’t making it in the \$50 billion-a-year Black consumer market. The reason is obvious. Mass advertising is color blind [...] It speaks to him [the black consumer] in a foreign language. It offers him Great White Hopes. It pictures him in off-color, unrealistic settings.” The advertisement argued that the norms and codes of addressing this lucrative market required careful research, for a mass market claim might alienate a potential buyer by adhering too closely to white middle-class social mores.²⁸ “Companies aware of this,” the campaign stated, “have frantically begun coloring mass advertising black. But the result isn’t black. It just looks that way to people who create it. People whose understanding of Black sensibilities comes out of textbooks and seminars.” Turning on concerns over authenticity and the risks of hiring white consultants to construct a black aesthetic, Zebra’s ad concluded by pitching the firm as a solution to the tensions it set up: “if you’re an advertiser or agency who wants to talk to the Black consumer in a way he finds acceptable and believable, we’d like to talk to you. We’d like you to meet our black-and-white staff. People whose inner-city experiences, award-winning creative talents, and proven marketing skills can help you bridge the gap between white advertiser and Black consumer.” The Zebra campaign conjured up a low-income male consumer very much distinct from the working-class or middle-class housewives which the bulk of mass market advertising and marketing literature imagined. Instead, their campaign forwarded a black consumer and market that had its own idioms and cultural forms, both of which demanded recognition from merchandisers if they were keen to secure the sale. The advertising blitz built upon the concept Wall had forwarded in his work on the low-income market, suggesting that gaps in knowledge could be resolved through the promise of lived experience. It

²⁸ “New Agency Specialty to be Selling to the Poor,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 20, 1969, 36.

is worth noting that Zebra itself appears to have had little relationship to the urban core or the construction which they forwarded. Their team of middle class marketing and advertising professionals simply put this vision of low-income blackness to work in their favor, suggesting they alone could help secure merchandisers' access.

Zebra's campaign work offered merchandisers a solution to these tensions: one which appealed to their desire for large consumer markets but that could also speak to situated, contextual, and lived experience. Jones' *Rappin' on the Roof* is an example of the community scale at which such campaigns operated. In 1969, Coca-Cola's New York City bottler hired Zebra with the hopes of improving sales amongst young black and Puerto Rican people living in the city. Jones designed an advertising and marketing event that broke from typical print and radio advertising strategies, pitching a series of television specials entitled *Rappin' on the Roof* that would relocate the bandstand format to the inner city. At the same time, the campaign would be reproducible across the many different major urban centers within which the consumers Zebra pitched and sold lived.

Rappin' on the Roof began as a television special featuring local teens performing dance numbers between profiles of famous musicians and local New York celebrities, monologuing their own raps and featuring Coca-Cola ads throughout. To promote the special, Zebra recruited local teens to pass out free buttons announcing the airing. They also worked with local schools to organize assemblies for a viewing of a *Rappin' on the Roof* film distributed to New York metro public schools. The campaign was so successful that Coca-Cola bottlers funded six productions, culminating in a December 1970 episode featuring James Earl Jones, Rita Moreno, Laura Greene, and Curtis Mayfield.²⁹ The program was an example of the kind of cultural product

²⁹ "Coca-Cola To Back Music-Talk Series" *Billboard*, June 27, 1970, 33; "Roof Rappers" *Jet Magazine*, Dec 31, 1970, 58; "A Look At Three Black Agencies" *The Afro-American*, December 1970, 30-34.

agencies like Zebra pitched to claim their embeddedness within the communities they sold. Jones emphasized how *Rappin' on the Roof* drew upon specific social contexts relevant to Zebra's market segment, pointing to how the promotional plan was designed to be weaved into the fabric of everyday city life.

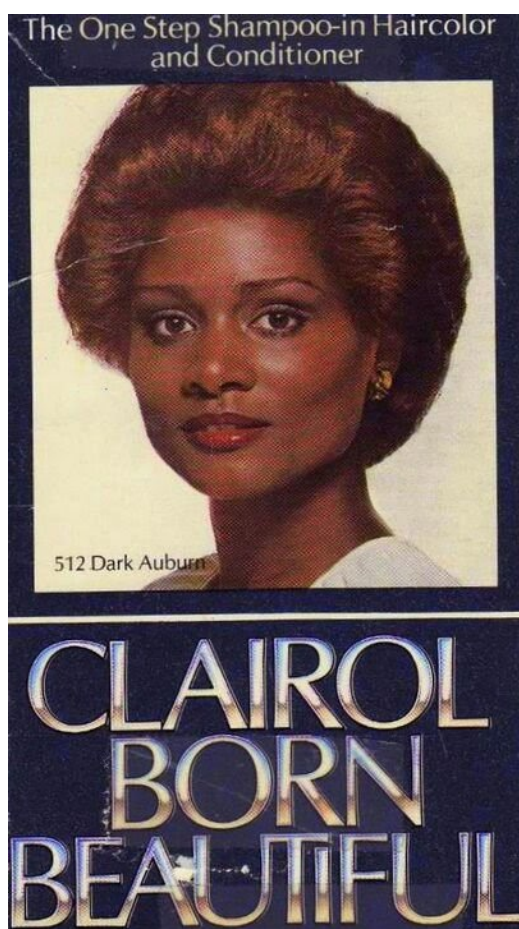
Zebra also emphasized their market segment as being more authentic and real than other constructions of black consumption circulating in market research. In 1969, Jones pitched the personal hair products manufacturer Clairol on a new line designed expressly for Zebra's urban market. She argued that Clairol could capitalize on how the on-going Black Freedom Struggle had recalibrated the social and political histories of natural hair for black women. In her pitch, she argued that Clairol could be the first mass market manufacturer of African American women's hair products, bringing their scale to compete against smaller firms like Posner, Mme. C.J. Walker, and Supreme Beauty Products, all of which had operated exclusively in the African American consumer market.³⁰

The result of the pitch was the marketing concept and product line, "Born Beautiful," which drew together racial pride, the authenticity which Zebra so prized, and political identity to sell natural hair. The Born Beautiful line featured a number of hair colors explicitly targeting black women, all of which emphasized the opportunity to wear one's hair natural and to reject the emulation of white beauty standards.³¹ Both the product packaging as well as additional promotional projects worked to tether together Clairol and blackness. The model on the cover box for Clairol's "Born Beautiful 512 Dark Auburn" hair color and conditioner line was Tracey

³⁰ "The Opportunity for Clairol within the Black Community," marketing proposal, November 14, 1969, Caroline Jones Papers, Series 3, Subseries 3, Box 25, Folder 3. On the rise of soul aesthetics during this period see Tanisha Ford, *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 95-123, esp. 101.

³¹ "The Opportunity for Clairol within the Black Community," November 14, 1969, Caroline Jones Papers, Series 3, Subseries 3, Box 25, Folder 8.

Africa Norman, the first trans model to work in the fashion industry—but who was not out at the time.³² (Figure 2) Norman is a dark-skinned black woman. Her gaze meets the viewer directly, her face framed by both the Clairol brand name and the Born Beautiful product line title. In addition to launching the line, in 1971 Clairol published *All About the Natural*, a book written by the hairdresser Lois Liberty Jones and the journalist John Henry Jones. *All About the Natural* offered a history of African and African American hair traditions, presenting natural hair as a symbol of black pride, albeit one which required significant labor to achieve.³³



(Figure 2: front of “Clairol: Born Beautiful, 512 Dark Auburn” featuring Tracy Africa Norman. Courtesy of Tracy Africa Norman.)

³² On Norman, see Elspeth H. Brown, *WORK! A Queer History of Modeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 2-4, 263-65, 267, 270-72.

³³ Susannah Walker, *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 173, 197-199.

As much as *Born Beautiful* or *Rappin' on the Roof* commodified black aesthetics and blue-collar cultural experiences for major merchandisers, they nonetheless put into motion a powerful visual project. As the historians Elspeth Brown and Jason Chambers have argued, they were a powerful departure from the kinds of visual representations of black life which had circulated in mass media throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the same time, in Jones hands', they also reflected Zebra's specific construction of the black consumer market and their pitch to major merchandisers: that by employing them, major manufacturers could work themselves into the cultural landscape of black urban life in the United States.

Jones' work at Zebra garnered considerable media attention, but she was quick to leave the firm over frustrations with how they managed the race line. She believed the principal's specific deployment of integration seemed to limit opportunity for staff at the firm, including herself. While Jones had developed Zebra's creative shop and worked as the public face of the company at trade and industry workshops and events, she found the firm's commitment to integration was in fact a strategy for managing the stigmatization of blackness when it came to general market accounts. Account managers at Zebra frequently adhered to the same logic market segmentation that had defined white backlash. They routed employees into accounts by race: white employees were kept from openly working for black-owned companies while black employees were denied opportunities to represent the firm to white merchandisers. Thus despite early successes with Clairol and Coca-Cola, Jones left Zebra in 1971.³⁴ Following her time at Zebra, Jones spent a year as a senior copywriter at the general market agency Kenyon & Eckhardt before co-founding the Black Creative Group in 1973 with Kelvin Wall.

³⁴ "Termination of Employment," 1971, Caroline Jones Papers, Box 25, Folder 3.

The Black Creative Group

The Black Creative Group was not an advertising agency per se, but rather a workshop consulting service which Jones and Wall designed to work with both major merchandisers and with advertising agencies looking to improve their success with black consumers.³⁵ The organization's first client was not a merchandiser, but in fact another, though much larger advertising agency: The Interpublic Group, a holding firm which operated multiple other advertising and marketing shops with different international geographic specializations around the world. At BCG, Jones and Wall's market research claims departed from the arguments made by Zebra by arguing that the African American consumer market was itself highly class-stratified and that they could access different classes within this market. They made their pitch by drawing on a new vogue in market research: the language of positioning.

To appreciate the pitch BCG made, we need to step back and consider the positioning concept and its popularity in the 1970s. Positioning drew on shifting metaphors of the human mind and growing concerns over information overload in a consumer market increasingly defined by the production of data.³⁶ By the late 1960s, marketers had begun to think of the human mind as a database with limited processing power, a shift which reflected a rejection of earlier psychoanalytic models in market research.³⁷ In 1969, Jack Trout and Al Ries of the Ries

³⁵ "BCG, The Black Creative Group – 1972 Proposal" American Tobacco Records. Unknown. Access date: April 11, 2019. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/lzfw0092>

³⁶ Heather Crowther-Heyck, "George A. Miller, Language, and the Computer Metaphor and Mind," *History of Psychology*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1999): 37-64; Orit Halpern, *Beautiful Data: A History of Vision and Reason since 1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), ch. 3; Nick Levine, "The Nature of the Glut: Information Overload in Postwar America" *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2017): 33-46 esp. 42-45; Kira Lussier, "From the Intuitive Human to the Intuitive Computer" *Technology Stories*, March 12, 2018.

³⁷ James R. Bettman, "Issues in Designing Consumer Information Environments," *Journal of Consumer Research* Vol. 2., No. 3 (1975): 169-177.

Cappiello Colwell agency published a piece in the trade magazine *Industrial Marketing* that offered ‘positioning’ as a response to these concerns. “We’re an Over-Communicated Society,” they suggested in an *Advertising Age* on the technique, “Each day, thousands of messages compete for a share of the prospect’s mind.”³⁸ They argued that throughout the 1960s mass communication had so overloaded consumers with information that distinct brands became muddled. In such a situation, brands had to be defined and positioned *against* one another, rather than presented as standalone ideas floating in the market. Trout and Ries argued that smart merchandisers (hired them!) to position brands relative to their competitors. They advised that new brands ought not take on IBM, for example, but should present themselves as more affordable; alternative; or even edgier. Their designs and declarative statements should position them relative to IBM in some way. To achieve this sort of positioning work, however, one had to understand, or claim to understand, how a specific consumer segment organized and processed information.³⁹

The positioning concept is a perfect example of how marketing claims are a kind of commercial good themselves, designed to cast ideas about consumption on terms amiable to the marketers who develop them. Following a series of *Advertising Age* essays penned by Trout and Ries announcing their own idea’s transformative arrival, “The Positioning Era Cometh” (Figure 1), *The Wall Street Journal*’s advertising critic ran a cover story suggesting the concept was simply not the innovation that Trout and Ries suggested it was. “The Trout-Ries articles spawned a debate that has raged in *Advertising Age* and on Madison Avenue” noted the *Journal*. “Some critics,” however, “claim ‘positioning’ is just a new name for an old idea [...] One outraged

³⁸ Jack Trout and Al Ries, “The Positioning Era Cometh” *Advertising Age*, April 24, 1972.

³⁹ Jack Trout, “‘Positioning’ is a Game People Play in Today’s Me-Too Market Place,” *Industrial Marketing*, June 1969, 51–55.

adman dusted off copies of old publications to show that the soap market was engaging in positioning advertising as early as 1901.⁴⁰ Trout and Ries capitalized on new metaphors for the human mind in order to suggest the consumer market had changed and that their firm alone had the power to manage it. While the concept was contested, many firms like BCG nonetheless seized upon the language of positioning to stake out their authority within a specific market segment. Trout and Ries saw their ideas take off, even as critics suggested there was little new to them.



(Figure 3: Marketers Jack Trout and Al Reis announce their own idea's arrival: "The Positioning Era Cometh," *Advertising Age*, April 24, 1972)

In Jones and Wall's hands, positioning became a tool to critique advertising agencies and merchandisers alike for assuming that black consumers shared the same values and aspirations as white consumers. Writing in 1973 for *Advertising Age*, Wall argued that if "positioning is the

⁴⁰ "Positioning Ads: A New Name for An Old Idea," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 13, 1972.

most important decision [you can make in your advertising], it is the one most ignored by advertisers aiming at blacks [...]. It is quite possible to develop a position that is tops in the white market and weak in the black market.”⁴¹ Positioning a product for black consumers meant reckoning with a distinct set of class, demographic, social, and geographic concerns that were not present amongst white consumers. By emphasizing this distinction and leveraging positioning, Wall made clear the important role that firms like BCG could play when it came to developing campaigns that meaningfully spoke to Black consumers.

BCG forwarded this argument in their own self-promotional work, arguing that even the most popular of national brands would fail with African Americans consumers without positioning that intuited or understood the specificity of these consumers. In a co-authored piece for *Madison Avenue Magazine*, Jones and Wall suggested that advertising characters like the Marlboro man illustrated this point well. Up until the 1972 ban on television broadcast advertisements for tobacco, the Marlboro Country Marlboro cigarette campaign had been recognized as “one of the classic image-builders” of the American brand landscape. “If a general TV campaign can be assumed to cover the Black consumer market,” Jones and Mingo suggested, “certainly this was it.” However, this was not the case. Despite his national popularity, the Marlboro Man did poorly amongst black consumers. While “a cigarette brand is as much an expression of self as the selection of apparel [...] To peer-oriented Blacks, however, Marlboro Country is a foreign nation like Sweden, and they don’t identify with the lonesome cowboy image of masculinity.”⁴² The consumers Hall and Jones constructed had no interest in the ‘outsider’ masculinity that Marlboro sold. This massively successful national brand offered little

⁴¹ Kelvin Wall, “Positioning your brand in the black market” *Advertising Age*, June 18, 1973.

⁴² Kelvin Wall and Caroline Jones, “Brand Mystique Among Blacks” *Madison Avenue Magazine*, July 1975, p. 28-29.

to them. In other words, it would not be enough to hire a black model for a Marlboro campaign since the campaign itself had not been developed or positioned for the black consumer market.

BCG offered merchandisers what it called the “minority management strategy” to advertising agencies and merchandiser clients on how to best position their brands for the African American market as a distinct segment. The minority management strategy was not addressed to African American marketing experts or producers. Rather, the management strategy was designed for white marketing and advertising executives interested in developing vehicles for addressing black audiences. The document drew together a vast amount of market research from different sources to “explain” the black consumer market and its divisions, including a profile of black attitudes and perspectives on American life, cultural patterns, and habits. The strategy did the work of laying out warnings against white liberalisms, explanations of the geographic and cultural specificity of Black life throughout the United States, and broader data that documented aspirations and interests within these communities and contexts. Combining a large-scale generalization with regional information, the report promised to provide insights into the social and cultural concerns of the black consumer at every class position and across the United States.⁴³ It emphasized the idea that black consumers did not seek white values or tastes, nor did they share white aspirations. In doing so, it constructed the black consumer market as both distinct from the general and itself stratified by class, income, and geography.

While BCG was short-lived, it drew together a number of currents in marketing thought. Adopting the positioning concept, BCG argued for the distinct nature of the Black consumer market. African American consumers, they argued, required specific kinds of commercial

⁴³ “Minority Sales Management, and Presentation, 1973 and 1975” Caroline Jones Papers, Box 28, Folder 8.

address. Even popular general market brands like the Marlboro Man would fail if generically applied to the African American market through the use of black models. Firms like Zebra and the BCG sought to construct a distinct black consumer. Their arguments about black consumption established the conceptual model by which American mass merchandisers would come to interpret and understand black consumption in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, Wall would find employment as a consultant for a number of major American corporations, including the tobacco and snack food conglomerate, Reynolds-Nabisco, discussed in chapter six. Jones would leave BCG for a short stint in general market agencies before she was recruited to help found the advertising agency Mingo-Jones in 1977, an agency with general market aspirations.

Mingo-Jones & Caroline Jones Advertising

In 1977, Jones was recruited by Frank Mingo, a former VP at Thompson and McCann Erickson to found Mingo-Jones. Banking on their combined professional experience, Mingo and Jones pitched the agency as general in orientation. Mingo in fact rejected the moniker of black agency entirely, arguing that they wanted to present themselves “as professionals, not as blacks. We happen to be black[.]”⁴⁴ Yet, as this section argues, the opportunities generated by market segmentation during the 1960s and early 1970s severely undercut the ability of Jones’ firm to secure general market accounts later on. I demonstrate this by attending to the nature of the contracts which Mingo-Jones received. While major merchandisers were willing to direct some work toward the firm, these accounts were typically only a small portion of the advertising dollars that these merchandisers spent overall. Once Jones founded her own firm, Caroline Jones Advertising, in the late 1980s, she spoke plainly of the contradictions which market segmentation generated for her as a professional of color: accolades without opportunities.

⁴⁴ S. Longshore, “Their Marketing Homework Rates an A+,” *Advertising Age*, November 29, 1982, 14-15, 17.

Indeed, during the late 1980s and well into the 1990s, there remained the persistent assumption that marketing and advertising executives like Jones were capable only of handling black consumer market accounts, the result of both earlier marketing strategies undertaken by Jones as well as an enduring assumption that black marketers were a risk to the success of a brand in the general market.

Although Mingo-Jones garnered significant attention when it opened in 1977, the positive coverage was undercut by the suggestions that it was not a truly independent firm. Both *The New York Times* and *Advertising Age* reported that the company fell under the umbrella of Interpublic, the holding firm that had supported BCG and which operated agencies across a number of major international markets.⁴⁵ The connection enabled Mingo-Jones to purchase media, research, accounting, and billing services from Interpublic while retaining internal authority for themselves. From the beginning some argued that reliance meant Mingo-Jones was merely “a sharecropper on the Interpublic plantation”.⁴⁶ In other words, the critique suggested that black advertising professionals remained perpetually indebted to general market agencies, their own agencies not viable without support from major firms. But the affiliation itself was also strategic. It provided Mingo-Jones with considerable reach into the industry, a suite of affordable services at reduced cost, and a number of potential clients drawn from Interpublic’s global roster of advertising agencies.

While Mingo-Jones was able to name an impressive list of clients early on, the contracts they secured were often for smaller urban markets or public relations programs. They were never named “agency of record.” In their first years of operation, the company announced that it had

⁴⁵ “A New Black-Owned Agency,” *New York Times*, May 6, 1977, 1.

⁴⁶ “Interpublic Move Creates New Entry in Black-Owned Area,” *Advertising Age*, May 9, 1977, 1.

secured work with Miller Lite, Kentucky Fried Chicken, L'Oréal, Disney, Goodyear Tire and Rubber, Omni brand cigarettes for Liggett and Myers Tobacco, the National Urban League, Pepsi and Mountain Dew, Seagram's, Uncle Ben's Rice, and Westinghouse Electric. In a similar fashion to the KFC anecdote that opened this chapter, however, Mingo-Jones handled black targeted advertising for clients like Pepsi and Mountain Dew, but a much larger advertising firm, BBD&O, kept all general market assignments. Partly, Mingo-Jones was fighting an uphill battle. Major merchandisers sought out large general market advertising agencies because they provided many creative, research, and media-buying services at a scale which smaller firms simply could not. But from Mingo-Jones' perspective (and as would be the case later with Caroline Jones Advertising), being named 'agency of record' and securing general market accounts was a way to signal their own agency's arrival in the big leagues, so to speak.

Within the firm's first year of operation, both Frank Mingo and Caroline Jones began to speak out about the ways in which race was policed in the general market, a concern which the advertising and marketing press quickly picked up on. One 1977 report appearing in the *New York Times* detailed the agency's situation: "There is a tendency for marketers to classify black agencies immediately as exclusive specialists in communicating with black consumers which [...] the first-generation black ad agencies were."⁴⁷ Indeed, at earlier agencies like BCG and Zebra, black marketing professionals like Jones had strategically deployed segmentation, banking on a vision of the general market as lily-white to insist on the crucial role of black-owned and operated firms could play in targeting the African American market. By the late 1970s, however, many of these professionals had moved onto senior positions in general market agencies or opened their own general market shops of their own.

⁴⁷ Dougherty, "General Accounts for Black Agencies," *New York Times*, September 22, 1977, 73.

In the profile, Jones and Mingo resisted the suggestion that they, too, would be stuck serving the black consumer market alone, arguing that the agency would be 50% general and 50% black consumer market billings by 1978. They argued that merchandisers chose to see the agency “as black only” and that this persisted even when their work was stronger than competing, larger, white-owned firms. “If we win a creative shoot-out,” suggested Jones, “they’ll have another excuse to award the account to another agency. It frustrates you, but you can’t let it embitter you.”⁴⁸ In his own assessment, Mingo suggested about how the whiteness of the general market undercut their ability to become the agency of record for major merchandisers: “It’s a real struggle and seems to be mainly a cultural thing and not something people overtly want to do. They believe that if they are advertising to white, WASPy consumers, they need white, WASPy people to talk to them [...]”⁴⁹ Both had handled major accounts, and so Mingo concluded that his blackness was what drove merchandisers away: “It was hard to swallow the fact that, although I had handled \$100 million accounts for big agencies, some people were inclined to question my ability to handle a \$3 million account because I have a black face[.]”⁵⁰ After five years in operation, Mingo-Jones had become one of the largest black-owned agencies in the United States, but this scale meant little without access to general market assignments.⁵¹

In 1986, Jones struck out on her own to found Caroline Jones Advertising. Capitalizing upon her record as well as network of contacts. Jones pitched the firm and herself as keen to break out of the ‘ethnic market.’ However, she recognized that building capacity would

⁴⁸ “Black-Owned Agency aims to Win White Market Over,” No Publication Title Listed, 1985, Caroline Jones Papers, Box 13, Folder 14.

⁴⁹ Quoted in “Mingo-Jones Builds Long Term Relationships, *Advertising Age*, December 18, 1985, 18-20.

⁵⁰ Pope, ‘Ethnic Expertise Helps but Black Agency Viability Depends on Non-Ethnic Success,’ *Business Today*, April 8, 1981, p. 4.

⁵¹ Judy Foster Davis, *Pioneering African American Women in the Advertising Business* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 113.

nevertheless mean perusing black market contracts in the immediate term.⁵² As President, Jones' job transitioned from creative development or market research to account management, recruitment, and promotion. By 1994, the firm was billing roughly 13 million dollars, with contracts for American Express, Anheuser-Busch, Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, Greyhound, Lorimar, the Partners for a Drug Free America Program, and the Trump Organization's community development arm. Much like Mingo-Jones, these contracts were not agency of record agreements, but smaller billings to develop corporate PR, diversity and inclusion programming, or targeted community relations campaigns aimed at African American communities and consumers.⁵³

As the named principal of her own firm, Jones could make new kinds of bids on the merchandisers who offered her smaller contracts. At Caroline Jones Advertising, she attempted to navigate the same sort of limitations which had foiled success at Mingo-Jones. For example, in 1991 Anheuser-Busch hired her to produce a marketing campaign recognizing the contributions of African American elites to American culture and society. Such campaigns were rarely profitable, however, and were often created by the industry writ large as a kind of public service work for black agencies. Jones accepted the contract, but when trade reports revealed that Anheuser-Busch would boost their ad spending by \$100 million dollars over 1992, she began to pressure Anheuser-Busch into hiring her as part of the ramp up in spending. Jones succeeded in securing a larger project and being named the agency of record for Anheuser-Busch Corporate Affairs.⁵⁴

⁵² Daniel Kahn, "Black and Female and On Her Own" *Newsday*, 1987.

⁵³ Judy Foster Davis, "Beyond 'Caste-Typing?'" Caroline Robinson Jones, Advertising Pioneer and Trailblazer," *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2013): 323.

⁵⁴ R. Brunelli, "Anheuser-Busch will Boost Spending by \$100 million in 1992" Caroline Jones Papers, Subseries 3.7, Box 31, Folder 5.

The challenges Jones' agency faced in securing general contracts were contrasted by mounting accolades. In 1990, she was awarded 'Advertising Woman of the Year' from the Advertising Women of New York. That same year, The *Wall Street Journal* featured her as a "Creative Leader" in their trade advertising series. Jones argued that the awards rarely resulted in actual business opportunities for her firm, given the ways merchandisers continued to interpolate black executives: "When I walk in the door to pitch an account, people automatically think 'black advertising.'"⁵⁵ For the *Wall Street Journal*, Jones argued that the industry had functionally side-lined her even as she received awards that recognized the aesthetic eye she had developed working on general market campaigns: "As a member of a double minority—female *and* Black—I've learned the biggest problem in America is the existence of castes within society, business and advertising ... Some might think there's been progress. But look around advertising today and you'll find there are *fewer* Black men or women than in the 1970s [...]."⁵⁶ The challenge was that her aesthetics were tied to her race difference: she was tokenized, expected to be professionally black in such spaces, and nothing else.

By the early-1990s, Jones had begun to argue that constraints on her ability to secure general market accounts had to do precisely with the enduring race logic of the market. "The so-called 'rules' keep changing," Jones wrote in a draft of a speech. "Or I should say the whims of Whites keep changing. Fluctuating. Finding reasons for keeping budgets for ethnic programs down. Looking for band-aid solutions to keep competition out. Not always keeping the interests of the clients in view as much as keeping the money in their pockets." Clients, she suggested, "seem extremely uncomfortable with the notion that we have a country of different ethnic

⁵⁵ Berger, "Caroline Jones Advertising" *Inside Print*, March 1989, 30-34.

⁵⁶ "Creative Leaders Series: Charisma is Caroline," Special Series, *Wall Street Journal*, 1990.

groups. Groups large enough to be addressed effectively and efficiently in their own media. Or in their own language. One example—if the Black Consumer Market’s gross income were measured as a Gross National Product, it would rank as the ninth largest country in the world. But you knew that, didn’t you?”⁵⁷ Jones’ argument signaled a shift in her own promotional strategy. She suggested that a willingness to blindly ignore black consumers was part of ensuring that marketers conjured up only the consumers that merchandisers desired. She argued that advertising agencies purposefully failed to investigate whether their products were used by people of color, and when they knew this was the case, they ignored them.⁵⁸ Doing so protected both the general market agencies as well as the white men who worked at them: controlling the image of the consumer allowed these experts to claim expertise over them. For these white advertising and marketing professionals, the imperative to increase profits by speaking to consumers through registers tailored to their lived experiences was secondary to the aim of maintaining a white image of the general market, despite it being a fiction.

At the very same moment which Jones had condemned the stigmatization of blackness in the mass market, major merchandisers had turned to large advertising agencies to pursue black aesthetics, or what was known as the new “urban marketing” for their general market consumers. A few black-owned agencies followed suit, although it would soon become the domain of general market agencies. *New York Times* advertising journalist Randall Rothenberg argued that the new ‘urban marketing’ trend was “equal parts crafty trend analysis and defensive positioning for a minority-oriented agency. Advertising which depicted African American celebrities is increasingly reaching into the mainstream of public consciousness [...] but growth in advertising

⁵⁷ Jones, “Personal Notes,” 1995, Caroline Jones Papers, Series 3, Box 23.

⁵⁸ Jones, “Target Marketing: Or Why Did Uptown Go Down in Flames?” Caroline Jones Papers, Subseries 2.1, Box 3, Folder 30.

aimed at blacks [...] appear[s] to be slowing.” By the mid-1980s, African American cultural contexts, especially those which articulated urban poverty, had become prized aesthetic markers of the general market.⁵⁹

Advertising agencies like Mingo-Jones, renamed Mingo-Chisholm after Jones’ departure, began a shift in strategy as well, rebranding themselves as ‘urban marketing’ firms which sold basketball and music to white consumers. “To move beyond ‘minority advertising’ and be more than a ‘black agency,’” argued Samuel Chisholm, who had taken over after Frank Mingo’s sudden death in 1987, “you have to position yourself properly.”⁶⁰ Positioning now, it seemed, was more than a concept for products—it shaped how marketers and advertising professionals alike spoke about themselves as well. While blackness had been feared as a risk to the brand images of mass market goods for much of the mid-twentieth century, by the late 1980s blackness’ historical connections to authenticity rendered it a powerful driver for sales in the general market, an opportunity for what bell hooks described in the early 1990s as the opportunity for the normative consumer to devour the Other.⁶¹ The difference, of course, was that urban marketing provided the signifiers of blackness largely without black people, unless they served as entertainers, the subject of charity, or athletes.

Jones spoke to this erasure in no uncertain terms. In March 1991, Penelope Green, staff editor at the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, interviewed commercial model Laurence White, a member of a new cadre of well-paid American models who specialized in a specific part of the body: the hand. Green’s piece documented the vast amount of strategy (and capital) that went

⁵⁹ Randall Rothenberg, “Shift Sought From ‘Black’ To ‘Urban,’” *New York Times*, November 30, 1989.

⁶⁰ Rothenberg, “Shift Sought From ‘Black’ To ‘Urban,’” *New York Times*, November 30, 1989.

⁶¹ bell hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 21–39.

into choosing one kind of hand over another and the matching of those hands with a particular consumer market and set of goods, be it calculators, wrist watches, or precious jewels.⁶² For commentary, Green looked to Caroline Jones and the cultural studies scholar Stuart Ewen. Jones spoke plainly about the ways race shaped advertising images, both in front of and behind the camera. She suggested that to use a black hand in such a commercial would be to specialize, and in turn risk alienating the ‘general market’ of white, middle-class consumers. Such thinking dominated not only which models were hired for a commercial shoot, but which advertising, and market research agencies could secure such contracts as well.

Market segmentation set the conditions through which Jones navigated her career. She forwarded a number of different visions of the black consumer in order to secure success, but the enduring whiteness of the “general market” meant that as her professional capacities grew, her firms were systematically denied access to lucrative major campaigns. Jones herself did not get the opportunity to pursue the shift toward urban marketing that Mingo-Chisholm did. She received a breast cancer diagnosis in the early 1990s. Despite attempts to keep it under wraps, news appears to have gotten out, undermining her client base and making it difficult for the firm to remain open. A few years later in 1997, her cancer had gone into remission and the firm did open as Caroline Jones, Inc. It remained successful for three years, securing a number of targeted campaigns with Quaker Oats, Heineken, and Toys R. Us. Sometime in 2000, a more aggressive form of cancer took hold and Jones passed away over the summer of 2001. Caroline Jones Advertising folded in October of the same year.⁶³

Conclusion

⁶² Penelope Green, “Beauty,” *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, March 17, 1991, pg. SM58.

⁶³ Judy Foster Davis, *Pioneering African American Women in the Advertising Business* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 125-126.

Between the height of the Black Freedom Struggle in the mid-1960s and the early 1990s, American commercial marketing and advertising had changed. Thanks to firms like Zebra, BCG and others, they had begun to address specific ethnic communities and subgroups with targeted campaigns. This coverage had benefited these communities with exposure to commercial markets, which read them as legible consumer-citizens, but at the same time, it had rendered the general market *less* integrated, and in fact, more white than ever before. It was not that ethnic groups were dropping from the consumer market, or that their buying power had shrunk. In fact, purchasing power had steadily increased since the 1970s, largely thanks to expanding access to credit, even as real wages had fallen. Rather, the enduring whiteness of the general market rendered black consumers as illegible within it.

Market segmentation created an avenue for black advertising and marketing professionals, but the scale of African American consumer market advertising dollars rarely brought enough revenue in to keep an agency staffed or owned by African American professionals afloat. In the 1980s, the social capital and value of black urban aesthetics boomed. Firms like Mingo-Jones saw their work enter into the general market arena. While these firms earned professional recognition, they nonetheless remained barred from the general market, the stigma of blackness understood to be too great a risk when it came to creating advertising images designed for the national market. In the early 1990s, some African American agencies sought their way around this, rebranding as ‘urban marketing firms’ in an attempt to secure general market contracts. They argued that their connection to the black consumer market could be leveraged in selling blackness to white consumers. The vast majority of these firms were soon

replaced by much larger agencies opening their own shops specializing in urban aesthetics.⁶⁴

While both Mingo-Jones and Caroline Jones Advertising were launched as ostensibly “general market” agencies, neither could escape the commercial risk which the merchandisers associated with blackness when it came to the general market.

This was the enduring power of racial categories in market research. While, as a concept, segmentation promised to draw new kinds of racialized consumers into the market, in actuality it functioned as a means of managing difference and sharpening distinctions between these categories. Jones, of course, participated in this segmentation. She constructed ideas about the black consumer that were favorable to her firm and her potential clients. These composites were explicitly designed to stand in tension against the general market. And they endured. Even when Jones could later prove that black consumers were present across all the same market categories which white buyers were, the presumed whiteness of the general market remained fixed, as did the assumption that her blackness signaled specialization and therefore might cut a product off from a larger audience. At the height of market segmentation, the notion of a general market defined by whiteness persisted. It remained the measure by which marketing and advertising professionals of color were forced to define both the audiences they sold as well as themselves.

⁶⁴ Melanie Wells, “Minority Shops Fear Raids,” *Advertising Age*, November 28, 1994; Adrienne Ward Fawcett, “The Battle for Black Accounts; African-American Shops face Competition from General Shops,” *Advertising Age*, February 26, 1996; Hillary Chura, “Suitors Pursue Minority Agencies,” *Advertising Age*, June 7, 1999.

Chapter 5: Melodramas of the Marketplace: Psychographic Marketing and the shift from Demographics to Psychology in Consumer Market Research

Roger had come a long way from the little railway town in Arkansas. He was the first of his family to make it college, though he lasted only two years. He was the first to hold “a three-piece-suit job,” as he put it. He was the first to wind up working in a big city--Chicago. He was the first to move in the circles of big business. And now he was the first to make a killing--a \$1.5 million sale and 100,000 commission, half of it his, clear.¹

-Arnold Mitchell, “Roger and the Big Time” *The Nine American Lifestyles: Who We Are and Where We Are Going*.

[Roger] awoke one morning to realize he was in debt and, worse, that there were taxes and alimony still to pay. Roger went to his boss to ask for an advance on the “sure-thing” sale he was working on. But his boss was tough. “Son,” he told Roger, “you never make a sure thing. You ought to know, too, you’re not going to make it here in this firm living the way you do. There’re plenty of salesman making twice what you do and they aren’t throwing it away. They have better sense. They’re looking ahead. They’re developing contacts for the long haul. I’m telling you something important, Roger. I hope you’re hearing.”²

-Arnold Mitchell, “Roger and the Big Time” *The Nine American Lifestyles: Who We Are and Where We Are Going*.

Gone is the “Gee, that’s interesting—but what do we do with it?” Type of consumer research. Insightful and action producing ideas are replacing abstract and lifeless statistics. And the role of mathematical manipulation is being superseded by a new breed of psychographic practitioner—the creative conceptualizer.

-Alan Nelson, “New Psychographics: Action-Creating Ideas, not Lifeless Statistics”³

Beginning in the early 1960s, shifts in the technological scale of data analysis brought about a transformation in how marketing professionals constructed their consumer composites and

¹ Arnold Mitchell, *The Nine American Lifestyles: Who We Are and Where We’re Going* (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 71.

² Mitchell, *The Nine American Lifestyles*, 71.

³ Alan Nelson, “New Psychographics: Action-Creating Ideas, not Lifeless Statistics,” *Advertising Age*, June 1971, 1.

market segments. The ready availability of speedy commercial data processing technologies and the rapid growth in widely-circulating state and privately-collected personal data meant that marketers could now feed enormous amounts of information into data processors designed to surface previously unseen correlations in consumer behavior.⁴ The strength of these behavioral correlations, marketers argued, would reveal stronger inclinations for market segments—which they pitched to merchandisers as ‘personalities’ or ‘lifestyles’—than segmentation by age, race, gender, or class had, or could, ever achieve. In the 1970s, this kind of market modeling, and the consumer composites it produced, were known as ‘psychographics.’

When the marketing professional Alan Nelson suggested in 1971 that psychographics were the future of marketing, he and others working at the intersection of psychology, statistics, and market research framed it as an objective science that would finally free marketing from the “slapdash interpretations” of the past.⁵ Never mind that Ellis, Warner, Jones, and many others had all argued that their research promised insights into real people and real populations. In Nelson’s eyes, this new science would instead draw upon quantitative, large-scale survey samples to derive consumer composite types backed up by the supposedly objective power of computational fact.⁶

⁴ On public and private databases see Paul Starr and Ross Corson, “Who Will Have the Numbers?,” in *The Politics of Numbers*, ed. William Alonso and Paul Starr (New York, 1987), 415–47; Sinson Garfinkel, *Database Nation: The Death of Privacy in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: O’Reilly, 2000), 16; on commercial use of this data, see Josh Lauer, *Creditworthy: A History of Consumer Surveillance and Financial Identity in America*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 212–242; on the political economy of data analysis see Dan Bouk, “The History and Political Economy of Personal Data over the Last Two Centuries in Three Acts,” *Osiris* Vol. 32, No. 1 (2017): 85–106, esp. 101–103.

⁵ Alan Nelson, “New Psychographics: Action-Creating Ideas, not Lifeless Statistics,” *Advertising Age*, June 1971, 1; see also Nelson, “Psyching Psychographics: A Look at Why People Buy,” in Charles and Douglas J. Tigert, *Attitude Research Reaches New Heights* (Chicago: American Marketing Association, 1971), 181–188.

⁶ For a more recent account of this transition, see Joseph Turow, *The Daily You: How the New Advertising Industry Is Defining Your Identity and Your Worth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

Yet, psychographics were not pitched to merchandisers or advertisers through the statistics which marketers argued lent them power. Rather, they were articulated through melodramatic stories and narratives, just like *The Workingman's Wife* or even Zebra's low-income black consumer. "Roger and the Big Time," the narrative which opens this chapter, was one such story. Roger was not a real person. Rather, it was a profile deployed in the psychographic inventory known as VALS, the "Values and Lifestyles Survey," perhaps the most popular psychographic profiling system of the 1980s and the focus of this chapter. VALS was created by Arnold Mitchell of the Stanford Research Institute in the late 1970s. In his 1984 trade press book, *The Nine American Lifestyles: Who We Are and Where We're Going*, he introduced VALS to both marketing professionals and the American public alike. As a psychographic model, VALS used survey data and a proprietary algorithm to segment the entirety of the United States into a hierarchy of nine personalities, ranked along by their ability to satisfy physical, emotional, and psychological needs. The 'Rogers' of the world sat at the second-lowest rung of the VALS typology. They were 'outer-directed' personalities who were deeply suspicious of political figures and other leaders. They preferred to spend rather than save, to buy small foreign-made cars over American models, and they savored both the risks and rewards of a high-roller life.⁷ Like all of the melodramatic portraits featured in *The Nine American Lifestyles*, "Roger and the Big Time" served two purposes: it suggested that such a consumer really existed and it taught the reader how to needle that consumer's most profound anxieties and desires in the name of making a sale.

This chapter examines how marketing professionals argued that psychographic profiling and data processing would transform market segmentation in the late twentieth century. It makes

⁷ Mitchell, *The Nine American Lifestyles*, 92-95.

three arguments. First, psychographic marketing professionals argued that their methods allowed marketing to move ‘beyond’ or sidestep the discourse of race, gender, and class difference in favor of becoming a kind of science. They pointed to psychographics’ highly quantitative, statistical approach to argue that statistical segmentation by taste, values, or preferences offered more productive consumer segments than identity categories ever had. However, as I demonstrate here, even as they sought to move past the language of race, gender, and class, these concerns remained central to the work of psychographics. They were embedded within the individuated narratives programs like VALS used to explain each personality type, a move which erased race, gender, and class as structural forces. The VALS system, for example, clustered communities of color in the lower tiers of the model. Rather than constructing these segments as the ‘black consumer’ or ‘Latino consumer,’ they described them as “Sustainer” and “Survivor” personalities. This shift provided merchandisers the opportunity to target specific racialized communities without stating as such.

Second, despite claims to quantification, VALS relied on narrative constructions like “Roger and the Big Time” to lend veracity to its nine personalities. These narratives were melodramas that turned on human suffering and pathos to instruct merchandisers on how to secure a sale. For those personalities near the bottom of the VALS hierarchy, the narratives drew upon enduring, highly racialized tropes, such as the pathologized black matriarch or the dysfunctional, immigrant family. Mitchell presented these constructions as marketing facts backed up by data analysis. Third and finally, I argue that Mitchell presented VALS as something more than market research by narrating it through the language of social criticism. This worked in two ways. First, VALS drew upon Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to rank its personalities by need. And second, Mitchell claimed that VALS was an extension of David

Reisman's work in *The Lonely Crowd*. Mitchell suggested that the VALS program not only charted who Americans were, but "where they were going," all through the power of data analysis. In this way, Arnold Mitchell promoted VALS as the realization of a fully rationalized marketing and advertising system capable of not simply intuiting consumer desire but predicting future shifts in human subjectivity as well.

Psychographics was the fetishization of data and the always-already new of technological change. Mitchell, Nelson, and their ilk sold this shift on the promise that, by virtue of its sheer scale, computational data analysis could provide marketers with a window into the objective, the truthful, and the real. But data itself is not neutrally produced, nor is it meaningful *a priori*. Rather, data always gives us a human picture because it demands interpretation. As I illustrate here, it was precisely this, interpretation, which calls celebrating the arrival of psychographics as a new marketing science downplayed. Some critics did pick up on this concern. Some advertisers and market researchers of the 1970s and 1980s interrogated how large-scale projects such as VALS failed to account for individual behavior. They recognized that narratives like "Roger and the Big Time" were deployed to sell psychographics as much as they were to help merchandisers sell their products. In many instances, marketers came to use large-scale psychographic profiles to contextualize their own market research, rather than as their primary marketing model. They combined psychographics ambitious national scale with their own segment expertise.

This chapter begins by tracking how marketing professionals presented psychographics as a move beyond other kinds of segmentation by race, gender, or class. I show how psychographics and earlier, less 'quantitative' modes of marketing were far more alike than psychographic boosters cared to admit. Rather, it was the speed and scale of analysis which psychographic marketing offered that would shift the marketing profession and the nature of the

composites it forwarded. Following this, I then turn to the Stanford Research Institute in the 1960s and the creation of VALS in the 1970s. VALS was the result of three overlapping sets of influences at Stanford Research: US military defense spending focused on long-term social and political forecasting; the West Coast countercultural vogue and “voluntary simplicity”; and American corporate interest in evaluating and forecasting future business climates. Finally, I attend to the specific types which the VALS program constructed and the conceptual framing which Mitchell used to introduce VALS as social criticism and market research in *The Nine American Lifestyles* following its publication in 1984. Taken together, this chapter illustrates how, by the late 1990s, psychographic marketing models like VALS enabled marketing professionals to proclaim their predictive power to both American corporations and the public alike.

‘Beyond’ Demographics: From Motivational Research to Psychographic Marketing

Writing for the *Atlantic* in October 1984, journalist James Atlas offered psychographic profiling as a new vanguard in market research. In a feature titled “Beyond Demographics,” Atlas told of the power psychological profiling offered merchandisers by using statistics to construct insightful consumer types based on psychological needs, rather than “demographics”, by which he meant social class, race, gender, or income. Atlas interviewed Joseph Plummer, vice-president of research at the general market agency Young and Rubicam and an early booster of psychographics, for the piece. Plummer marveled at the power of this new technique to bring marketers right into the elusive consumer’s mind: “[I]t’s a whole new dimension for us. Before VALS, we didn’t really have a sense of who the consumer out there was. Now we know *how*

they live and *what* they buy and *why* they buy it.”⁸ Just as in the title, throughout the essay, Atlas and those he interviewed cast psychographic profiling as a dynamic future which, through on-going data analysis, offered a mobile, shifting view of consumer desires, and “demographic” profiling as the messy, unverifiable bad old days of consumer market research.

This transition turned on a falsity which framed categories like race, gender, and class as unchanging and the outputs of psychographic studies as animate and dynamic. In reality, marketers had segmented the marketplace through powerful accounts of the changing nature of gender, race, and class since at least the 1930s. This was the argument of firms like Ellis’ Business Image, Inc. or Jones’ Black Creative Group. The narrative Atlas provided had more to do with changes in the methodologies and technologies which marketers brought to their work than it did with moving ‘beyond’ identity. In this section, I show how psychographic marketers suggested statistical sciences brought their psychographic conclusions closer to the ‘real,’ even as their techniques and conclusions were indebted to the same kinds of practices earlier marketing professionals had used.

To consider this, I first follow the relationship between early motivational research and the rise of psychographic marketing in the 1970s. I attend to how the concerns of motivational research were adapted to new, large-scale survey techniques, and new kinds and sources of data. I then examine how data processing and statistical analysis did transform the notion of the ‘consumer’ in market research. I show how, as the speed and scale of data analysis grew, marketers came to present and understand consumers as what they called ‘moving targets,’ which changed in real time. This ‘moving target’ was contrasted against older tropes like *The*

⁸ James Atlas, “Beyond Demographics,” *The Atlantic*, October 1984, 49-58.

Workingman's Wife, which, grounded in motivational research (MR) and small survey samples, marketing professionals now suggested might never have existed.

In the early 1960s, the model of motivational research (MR) forwarded by firms like Social Research, Inc. came under fire from both the marketing profession as well as the wider public. Marketing critics trained in the social sciences increasingly argued that motivational research was suspect because its sample sizes were small and its techniques, such as the Thematic Apperceptive Test (discussed in chapter two), could not be standardized. These concerns undercut MR because they suggested that such studies could not be easily reproduced and therefore were unverifiable. Other marketing professionals condemned the role of the clinician in constructing the conclusions of MR: composites like *The Workingman's Wife*. These critics worried that MR experts like Ernest Dichter or Lloyd Warner appeared to bank upon their reputation alone to verify their conclusions. In other instances, marketing critics worried about the very ethics of the long-form depth interviews conducted by these firms, where interviewers lead participants to confess and divulge. These concerns reflected the profession's growing investment in social scientific modeling and the ability to assess market research on seemingly impartial, academic terms.⁹

A number of blockbuster reports on MR techniques led to growing suspicion from the public as well. The field came under fire when social critic Vance Packard published his *exposé* on motivational research, *The Hidden Persuaders*, in 1957. The book was based on time spent at both Dichter's Motivational Institute as well as Warner's Social Research, Inc. Packard argued that motivational researchers like Dichter and Warner were manipulators who worked behind the scenes of American mass media to "probe our everyday habits for hidden meanings," seeking out

⁹ William Wells, "Psychographics: A Critical Review," *Journal of Marketing Research* Vol. 13 (May 1975): 196.

the “whys of our behavior, so that they can more effectively manipulate our habits and choices in their favor.”¹⁰ Packard suggested that marketers were after these revelations not to better understand the human condition but to manipulate them: to bend ordinary peoples’ desire to better suit the needs of their merchandiser clients.

Even as motivational research was widely critiqued over its veracity, the kinds of marketing outputs it generated remained popular amongst both advertisers, merchandisers, as well as creatives. These parties used long-form interviews and composite profiles to develop their ad copy and campaigns. As two marketing and media directors argued in 1971, despite struggles with verifiability, motivational research “brought the copywriter and the marketing manager face to face with an audience or group of customers[.]” Participants spoke at length about themselves; confessed their needs, wants, and frustrations; went off on tangents, and shared part of their lives with an interviewer who probed them to go deeper, to reflect on meaning, and to divulge more and more.¹¹ MR-generated consumer composite profiles, long-form interviews, and focus group narratives were generative sources for imagining the consumer because they provided the advertising executive, copy writer, and marketing professional with what seemed like a window into the consumer’s inner world.

Given the value of such profiles, concerns over verifiability led marketing professionals to begin considering ways to adapt the outputs of MR to new kinds of survey techniques and technologies. In the mid-1960s, a number of marketing professionals began to revise the interview guidelines used by motivational researchers for use in large-scale surveys that could be analyzed by data processing computers rather than individual, trained clinicians. Their goal was

¹⁰ Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: D. McKay, Co., 1957), 32.

¹¹ William Wells and Douglas Tigert, “Activities, Interests and Opinions,” *Journal of Advertising Research* 11, no. 4 (August 1971): 27; Edward Winter and John T. Russell, “Psychographics and Creativity” *Journal of Advertising* Vol. 2, No. 1 (March 1973): 33.

to reproduce the kinds of outputs MR offered, but with the promise of statistical verifiability. While advertising agencies had relied on reader survey data since the 1920s and 1930s, advancements in data processing during the 1960s meant new surveys could be much more complex and operate at greater scales, with hundreds of questions and thousands of respondents.¹² When these completed surveys were fed into a data processor, a data analysis program would then organize respondents into ‘clusters’ within which each point was more similar to one other than they were to those in other groupings. Using these clusters, marketers could then create many different aggregate consumer types—known as psychographic or lifestyle profiles or portraits (firms used different names to sell their composites as real)—as they traced correlations which might have gone previously unnoticed by marketers.

Over the 1960s and 1970s, advertising agencies and market research firms developed a variety of different models to accomplish this task, measuring and segmenting large populations into different kinds of groups. One of the most well-regarded early psychographic projects was the Activities, Interests, and Opinions (AIO) survey developed by William Wells and Douglas Tigert. Wells and Tigert understood their work as a direct extension of MR. They described their AIO technique as a “more sanitary version of motivation research” with the aim of drawing “recognizably human portraits of consumers” based on “tougher-minded, more conventional research” methods that were more “amenable to quantification and respectable samples.”¹³ In a review essay on psychographic techniques, Wells explained the value of this sort of cluster analysis using the example of a man who often purchases shotgun ammunition. He noted that the

¹² On technological shifts required for this, see Martin Campbell-Kelly and William Aspray, *Computer: A History of the Information Machine* (New York, 1996), 144–7 and Thomas Haigh, “How Data Got Its Base: Information Storage Software in the 1950s and 1960s,” *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* Vol. 31 (2009): 6–25.

¹³ Wells and Tigert, “Activities, Interests, and Opinions,” 28.

1975 *demographic* profile of such a consumer would be a young white male between the ages of 25 and 44, perhaps working in the trades, living in a rural setting, and earning somewhere around \$6,000 to \$10,000 a year. With just these factors alone, a copywriter or marketer could go on to assume much about this person's life, their habits, their values, and preferences. The challenge, Wells warned, was that the marketing professional knew little about this social world or lifestyle. A marketer risked much in making their own inferences: "Knowing that heavy users of shotgun ammunition tend to be younger, more in blue collar occupations, and less urban than nonusers might suggest that they would be heavier users of beer, more interested in television, more interested in spectator sports, more prone to use credit, and more apt to shop at discount stores."¹⁴ However, a cluster analysis of users and non-users of shotgun ammunition came to a different conclusion: "buyers of shotgun ammunition do not differ significantly from nonbuyers on any of these dimensions."¹⁵ In constructing categories backed up by large scale survey analysis, Wells argued that marketers would evade falling victim to their own false assumptions.

Even with such a revelation, Wells cautioned readers that large-scale analysis created categories that existed in the realm of probability, not reality—an admission later psychographic marketers would avoid. Each cluster demanded interpretations, assessment, and a critical eye. "[A]re the descriptions of the segments reliable and valid?" or, Wells warned, "[d]o real groups of real consumers fitting these descriptions actually exist?"¹⁶ A correlation meant little if it could not be backed up with further evidence. Such concerns meant that the expert who took a psychographic study too seriously might wind up "marketing to a family of fictions."¹⁷ Yet, for

¹⁴ Wells, "Psychographics: A Critical Review," 198.

¹⁵ Wells, "Psychographics: A Critical Review," 198.

¹⁶ Wells, "Psychographics: A Critical Review," 208.

¹⁷ Wells, "Psychographics: A Critical Review," 208.

Wells the risks of producing non-existent consumers was worth the risk, given the alternatives: “The copy writer might depend upon qualitative motivation study. If he did, he would be looking at a small unrepresentative sample, and he would be depending upon the subjective judgement of the motivation research analyst. He might examine a demographic profile obtained from a large-scale quantitative market survey. But, as the shotgun study illustrates, he would almost surely miss some valid relationships, and he would almost surely make some false inferences.”¹⁸ Given these concerns, even when the cluster remained questionable, scale conferred the findings more weight—more ‘realness’—than either the copywriters’ lived experience or a small, unverifiable motivational study completed with only a handful of participants and produced solely through a single interviewer’s interpretation.¹⁹

The turn toward psychographics relied upon readily available new technologies with higher processing power, which transformed not only the scale and speed of market research, but also the kinds of questions and concerns which marketing experts investigated. In 1964, Daniel Yankelovich of Yankelovich, Skelly, and White, published a piece in the *Harvard Business Review* arguing that marketers ought to “discard the old, unquestioned assumption that demography is always the best way of looking at markets,” and instead look to “buyer attitudes, motivations, values, usage patterns, aesthetic preferences, or degree of susceptibility.”²⁰ In 1970, they founded the Yankelovich Lifestyle Monitor, a subscription-based yearly report for merchandisers and advertising agencies. Unlike ‘Teena’ or *The Workingman’s Wife* which were articulated a certain type of consumer, the Monitor constructed and followed what it claimed were popular social attitudes and perspectives, giving them appealing names like “Novelty and

¹⁸ Wells, “Psychographics: A Critical Review,” 208.

¹⁹ Wells, “Psychographics: A Critical Review,” 208.

²⁰ Daniel Yankelovich, “New Criteria for Market Segmentation,” *Harvard Business Review* (April-March 1964), 83-90.

Change,” “Anti-Bigness,” “Blurring of the Sexes,” and “Defocus on Youth.”²¹ By surveying the same 2,500 participants every twelve months, Yankelovich suggested that it could measure how these concerns changed over time, forecasting fads, trends, and popular interests. This form of psychographic marketing presented potential attitudes, perspectives, and feelings as trackable, and therefore manageable concerns which clients could use to weather social change.²²

Psychographic marketing and new scales of market research also afforded the opportunity to mobilize new kinds of information in market research. The development of new technologies for associating marketing data with the geography of the U.S. began in 1970 when the Census Bureau first published consumer data on electronic tape for the use of commercial business, offering “business men, government officials and others everything they always wanted to know about the American public but were afraid to ask.”²³ That marketing firms capitalized on state data dumps was no secret. In fact, by 1994 marketing’s relationship with the state was a celebrated fact of the industry. That year, *American Demographics* magazine, founded in 1988, released a compendium of the “best 100 sources” for “America’s top marketing information and product services.”²⁴ Of the list, 16 were public institutions or government agencies, including the National Park Service, Statistics Canada, the U.S. Internal Revenue

²¹ In 1997, The Monitor’s then 27 year-run would serve as an archive of sorts, when Yankelovich Associates J. Walker Smith and Ann Clurman wrote their own history of late-twentieth century consumption, *Rocking the Ages*. The *New York Times* described the study as a call for marketers to move past “the traditional demographics of income, education, race, and sex when focusing on buyers” and to instead target the mind-sets of what they deemed the three “generational cohorts” of the late twentieth century: Matures (1900-1945); Boomers (1946-1964); and Generation Xers’ (1965 to 1978). See J. Walker Smith and Ann Clurman, *Rocking the Ages: The Yankelovich Report on Generations* (New York: Harper Business, 1997); Deborah Stead, “Coming of Age in Consumer Land” *New York Times*, September 7, 1997, 11.

²² Daniel Yankelovich, “What Life Style Means to Market Planners” *Marketing Communications*, Vol. 6 (1974): 38-45.

²³ Leonard Sloane, “Census for Business,” *The New York Times*, January 17, 1971, F15.

²⁴ “The 100 Best Sources for Marketing Information” *American Demographics*, 1994 Directory, 4-11.

Service, and U.S. Bureau of the Census.²⁵ *American Demographics* was itself a magazine built upon three overlapping audiences deeply invested in ways of seeing the population: state demographers, academics interested in population research, and advertising and marketing professionals keen for new techniques and sources of data with which to construct their markets.

By 1973, the J. Walter Thompson Information Center—an internal clearinghouse for market research strategy that translated scholarly and trade reports for executives, copywriters, and researchers within the agency—noted that all of the largest manufacturers in the United States had adopted some form of targeted life style or life stage marketing. In 1969, Lever Brothers had taken a mass marketing approach to free sampling, distributing “enough free toothpaste samples [...] to cover the entire nation’s tooth brushing needs for a full week.”²⁶ In the interim four years, the merchandiser had employed the services of a number of psychographic firms to provide a segmented approach. These organizations enabled the firm to drastically cut the cost of distributing free samples by “zeroing in on those consumers who are prime prospect for the product.”²⁷ They delivered “samples to such specialized audiences as new mothers or college girls, or ulcer sufferers, or even redheaded moviegoers. And, through their computers, they can provide valuable supplementary data on your customers and potential customers.”²⁸ These were firms like Gift-Pax, which had got its start in the 1940s running write-in sample opportunities on behalf of merchandisers who advertised in popular magazines; Teen-Mail, which relied on personal sign-ups targeting young people; or Compusamp, a program from

²⁵ “The 100 Best Sources for Marketing Information,” *American Demographics*, 1994 Directory, 4-11. Marketing critics watched state discussions on new ways of handling and securing data closely. See “Data Data Everywhere,” *American Demographics*, February 1979, 8.

²⁶ “Information Center Flash, August-December 1972,” J. Walter Thompson Collection, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

²⁷ Id.

²⁸ Id.

the ad-man Henry Dale, which “promised a few products” to housewives who agreed to take phone surveys for the company. By 1974, Compusamp alone had reached 5 million households across the United States.²⁹

Taken together, the growing number of new sources for marketing information, new technologies for processing it, and the speed at which these technologies operated all occasioned a shift in how marketers thought about the subject produced in their research. Marketers’ conclusions increasingly turned on questions of ‘the changing consumer’ to make predictions about what new kinds typologies might emerge and how best to manage them. In 1974, Rena Bartos, the Vice-President and Director of Communications Development at J. Walter Thompson who had worked with Caroline Jones, published an internal Thompson study of American women, referring to them not as a singular kind of consumer, but as the agency’s ‘moving target.’ “The target is not fixed or stationary,” argued Bartos, “[i]t has moved a hundred years in the last ten years. And the pace of change is accelerating.”³⁰ In such a framework, figures like the workingman’s wife were the output of a single set of studies completely slowly and at a small scale. Bartos argues these were illusory figures of the past which were meaningful for only a brief moment in time. “For all intents and purposes,” warned Bartos, “this woman no longer exists, and worse, may never had existed.”³¹ Indeed, psychographic profiling rooted in the on-going collection of vast swaths of personal data promised endless movement, and a system

²⁹ Geographic targeting was no major innovation – markets had always been understood as both regional and national. Rather, in the 1970s the use of census tract data to target specific neighborhoods was lauded as a cost-saving alternative to mass marketing, see Joseph Turow, *Breaking Up America: Advertisers and the New Media World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), ch 6.

³⁰ Rena Bartos, *The Moving Target*, J. Walter Thompson Collection, Rubinstein Library, Duke University.

³¹ Id.

which could track this movement—a transformation which marketers contrasted against their vision of earlier market segmentation models as static and unchanging.

The power of scale and a turn toward quantification allowed psychographic marketing experts to argue that market research had become more of a science than an art, one indebted to statistics, data processing, and the endless gathering of information. It enabled them to ignore critiques and undercut arguments about how they constructed advertising images and campaigns by simply arguing that they merely followed their statistical findings. In 1983, marketing critic Theodore Levitt named this project in a rather blunt way in his *The Marketing Imagination*, inadvertently capturing the work of all market research. Merchandisers, he argued, did not look to secure a sale. Rather, in adopting psychographic methods, their job was now to “create and keep a customer,” using these techniques to follow this consumer as they changed over time.³² As Caroline Jones’ had repeatedly argued, however, the customers merchandisers “created” were not necessarily the ones they had. Psychographic profiling, after all, worked exactly like all marketing did: it was deployed to construct the customers merchandisers wanted. Proponents of psychographic techniques merely used its grounding in statistics and the speed of computational data analysis to suggest that its outputs were somehow more real.

Marketing professionals used psychographic personality inventories to promise merchandisers near constant access to the objective or real. Growth in data processing technologies brought the outputs of motivational research to large-scale quantitative studies of consumer desire, enabling the rise of psychographic research methods that promised to reveal market segments which marketers could never have imagined. Statistics and data processing lent these techniques veracity and, in the process, shifted the idea of the consumer type, framing it as

³² Theodore Levitt, *The Marketing Imagination* (New York: Free Press, 1983).

a ‘moving target’ which changed over time. This focus on change became a centerpiece of psychographic profiling as new kinds of organizations entered the marketing arena.

Organizations like the Stanford Research Institute would seize upon this concern, promising major American corporations the power not only to intuit consumer desire, but to command an uncertain future as well.

Stanford Research Institute and the Values & Lifestyles Survey (VALS)

Despite psychographic practitioner’s claims of objectivity, their techniques were grounded in specific ideological commitments. The Values and Lifestyles Survey (VALS) was perhaps the most popular and well-regarded psychographic model developed during the 1970s and used during the 1980s. To understand its ideological and cultural investments, we must first consider its origins at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in the 1970s, an organization which specialized in futures research (or ‘scenario planning’) for both American business and the state. In this section, I track the origins of VALS in SRI’s scenario planning. At the center of their futures research was a fundamental question: how would Americans respond to the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society? In their interrogation of this question, SRI researchers developed a number of proposals for forecasting what the end of the twentieth century might hold for the United States. They drew upon the writing of the American social philosopher Richard Gregg and his call to ‘voluntary simplicity,’ or the rejection of material consumption, to think about a post-industrial future. Rather than adopting the anti-capitalist critique forwarded by Gregg, however, SRI drew Gregg’s call to ‘voluntary simplicity’ into their vision of a post-industrial United States defined by a highly profitable, consumer-oriented, minimalist living. Together, voluntary simplicity and the corporate forecasting techniques developed at SRI would serve as the foundation of the VALS program.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, Stanford University founded the Stanford Research Institute as a means of generating new revenue streams for the university.³³ While SRI's primary aim was to bring research to West Coast businesses, the organization's first major source of funding came from the federal government instead, which heavily invested in defense and military research on the west coast during the Korean War. The combination of military defense spending and university research made for uneasy bedfellows and following student protests against the increase in military-sponsored research and development at Stanford in 1968, the organization and the university formally parted ways in 1970, with the Stanford Research Institute rebranding as SRI International that same year.

In the late 1950s, SRI began producing long-term technological forecasting for industry, becoming one of the largest and most relied-upon resources for market planning by American corporations, both consumer-facing and otherwise. The firm offered both specialized and general reports as part of its Long Range Planning Services, including special research studies, an inquiry service, and personal consultation with merchandisers and manufacturers on future market conditions as they intersected with concerns over technological, economic, ecological, social, and political change. For example, in the Autumn of 1964 they produced *The World of 1975*, and in the Fall of 1967, a study titled *The Management of Innovation*, both of which promised to help merchandisers weather an uncertain future. SRI also offered access to what they called their "Information Center," which offered the complete background material on their Long Range Planning Reports. The firm charged \$4,000 a year for companies and \$3,000 for

³³ There is little written about SRI as its contemporary form, SRI International does not allow access to its archive. See: Rebecca Lowen, *Creating the Cold War University: The Transformation of Stanford* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); for an internal history of the organization with little analysis, see: Weldon B. Gibson, *SRI: The Founding Years* (Los Altos, CA: Publishing Services Center, 1980) and *SRI: The Take-Off Days* (Los Altos, CA: Publishing Services Center, 1986).

publicly-sponsored organizations, with roughly 400 clients subscribed to the service by 1966, including a number of large-scale advertising agencies, such as J. Walter Thompson.³⁴ These subscriptions gave SRI a measure of influence across American industry, including amongst marketers and advertisers tasked with predicting long-term consumer want and need.

SRI's long-range planning services were also shaped by their engagements with the west coast countercultural vogue and Western investments in mysticism. As historians of science and technology have argued, critiques of technology proliferated in American institutions and culture during the 1960s. These critiques came from all quarters: from engineering departments, student activists, and popular critics who argued that bureaucratic or technocratic solutions were inadequate answers to the social and environmental problems which plagued the United States.³⁵ These were the challenges of modernization, all of which concerned SRI associates interested in questions of managing the future. In the early 1970s, these lines of critique had coalesced at SRI into the firms' 1974 study, the *Changing Images of Man*, which brought together contributors from across the social sciences and humanities to attempt to address significant challenges facing the United States. Financed by the Kettering Foundation, the study asked how certain "images of the nature of man in relationship to the universe" had changed under industrial capitalism and how these images had put modern industrial civilization on a dangerous path. Written in a grand and myth-like style, it proclaimed that Civilization required a post-industrial future. But what exactly would that look like?

³⁴ Jantsch, *Technological Forecasting in Perspective: A Framework for Technological Forecasting, its Techniques and organization*" Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1966, 299.

³⁵ Matthew Wisnioski, "Inside 'the System': Engineers, Scientists, and the Boundaries of Social Protest in the Long 1960s," *History and Technology* 19 (2003): 313-33; Matthew Wisnioski, *Engineers for Change: Competing Visions of Technology in 1960s America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012); Cyrus CM Mody, "Santa Barbara Physicists in the Vietnam Era," in *Groovy Science: The Counter-Cultures and Scientific Life, 1955-1975*, ed. Cyrus CM Mody, David Kaiser, and W. Patrick McCray (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 70-107.

While *Changing Images of Man* was being developed, other researchers at SRI were developing similar projects that sought to answer just such a question: interrogating how countercultural life ways might intersect with SRI's post-industrial vision. "Voluntary Simplicity," published by later VALS author Arnold Mitchell and his collaborator, Duane Elgin, offered one avenue. "Voluntary Simplicity" critiqued the alienation which ordinary people experienced under industrial capitalism. The phrase itself had a lineage that defined Elgin and Mitchell's thinking on authenticity and self-actualization as consumer tropes. As Sam Binkley has noted, Elgin first encountered the term in a reprint of an article by Richard Gregg, an American social philosopher who had studied under Gandhi during the 1930s and would go on to serve as a critical interlocutor for Martin Luther King Jr. and Bayard Rustin during the modern Civil Rights Movement.³⁶ Gregg had published "The Value of Voluntary Simplicity" in 1936 while working as the director of Pendle Hill, a Quaker study center in Massachusetts. The piece outlined his vision of a life which rejected market forces of accumulation. It warned that capitalism shaped not just social relations, but the human spirit itself. "Capitalism," he argued, "is no mere exterior organization of bankers and industrialists," but instead "consists of a spirit and attitude and habitual actions in and among all of us." Gregg argued that those who sought to reform or end capitalism would have to explore within themselves how market attitudes had shaped their own particular "habits and desires":

If capitalism is to be reformed or ended, that change will alter the lives and thoughts and feelings of every one of us. Conversely, if I wish actively to participate in this transformation, I myself must begin to alter my own life in the desired direction. If I share too heavily in the regime I want to change, it becomes too difficult for me to disentangle myself, and I cease to become effective as a

³⁶ Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 95. On Gregg see Joseph Kip Kosek, "Richard Gregg, Mohandas Gandhi, and the Strategy of Nonviolence," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (2005): 1318–1348; Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 85–112.

reformer. Those who live on income from investments will not dare to advocate deep economic changes, unless they live simply enough to permit a lowering of their income without too great an upset in their mode of life. My changes must be both inner and outer, and must, I believe, be in the direction of more simplicity.³⁷

Elgin and Mitchell were struck by the familiar tensions Gregg played on over industrialization and mass production, and in particular, the ways passive engagement with capitalism – through investments – were too ‘entangled’ to call for structural change. In Elgin and Mitchell’s hands, however, voluntary simplicity was a potential response to changing social and political conditions of the 1970s, a way out of the crises of the day. In their reworking, they invoked a call to simple living “driven by a sense of urgency and social responsibility that scarcely existed ten or fifteen years ago,” rooted in the fear “of a chronic energy shortage,” the “prospect that before we run out of resources on any absolute basis we may poison ourselves to death with environmental contaminants;” and “a growing social malaise and purposelessness which causes us to drift in our social evolution; and so on.”³⁸ Much like *The Changing Images of Man*, Elgin and Mitchell’s deployment of voluntary simplicity forthrightly argued that the subject of industrial capitalism did not cohere with an imagined, post-industrial social and economic order.

While Gregg’s framework challenged the reader interested in ending or reforming capitalism, Elgin and Mitchell adopted his language to another end, framing voluntary simplicity as a set of aesthetic choices. Their move evaded Gregg’s argument that beyond consumption, investment also weakened one’s call for structural change. In 1977 they began a speaking tour on the topic; publishing an essay on the topic in 1978 and later their book, *Voluntary Simplicity*, in 1981. The monograph set off the simple living movement of the 1980s. “The emergence of voluntary simplicity could represent a major transformation of traditional American values” they

³⁷ Richard Gregg, *The Value of Voluntary Simplicity* (1936).

³⁸ Duane Elgin and Arnold Mitchell, “Voluntary Simplicity,” *The CoEvolution Quarterly* (Summer 1978). Now known as *Whole Earth Magazine*.

argued in the 1978 essay. “[I]t may be a harbinger of multifold shifts, not only in values, but in consumption patterns, institutional operations, social movements, national policies, and so on.”³⁹

While they admitted the concept implored people to consume less, particularly materials that were energy inefficient, nonbiodegradable or luxuries deemed nonessential, they did not believe this required a challenge to American capitalism. Nor did simple living suggest consumption would slow down. Voluntary Simplicity “does not mean that the overall cost of consumption will go down drastically. *Living simply need not be equated with living cheaply.*”⁴⁰ They emphasized the enhanced value of “[t]he hand crafted, durable, aesthetically enduring products,” and how these products that “appeal to frugal consumers are oftentimes purchased at a considerable premium over mass-produced items.” In finding commercial balance in an uncertain future through simple living, the authors promised the total value of goods purchased would “remain relatively high since our economy is not oriented to producing the kinds of products which fit these criteria. Material simplicity will thus likely be manifest in consumption styles that are less ascetic (of strictly enforced austerity) and more aesthetic (where each person will consider whether his or her level and pattern of consumption fits, with grace and integrity, into the practical art of daily living).”⁴¹

Mitchell and Elgin’s deployment of voluntary simplicity was a kind of premium lifestyle model rooted in counterculture capitalism. As one 1981 management and marketing scholar suggested in their evaluation of the claim, while “choice is voluntary; this low-consumption and low-energy lifestyle is often selected by individuals who are financially able to afford a more luxurious way of living. In fact, a spartan and self-sufficient lifestyle adopted purely in response

³⁹ Duane Elgin and Arnold Mitchell, “Voluntary Simplicity.”

⁴⁰ Duane Elgin and Arnold Mitchell, “Voluntary Simplicity.”

⁴¹ Duane Elgin and Arnold Mitchell, “Voluntary Simplicity.”

to economic constraints could not be considered voluntary simplicity.”⁴² Even as voluntary simplicity offered a vision of industrial man transformed, its own conceptual ‘lifestyle’ was *aspirational*. It came to define how American merchandisers and marketers articulated ideas about countercultural value in the market. Indeed, the transcendental futures reflected upon by Mitchell, Elgin, and others at SRI would become some of the most successful marketing strategies on hand for multinational corporations by the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

After publishing *Voluntary Simplicity* in 1981, Mitchell turned his focus to VALS, the psychographic survey which he developed by SRI. VALS took up a number of the same commitments that voluntary simplicity did, placing at its apex men who practiced the philosophy as Elgin and Mitchell understood it. By 1984, when Mitchell published his trade press book on VALS, *The Nine American Lifestyles*, American merchandisers were very familiar with SRI’s Business Intelligence programs and the promise of long-term corporate forecasting. The text, however, took VALS one step further. The publication invited Americans to find themselves in the VALS hierarchy and in doing so, recast SRI’s marketing regime as a site for self-identification through consumption.

VALS

In *The Nine American Lifestyles: Who We Are and Where We Are Going*, Mitchell invited marketing professionals and the reading public alike to imagine the entirety of the U.S. population segmented not by age, race, or class, but by psychology and lifestyle. As a marketing

⁴² Sorothy Lenoard-Barton, “Voluntary Simplicity Lifestyles and Energy Conservation,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 8 (Dec 1981): 244. On its application in market forecasting and planning, see Duane Elgin and Arnold Mitchell, “Voluntary Simplicity” *Planning Review*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (1977): 13-15. On responses to stagflation see Avraham Shama, “Coping with Stagflation: Voluntary Simplicity” *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (1981): 120-134.

text, the study argued that the United States was on the verge of a major socio-economic and cultural transformation and that new personality types were emerging in the process. Mitchell used narrative portraits like “Roger and the Big Time” to lend these types veracity. This section examines how the VALS survey in particular was framed as a kind of social fact rather than market research, and the racial work which it accomplished, even as it claimed the mantle of psychological segmentation operating ‘beyond’ identity. I first argue that the social criticism framing Arnold Mitchell deployed in *The Nine American Lifestyles* lent VALS power as a way of ‘seeing’ social change in the United States. Mitchell presented VALS as an extension of mid-century sociologist David Reisman’s work in *The Lonely Crowd*. He claimed that VALS tracked the emergence of a new kind of personality, the ‘Integrateds,’ which had squared away Reisman’s inner- and outer-directed personalities by incorporating the tenets of voluntary simplicity into their lives. These ‘Integrated’ personalities sat atop the VALS hierarchy.

I then argue that while psychographics more broadly elided the language of race difference in their rejection of segmentation by identity, race was nonetheless central to VALS hierarchy of self-actualization. VALS mobilized Abraham Maslow’s theories of self-actualization to present, in neutral language, a racialized hierarchy of consumer self-actualization that placed consumers of color at the bottom and white, west-coast professional men, at the top. To demonstrate this, I attend to the narrative melodramas Mitchell presented in *The Nine American Lifestyles* to ‘sell’ VALS to merchandisers. The types that populated VALS’ Maslowian hierarchy drew upon the enduring racist tropes of the 1970s and 1980s, framing these narratives not as market research, but as social fact. *The Nine American Lifestyles* offered a highly atomized vision and theory of American life in the late twentieth century, one which

erased the structural power of race, gender, and class in favour of emphasizing the power, and responsibility, of individuated consumer choice.

In *The Nine American Lifestyles*, Arnold Mitchell argued that “Externally-oriented” personalities of David Reisman’s *The Lonely Crowd* were giving way to a new kind of subject. In 1950, Reisman and his collaborators, the sociologist Nathan Glazer, and the social scientist and poet Reuel Denney, argued that a tradition-bound American culture had, since the industrial revolution, gradually adopted an outer-directed process of identity formation. Growing material wealth accompanied a shift away from “traditional” or “Self-Directed” mentalities towards an outer-oriented sense of self and self-worth, one driven by a desire to keep up with the Jones’.⁴³ While Reisman sought to document how American personalities had transformed through the mid-century, Mitchell’s text offered up the kinds of changes which SRI and VALS suggested would come as the century closed. Mitchell described this transition by opening the *Nine American Lifestyles* with a question: what would become of the generation growing up in the 1960s who had lived through profound social change? He framed the marketing text as a study which sought to understand how a shift away from “success in financial or power pursuits as a prime measure of an individual; conformity; functionalist at any cost; and materialism in its flamboyant forms” had transformed those who had lived through the social contestations of the 60s. Mitchell claimed that the ‘Integrateds’ were the answer to this question: raised in the language of the West coast counterculture and embracing voluntary simplicity, they would find their orientation to the world transformed by rejecting materiality in the name of experience.

Where the description of personality types framed by enteral- or internal-motivations placed VALS in the tradition of social criticism à la Reisman, its ladder hierarchy of

⁴³ David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

personalities drew upon the work of Abraham Maslow to rank its nine types by their ability to achieve and satisfy their needs. Maslow himself had first presented his theory of human motivation in a 1943 essay published in *Psychological Review*, which was later extended in his larger work, *Motivation and Personality* in 1953. Both texts argued that people were motivated by needs left unsatisfied. Once such concerns were met, those needs were no longer motivational forces, and so they could begin to strive for higher order ones. Maslow's work took off in both management and marketing at mid-century. As the historian of science Kira Lussier has argued, corporate managers at major firms like Mattel and Texas Instruments readily adopted Maslow's theories to make the argument that corporate work was central to human self-actualization, with major corporations like Mattel and Texas Instruments adopting Maslowian models into their Human Resource policies.⁴⁴

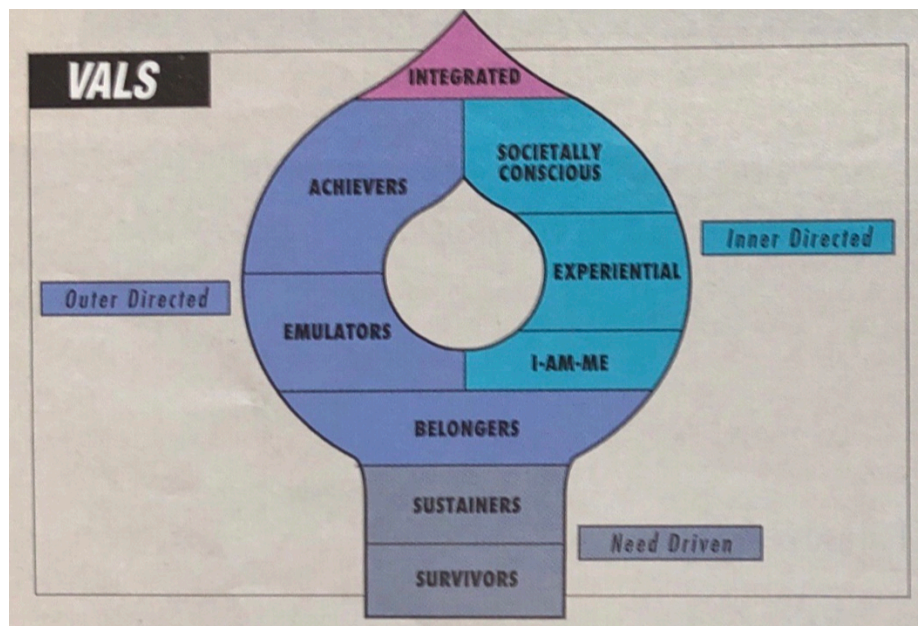
For VALS the hierarchy informed how advertising pitches ought to be made. A successful campaign would have to speak to the unmet emotional and psychological needs of a specific psychographic segment. The challenge with this interpretation of Maslow's framework, however, is that it flattened the idea of need: a person struggling to secure housing, for example, was not capable of any other kind of 'higher-order' need. Maslow himself had contested the idea of a ladder progression in his work, arguing that people "are partially satisfied in all their basic needs and partially unsatisfied in all their basic needs at the same time," and that "any behavior tends to be determined by several or all of the basic needs simultaneously rather than by only one of them."⁴⁵ In the VALS adoption of Maslow, however, immediate needs were always defined by the personality's position on the hierarchy. As the narrative constructions discussed in the

⁴⁴ Kira Lussier, "Personality, Incorporated: Psychological Capital in American Management, 1960-1995" (PhD Diss. University of Toronto, 2018), 50.

⁴⁵ Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation" *Psychological Review*, Vol. 50, (1943): 388

next sections suggests, this misinterpretation served to further flatten and homogenize each of the personality types forwarded in the study.

Drawing together Reisman and Maslow as a framework, *The Nine American Lifestyles* introduced the VALS hierarchy to merchandisers and marketers as the result of large-scale psychographic surveys of Americans living in the United States. The study divided its nine American personality types into four Maslowian categories arranged from “Needs Driven” personalities at the bottom to “Integrated” personalities at the top. “Needs Driven” personalities signaled those who lacked access to materials to cover their most basic needs, from food to housing. Above “Needs Driven” types were two distinct kinds of personalities. The first, and lowest group, was the outwardly-oriented individualist, rooted in Reisman’s *The Lonely Crowd*, and by far the majority of people living in the United States. The second group, the “Inner-Directed,” were the younger members of society, typically born in the post-war period and well-educated professionals and keen for self-recognition. Finally, atop of the VALS hierarchy were the “Integrations,” people had resolved the tensions between inner and outer-direction in their own psyche, the psychologically mature consumers which Mitchell saw as the end-point of the American society in the twentieth century.



(Figure 1: VALS Psychographic Chart, produced for *American Demographics*, “Psychographics in the 1990s”)

While we do not have room to examine each of the melodramatic portraits drawn up by Mitchell to construct these types, a sample reveals how they worked to define race, class and gender without saying so. The portraits were heuristics: frameworks through which clients could imagine each segment, their immediate needs, and desires. They served two important functions. First, narrative portraits congealed correlations and tendencies into specific positions, downplaying difference *within* each of the nine categories in favor of emphasizing distinctions *between* them. This meant that these personalities came to represent entire identity categories. Second, these melodramatic narratives erased the structural realities of race and gender inequality in the early 1980s in favor of individuated and atomized narratives untethered from the wider world. In doing so, they taught clients, which ranged from mass merchandisers and advertising agencies to state and federal governments, public agencies, educational institutions and more, to think and understand their publics on these individuated terms as well, divorced from the larger structural logics of race, gender, and class.

At the bottom of the VALS hierarchy were the “Needs-Driven” personalities, Survivors and Sustainers. Survivors were represented by a melodramatic portrait titled “Mrs. Washington’s New Home,” an African American matriarch whose recent move to Boston had been upended by the death of her breadwinner husband:

Well, we does O.K., I guess. Peter here [Mrs. Washington’s eight-year old son]. He has it better than I did, or his daddy. I can say that. I tell myself that a lot. He can just turn on the faucet over there, and a lot of the time, he just gets the water, right away. And when I tell him what it was like for us, to go fetch that water—we’d walk three miles, yes sir, and we’d be lucky it wasn’t ten—well, Peter, it doesn’t register on him. He thinks I’m trying to fool him, and the more serious I get the more he laughs, so I’ve stopped.

Of course, it’s not all so good, I have to admit. We’re still where we were as far as knowing where the next meal is coming from. When I go to bed at night I tell myself I’ve done good to stay alive and keep the kids alive, and if they’ll just wake up in the morning, and me too, well then, we can worry about that, all the rest, come tomorrow. So there you go. We do our best, and that’s all you can do.

Mrs. Washington and her family had moved to Boston a couple years before, on impulse, when racial tensions in Alabama turned ugly. They did not seek the ghetto—it was simply the only place they could find. She accepts this. She says: ‘God wants us to have a bad spell here, and so maybe it’ll get better next time—you know in Heaven, and I hope that’s where we’ll be going.’⁴⁶

“Mrs. Washington’s New Home” drew directly upon an enduring discourse of demonization that had characterized black families in general and African American mothers in particular since the mid-1960s. From this period onwards, a number of policy makers and critics presented social and cultural explanations for what were in reality structural problems fueled by deindustrialization, on-going attacks on the welfare state, and anti-black sentiment that frustrated access to employment.⁴⁷ Texts like the Moynihan Report, for example, read the matriarchal

⁴⁶ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 66.

⁴⁷ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Benefit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) 18-19; Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), Daniel Geary,

model as deviant and particular to black life in the United States. Such knowledge production about black life in particular made Mrs. Washington a familiar trope to the merchandisers who encountered or used VALS. What's more, as a construction, demonized blackness complimented VALS and its emphasis on individual choice. By focusing on Mrs. Washington's lack of ambition, Mitchell presented the predicament as the consequence of a Survivor personality, rather than the result of structural forces beyond the composite's control.

Each of the VALS composites turned on visions of the long-term future as well as that personality's most pressing needs. For Survivors, the future was foreclosed, but this did not mean that this type would be unprofitable for merchandisers. "Few [Survivors] expect to escape" their situation, suggested Mitchell, "and even fewer do, for the experience of these people show that there is little reason to put out the enormous mental and social effort of trying to move upward through the classic means—education, work, leadership." To illustrate this, the conclusion of "Mrs. Washington's New Home" shifted focus to her young son Peter, who is presented through a discussion of his relationship to school and future employment. Peter attends school, but he confesses, "I wasn't made for that school and that school wasn't made for me."⁴⁸ Rather, Peter's education comes from the challenges of survival in the city. Peter "knows the streets, the alleys, and the rats. He's been bitten more than once and keeps a big stick by his bed to use against them. He wants to be a pilot (sometimes), a police-man (sometimes), a racing-car driver (sometimes), and a baseball player (most of the time)."⁴⁹ Peter, however will not be so lucky, "for he has a rheumatic heart. At some level he may know this, for he also says, 'I Don't know what I'll be. Maybe nothing. I see men sitting around, hiding from the welfare lady. They

Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

⁴⁸ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 67.

⁴⁹ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 67.

fool her. Maybe I'll fool her, too. I don't know what you can do.'"⁵⁰ Such a composite invited copy-writers to capitalize on Survivors sense of a foreclosed future to sell insurance, payday loan services, lottery tickets, and fantasies of escape—the subject of chapter six. In its adoption of the “culture of poverty” to market research, programs like VALS both contributed to the on-going production of these tropes while simultaneously advising merchandisers on how to profit from them. Within such a framework, a marketing composite's future did not need to be promising, it merely needed to be profitable.

A second class of Survivors were the elderly poor, many of whom could be advertised to in some of the same ways. The elderly, Mitchell argued, were “less likely to be born into the predicament; rather, through bad luck, lack of enterprise, or the onslaughts of old age, they have slipped back into the Survivor lifestyle.”⁵¹ Following a lifetime spent as one of VALS higher order personalities, many of those who occupied the second category had fallen into a Survivor position due to inadequate support in old age. For these personalities advertising claims should not be oriented toward the future, but toward the past instead: “Life has become a waiting game. Television is their main entertainment. Their homes are filled with mementoes of the past. Most are retired, and at least 80 percent are widows. They lead lives full of echoes, for most of their friends are dead or have moved to places unknown.”⁵² Where Mrs. Washington's vision of the better life is defined by sacrifice; for the elderly Survivors, their better lives are squarely located in the past. Such themes could be capitalized upon by marketer and copy-writers keen for a way ‘in’ to consumer's acute sense of want and need.

⁵⁰ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 67.

⁵¹ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 68-69.

⁵² Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 68-69.

The next of the needs-driven groups were the Sustainers, who unlike Survivors, had ambition but still lived within precarious and uncertain circumstances. This category captured the bulk of new and recent immigrants to the United States. Sustainers asked “much more of their world” than Survivors did—their future orientation involved possibility. Sustainers were framed as those on the edge of poverty, with a profound “mistrust of the system [...] less confidence in elected officials and corporate leaders than any other group.”⁵³ Mitchell signaled their ethnic difference through concerns over family size and dislocation: “despite the fact that 25% are divorced, separated, or living together unmarried. They contain the highest fraction of minorities—13 percent are of Hispanic origin and 21 percent are black.”⁵⁴ In Mitchell’s construction, Sustainers sought toward financial security through both formal and informal work that crossed the line between legal and illegal. More often than not, they were defined by the “[t]he lone mother, divorced, or separated, with several children” struggling to keep families going on minimum wage in service economy labor.⁵⁵ Whereas Survivors lived lives resignation, Mitchell defined Sustainers by their rage: “angry, distrustful, rebellious, anxious, combative people who often feel left out of things” and remain alienated by larger tracks of advancement.⁵⁶ In drawing together family dissolution, illegal activity, and the frustration that Sustainers faced, Mitchell’s marketing work participated in the larger cultural production of abject poverty as criminal. It repurposed these concerns for marketing, suggesting merchandisers targeted these communities with deals and sales that provided them with an opportunity to ‘beat’ the system.

⁵³ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 7.

⁵⁴ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 7.

⁵⁵ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 7.

⁵⁶ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 7.

Above the Needs-Driven types, the VALS map bifurcated into the Inner-Directed and Outer-Directed personality categories, both drawn from *The Lonely Crowd*. These composites served as contrast against the countercultural position of VALS's higher-order personalities. Outer-Directed types, such as Roger, the portrait which opened this chapter, included the bulk of Americans, many of which were in search of self-affirmation from external sources. VALS framed these consumers as materialistic and highly driven. The Inner-Directed personalities, on the other hand, were the "I-Am-Me," "The Experimentals," and the "Societally Conscious." Demographically, Mitchell suggested these were typically the children of Outer-Directed personalities and born in the post-war years. This demographic data was important to the VALS study, as it framed inner-direction as the next 'generational' step in the movement away from the outer-directed personalities which Reisman had argued emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. Mitchell claimed that these consumers had become disillusioned with the spoils of post-war affluence. Rather than enfranchising, home lives of material abundance had been experienced as isolating and cold. As they grew up, "I-Am-Me's" either regressed to Outer-Directed positions or became "Experimentals," idealists willing to engage in alternative ways of living, often brought about in a desire to seek contrast with their parents' outer-directed social lives.

The Integrateds, the consumer types which stood atop of the VALS schema, were the product of Mitchell's ideological commitments. With the Integrateds, Mitchell departed from the statistical truth claims that typically defined psychographics, admitting he had created this type as a representation of a consumer who had achieved their vision of self-actualization. Each of the other nine 'types' were top-down creations that VALS slotted data into, but the Integrateds had no information available. Mitchell suggested this was because of their temperate nature.

Despite this, Mitchell invited readers to imagine the type through a narrative portrait titled “Tree Sammath, the Builder.” The narrative served a crucial purpose in the enforcing the VALS schema: it framed the values articulated in voluntary simplicity as the pinnacle of human potential in the closing decades of the twentieth century. In the portrait Sammath is a handsome white man who struggles to make sense of the vivid dreams and ennui that haunt his otherwise idyllic life. He is “bearded, blond, well educated,” with “every social grace,” and surrounded by those who admire his sense of self. His friends and family are shocked when word gets out he is undergoing therapy. Sammath’s professional work “no longer held his interest,” and a “floating anxiety” now “all too often arose in him” when he tried to articulate his frustrations.

Sammath’s troubles are resolved not with consumption, but through the arrival of a young woman named Joanie. In the narrative, Joanie grounds Sammath’s serious introspection. She is not a fleshed-out character herself, but a lens through which Sammath can begin to see himself. With her he becomes “more relaxed, more aware as the moment came and blossomed, more gentle, more loving, more full of sense that the tide pool and the farthest nebula move to the same forces.”⁵⁷ The portrait ends on just such a note. On a Spring weekend, Sammath and Joanne are driving through hills and meadows, a quintessential scene of American car culture. As they drive, Joanie turns to Sammath and identifies both the internal and external orientations in his personality alongside a third, emergent one she has recently noticed: “Maybe I shouldn’t say this, but I think there are three parts of you. There is the sensible, logical, efficient part. There is the ambitious part that wants to get ahead. You use those parts now. And then there’s the softer, poetic, human part. That’s the new part of you. That’s the part I love best.”⁵⁸ Taken aback by

⁵⁷ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 148-150.

⁵⁸ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 148-150.

Joannie's read, Sammath responds with a confession that he wants "to be a builder": someone who creates. His turn to creative self-expression signals that he has achieved integration.

Sammath's narrative does not advise merchandisers or marketers on how to approach these consumers in any explicit way—and this makes sense, after all, the VALS algorithm could not discern such a type. If anything, Sammath's fundamental uninterest in the material and his commitment to 'building' outside the confines of the market are, in a way, a self-congratulatory conclusion to the VALS program, one which suggests the very men who forwarded the program are themselves examples of the pinnacle of human development in the 1980s.⁵⁹

Even as VALS was presented as social criticism, the text nonetheless advised merchandisers (and managers) on how to motivate each of the nine personalities. In a chapter titled "Mechanisms of Change," Mitchell elaborated upon how each of these types could be appealed to as they moved through different positions on the VALS hierarchy. Rather than producing cultural content for a specific group's contemporary desires, for example, marketers could instead pre-emptively design products that would speak to this segment as they began to age out of their current position and into another one. "Instead of focusing almost exclusively on seeking to capture emerging I-Am-Me tastes," Mitchell suggested, "why not pay more attention to the shifting tastes of today's I-Am-Me market?"⁶⁰ Planning for certain psychographic types to move into different segments later in life meant developing product cycles that attended to the entirety of a consumer's movements through these personalities. This emphasis on future change animated VALS' promise of control. Of course, this also meant merchandiser's maintaining their yearly 12,000.00 subscription for the program as well.

⁵⁹ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 148-150.

⁶⁰ Of course, Mitchell's emphasis on future shifts were particular to certain segments. For the sustainers or survivors such as "Mrs. Washington," there was little mobility at all. Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 148-150.

Beyond planning for change, Mitchell argued that psychographic profiling allowed an advertiser to deploy more effective strategies in their creative copy, tying ad claims to the emotional valences of a particular market segment. One such example was a program undertaken for Merrill Lynch in the early 1980s targeting “Achievers,” or the Rogers of the world. In the early 1980s, Merrill Lynch’s Bull logo was designed to invoke a “bull market,” with one line of commercials featuring “a thundering herd of bulls” making their way down an empty downtown street. This advertisement celebrated market growth but failed to recognize the conceit of Achievers as externally motivated, self-centered subjects who often entered finance interested only in their own success and the admiration of others. The VALS program was used to design a number of changes that would speak to the Achiever’s unmet needs. First, advertisers incorporated the language of “a breed apart” into the campaign, suggesting Merrill Lynch customers were distinct from other financial actors. And second, they replaced what Mitchell called “the Belonger symbol of a thundering herd” with a single, solitary bull. Using VALS data, advertisers developed a number of ‘A Breed Apart’ spots running with this theme: “There was a bull sheltered in a cave from financial storms; the bull pawing through the snow for grass in hard times; the bull in good times crossing a babbling river to reach the rich pastures on the other isle; the bull threading a maze, stalking through a china shop, uncovering a needle in a haystack, and many others.” These advertisements were designed to explicitly appeal to the “Roger” consumer types: the image of a single solitary Bull navigating intricate and seemingly insurmountable tasks spoke to the desire of these high roller figures on an affective level.⁶¹

VALS found massive reception well beyond market research. It quickly became one the most widely-adopted psychographic profiling system in use in the 1980s. In San Antonio, Ray

⁶¹ Mitchell, *Nine American Lifestyles*, 169.

Ellison homes used VALS to build homes tailored to specific categories. “‘Achiever’ women,” for example, “prefer small kitchens that are efficient and easy to clean, although they don’t mind cleaning big, luxurious washrooms” whereas “‘Belongers’ like big kitchens that are the center of family activities.”⁶² VALS had even made its way into the political organizing of certain organizations: “The United Farm Workers even uses VALS” reported one journalist for *The Washington Post* in the late 1980s “[a]t its headquarters in Keene, Calif., David Martinez uses the typology to target direct mailings and phone calls for a new national grape boycott.”⁶³ In applying VALS modeling to specific zip codes, the UFW could target those personality types which the psychographic model suggested were more amiable to their cause. The marketing program was taken up by *Newsweek* and *The New York Times*, by Volvo and by Mitsubishi as well. In 1984, *National Geographic* magazine ran an advertising campaign in the *New York Times* promoting the conclusions that VALS had come to regarding their own readers. (Figure 2) The advertisement’s headline read “THE NATIONAL PSYCHOGRAPHIC,” above a block of text which argued “According to VALS, 80% of our readers are in the three most desirable groups—Achievers, Societally Conscious, and Belongers.”⁶⁴ The personalities were stand-ins for class and race, signaling a specific kind of reader without saying as much. What’s more, that *National Geographic* purchased an advertisement celebrating its VALS categories in the *New York Times* is a reminder of the extent to which VALS categories had come to define how marketers thought about segments in the United States.

⁶² Brad Edmondson, “Who You Are Is What You Buy,” *The Washington Post*, October 26, 1986.

⁶³ Brad Edmondson, “Who You Are Is What You Buy.”

⁶⁴ Philip H. Dougherty, “Advertising Column: National Geographic Campaign,” *The New York Times*, March 23, 1984, D14.

THE NATIONAL PSYCHOGRAPHIC

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MARCH 1984	CHINATIGERS PEOPLE LASER HOLOGRAMS CALGARY MICHIGAN
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC DECEMBER 1983	EROSYR PZAVEM MT. CRYM EASTY BALCONY COAST COCK-OF-THE-ROCK
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SEPTEMBER 1983	SATELLITES SPACELAS ALEUTIANS NAMB DESERT TULSA OLD POST OFFICE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAY 1983	BROOKLYN BRIDGE BROOKLYN ETHIOPIA MARY ROSE TASMANIA ROADRUNNER
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FEBRUARY 1983	ARCTIC ALGORA TO LARLAND JEROMEARTY SOVIET ARCTIC HUNGARY RESIST
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC OCTOBER 1982	THE CHIP HELICON VALLEY PENE DAVID'S DEER THAILAND PERILOUS
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FEBRUARY 1981	WEST DENVER TEXAS COAST CHINA BAY MICHIGAN VIRGINIA LIECHTENSTEIN
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JANUARY 1981	SHOOT BY HELICOPTER ANCIENT ARRIEL NEW ARCHAIC POLAND WILCOX
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SEPTEMBER 1980	MIDDLE EAST SAUDI ARABIA HURRICANES MADAWASKA KELPLIFE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC OCTOBER 1979	BRITISH ISLES ENGLAND GREAT DIVIDE FIRE OF OPTIC GULCH WALKERS SEVILAS
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JUNE 1979	LOFT SETTLEMENTS REEXCHANGE LONG-SUCCESS WOMEN MICHIGAN SOCIETY H. DEAFONE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC APRIL 1979	FOOTPRINTS NUCLEAR POWER INDIANS DOLPHINS WHALES PRAGUE NORTH BRIDGE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JUNE 1978	PENNSYLVANIA GLASS WRECK BURGUNDY AIR SPACE MUSEUM DRAGONI ARMENIANS
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MARCH 1978	SPAIN LADARH EYES OF SCIENCE BIPOCAL FISH ARKANSAS GLEDE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC DECEMBER 1977	THE NEW WORLD TERENDIAN WEATHER INLAND SEA BOWERBIRD
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SEPTEMBER 1976	INDIA WELIFEE NAURI NEW BIOLOGY CALIFORNIA DELTA
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC APRIL 1976	HAWAII ROBERTS BOY CANOE ISLES MARSH ARAB SAN ANTONIO DINGLE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC DECEMBER 1975	WORLD OF THE MAYA WIND POWER VIKON RAFTTRIP AMANA COLOMBIA
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAY 1975	PROJECT FAMOUS AERODROMES RHODESIA BARBONS PROVINCE MACKA LINES
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JANUARY 1974	GOLD PINE BARBERS BIRNONG NEWFOUNDLAND FIREPLATING BEKON COMET
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FEBRUARY 1973	MARS AUSTRALIAS TOP END OMAN JOURNEY TO MARS THE MEXIC
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MARCH 1972	ICE AGE ALASKA/AMERICA TUNDRA BRITISH COLUMBIA HEADHUNTERS CIRCU
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FEBRUARY 1972	AFRICAN WILDLIFE MARYLAND ANGLIO U S E ASIA KAREN'S GLIDES
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC OCTOBER 1971	ARCTIC DEAN DANCES NORTH SLOPE OTTERS HONG KONG CORDEAS
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JULY 1971	NORWAY BOLDNESS CANYONLANDS BERSUDA AMA DIVERS APOLLO 14
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC NOVEMBER 1970	COMPUTERS ARHENATEN CEAKS FIC WAMP GANTOK PRANIAS ATLAS
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SEPTEMBER 1970	NEW MEXICO BLUE HOLES KIBBITZ INDIAN CORRA FAEBRO ISLANDS
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC DECEMBER 1969	SPACE RECORD APOLLO 11 TURKISH COAST HORN BILLS CHARTERS
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAY 1969	APOLLO 8 KUWAIT GRAND CANYON GRUNION ABU SIMBEL
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAY 1968	FINLAND VULTURES CASCABLE GOLD MINE ILE DE LA CITE FLOWER SEEDS
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC NOVEMBER 1967	AUSTRALIA YELLOWSTONE TV BUENOS AIRES SAHARA FARTH ANTARCTIC
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAY 1967	EASTERN CANADA HOGWAM INDIANS MAGNETIC DATING MICHIGONIA
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FEBRUARY 1966	BOLIVIA ST. AUGUSTINE ARCTI PRINGS COMET FARKER VIRT NAM
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JANUARY 1965	VIRT NAM TREASURES PIGMAN WELDON PRESIDENTS PART II ASTRONAUTS
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AUGUST 1964	TARZAN IN EUROPE MOZAMBIQUE NORTHERN IRELAND PERUVIAN WILDERNESS

What kind of person reads National Geographic? A look at the subjects we cover will give you a good insight: our readers are people who are interested in subjects as diverse as holography and Mount St. Helens, Silicon Valley and the Soviet Arctic, bioluminescence and the Brooklyn Bridge, fig wasps and fiber optics.

They are people who want to learn about new things—the curious, the surprising, the knowledge seekers. People who keep up with the changing world as it is changing. They are receptive to new ideas in science, technology—and consumer products and services.

It stands to reason that someone who has read "The Chip" or our definitive article on computer technology is a prime prospect not only for a personal computer, but for a VCR, a microwave oven, or an advanced TV set or stereo system. It makes sense that a reader who has been fascinated by a color essay on Colorado or Canada is in the right mind-set for a new camera, a new car, or airline tickets. And that a reader of articles about innovations such as holograms and laser research is receptive to new products of all sorts.

That's what our instincts tell us. And three sets of psychographic facts and figures say the same thing. According to VALS, 80% of our readers are in the three most desirable groups—Achievers, Socially Conscious, and Belongers. Then there's the testimony of advertisers: 28% of the ads in the Geographic are direct-response oriented—and the majority of these advertisers have advertised in the Geographic for eleven years or more. And finally the most recent Executive Career Survey shows 40% of the high-level executives interviewed selected National Geographic as their favorite of all magazines.

35,000,000 people throughout the world read National Geographic every month. Their loyalty is our renewal rate of 83%, highest of any magazine. Our National Demographics show that these readers are well-educated, affluent, and influential. Our National Psychographics show that they respect National Geographic, they respond to it, they trust it. And they believe it.

THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

revealing the world as it changes

(Figure 2: "The National Psychographic" *New York Times*, May 2nd, 1984, A28)

The VALS typology became so popular that it even made its way into cultural studies textbooks instructing students on the construction of stereotype. "Stereotypes are commonly thought of as having two outstanding characteristics—they are usually negative and they most often categorize a cultural sub-group which is somehow 'different' from the rest of us."⁶⁵ The VALS typology undercut both of these assumptions, suggested the textbook authors: Arnold Mitchell "counters both of these preconceptions in the following essay in which he defines and

⁶⁵ Jack Nachbar, John H. Nachbar, and Kevin Lausé, *Popular Culture: An Introductory Text* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 245

discusses nine stereotypes which are either neutral or positive in the traits they assign and are directed toward classifying mass society as a whole rather than its powerless fringe.”⁶⁶ Drawing upon the first chapter of *The Nine American Lifestyles*, the authors summarized Mitchell’s claims: “‘The Vals Typology’ [sic] stereotypes all of us and does so with a statistical rigor which is more purely descriptive—more ‘truthful’ (although not completely so) than we would have thought possible.”⁶⁷ Of course, the authors were incorrect. As the “Integrateds” position suggests, the VALS typology was not itself statistically rigorous—it was applied to survey data after the fact. But even so, the circulation of the typology in arenas far beyond marketing is telling. In its broad application, VALS operated less as a marketing regime and more as a tool for organizing and intuiting the constituent nature of publics, be they union workers and their advocates or *National Geographic* readers.

Even with widespread adoption across a number of different institutional contexts, many advertising agencies remained internally suspect of VALS predicative capacity as a total marketing system or way of seeing. Critics often criticized VALS for reifying even as it proclaimed the power to segment. In 1989 one vice president of consumer behavior at J. Walter Thompson warned that the system simply reproduced the very mass market it claimed to segment. For example, mainstream “Belongers” constituted 38% of the U.S. population, meaning that “[f]or the vast majority of marketing problems we deal with, VALS [has] not been useful or actionable[,] because the vast majority of Americans all fell within a single segment.”⁶⁸ This was further complicated by the fact that more specialized marketing experts, such as Caroline Jones or Estelle Ellis, often argued that consumer markets cut across these groups. Buyers for a

⁶⁶ Nachbar, Nachbar, and Lausé, *Popular Culture: An Introductory Text*, 245.

⁶⁷ Nachbar, Nachbar, and Lausé, *Popular Culture: An Introductory Text*, 245.

⁶⁸ Judith Graham, “New VALS-2 Takes Psychological Route” *Advertising Age*, February 13, 1989, 24.

particular brand rarely landed within VALS “neat groups, nor were the categories readily or cleanly correlated with buying behavior.”⁶⁹

While the study claimed to segment the entirety of the United States, such a scale cut both ways. It lent glossy headlines to the technique, but it also meant that their groupings were necessarily diffuse. They were “made up of people who have *some* tendency to be similar, but in a variety of ways that are likely to have relatively little relevance” to any specific product market.⁷⁰ Such segmentation studies, suggested one 1987 J. Walter Thompson market research manual “are often very attractive in concept (and often very attractively presented), but it is most unusual for broad personality or lifestyle characteristics to be the major factor in so relatively trivial a matter as choice between brands in a market: it is more often a matter of mild tendencies.”⁷¹ While internal, such a critique offered a devastating indictment of psychographic modeling: it suggested weak correlations were the basis of such programs, throwing into questions the coherence of the nine categories. Indeed, as early as 1982, J. Walter Thompson had assessed the VALS system for adoption across the massive advertising agency, determining that “consumer lifestyle trend reports” such as VALS “offer basic insights into the nature of consumer attitudes and behavior” and could “be helpful in providing a common ‘language’ for discussing consumer motivations and trends,” but remained “unproven in terms of its positive marketing contribution.”⁷² What value it did have stemmed from its production of consumer types—portraits like “Mrs. Washington’s New Home,” which were highly diffuse, highly

⁶⁹ Judith Graham, “New VALS-2 Takes Psychological Route,” *Advertising Age*, February 13, 1989, 24.

⁷⁰ J. Walter Thompson/Chicago, “Advertising Planning Methods: JWT Manual of Tools of the Trade for Advertising Planners,” 1987, 100.

⁷¹ J. Walter Thompson/Chicago, “Advertising Planning Methods,” 1987, 151-152.

⁷² J. Walter Thompson/Chicago, “An overview of the Research & Planning,” Department Research and Planning Seminar Reference Book, April 1982, Appendix IV and V.

racialized tropes—which people recognized well beyond the scope of market research. VALS might have been presented as truth to a reading public and major merchandisers, but other market research experts were deeply suspect. They incorporated the language of psychographic research into their approach, but rarely did programs like VALS fully replace marketing by other means.

Both in *The Nine American Lifestyles* and elsewhere, Mitchell responded to these critiques by looking towards more advanced models of segmentation. For SRI, he suggested, VALS was only the first step in the creation of a digital segmentation model that could interpolate the entirety of the United States. In the study, he cautioned that “typology is a fun game to play [...but] it has its dangers [...] all 160 million American adults cannot be pigeonholed into nine categories. The splendid truth is that we would need 160 million categories to be truly representative.”⁷³ He conceded that his team was under “no illusions that our nine are the only nine (or only nine exist)” and that to achieve the nine types, they had “winnowed and sifted and explored and invented all kinds of approaches.”⁷⁴ But even so, the study argued that VALS was “a coherent and useful perspective from which to view ourselves, others, and events.”⁷⁵ Yet these concessions meant little if the study itself proclaimed nine lifestyles and promised to reveal their future. If anything, such admissions recognized the role of interpretation in constructing these categories, undercutting the statistical truth claims which programs like VALS rested upon.

VALS’s extensive reach granted the marketing program significant cultural and social power in the 1980s as a way of thinking about the American public. The program well-exceeded

⁷³ Arnold Mitchell, *The Nine American Lifestyles*, 154.

⁷⁴ Arnold Mitchell, *The Nine American Lifestyles*, 154.

⁷⁵ Arnold Mitchell, *The Nine American Lifestyles*, 154.

that of its contemporary marketing peers. As Joseph Atlas suggested in his review of the technique in 1984, marketers thought of it as “more than a market-research outfit; it’s a credo, an aesthetic, a way of interpreting contemporary life [...]”⁷⁶ In *The Nine American Lifestyles*, Mitchell drew together melodrama, social criticism, and quantitative survey techniques to present VALS as a kind of objective science of segmentation: a fully rationalized marketing and advertising program capable not merely of revealing who American consumers were, but monitoring them as they changed as they change over time. While this promise was born out of its grounding in statistics and data science, even psychographics remained indebted to the same kinds of marketing techniques that previous marketers had used.

Conclusion: “Measuring Minds in the 1990s.”

In the early 1990s, large-scale psychographic profiling techniques like SRI’s VALS were prohibitively expensive for many smaller marketing organizations. However, even if it was inaccessible, the language of psychographic profiling nonetheless had profound and enduring effects on how late-twentieth century marketing professionals did their work. “The legacy of lifestyle has been positive,” suggested Melody Douglas-Tate, research division head at Leo Burnett in a discussion of VALS, “it led us to study behavior. Since emotions drive brand choice, it led us to study emotions directly.”⁷⁷ In marketing’s drive for the always-already new, many early 1990s market researchers turned to a variety of more affordable means to measure affect and feeling in the pursuit of constructing consumer personality types like VALS. These would be

⁷⁶ James Atlas, “Beyond Demographics,” *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1984, 50.

⁷⁷ Rebecca Pirrto, “Measuring Minds in the 1990s,” *American Demographics*, December 1990, 32.

combined with larger, national psychographic models to provide market-specific data. Smaller firms would take up focus groups, new kinds of thematic apperceptive techniques, one-on-one interviews, and the hiring of a slew of anthropologists to interrogate where brands and their associated product lines ‘fit’ in American culture. “Measuring minds in the 1990s,” as one article put it, looked very much like it had in the 1950s.⁷⁸

This chapter has illustrated the ways in which psychographic profiling claimed new reach, scale, and power for marketing professionals during the closing decades of the twentieth century. The growth in computational power and the use of publicly available private data in the 1960s and 1970s allowed psychographic marketing firms to claim their quantifications were, in essence, objective depictions of American life. At Stanford Research, these techniques were combined with a social criticism tradition to argue that their VALS marketing regime offered more than mere documentation of American consumer lifestyles. They argued that it had a predictive power that could chart the changing nature of American life in the transition from an industrial, outer-directed society to one defined by their vision of voluntary simplicity.

While its boosters celebrated psychographic profiling for moving the field “beyond demographics,” the practice was in fact anything but. For example, in *The Nine American Lifestyles*, Arnold Mitchell presented each of VALS nine personality types through melodramatic narratives that turned on suffering, pathos, and desire. These narratives drew upon and reified enduring racist tropes, erasing the structural role of social forces like race and class by attributing a portrait’s situation to the nature of the personality it represented. Programs like VALS provided merchandisers with a new language of segmenting the market, one that adhered to the race, class, and gender-based divisions they had used for decades.

⁷⁸ Pirrto, “Measuring Minds in the 1990s,” *American Demographics*, 34.

While scale lent psychographic profiling techniques power, it also instilled new kinds of anxieties and concerns in the American public.⁷⁹ As marketing professional amassed more and more data, who would benefit and who would lose out? Throughout the 1970s and 1980s a growing number of critics raised alarms over corporate surveillance, focusing on the sheer amount of personalized advertising materials which now arrived at their door.⁸⁰ For African American communities, however, the result of segmentation looked decidedly different than the now-familiar news headlines about junk mail and spam. These concerns and the contestations which emerged out of them are the topic of the final chapter of this dissertation

⁷⁹ Joseph Turow, *Breaking Up America: Advertisers and the New Media World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); "Segmenting, Signaling and Tailoring: Probing the Dark Side of Target Marketing," in *Critical Studies in Media Commercialism*, ed. Robin Andersen and Lance Strate (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 239-249; and *Niche Envy: Marketing Discrimination in the Digital Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

⁸⁰ Bryant Robey, "The 1990 Census: A View from 1984," *American Demographics*, July 1984, 22-26, 46-47.

Chapter 6: How Uptown Went Down in Flames: Uptown Cigarettes and the Target Marketing Crisis

On the first Sunday of April 1990, the Reverend Calvin Butts led his parishioners out of Abyssinian Church and into the streets of Harlem, New York. Each Sunday that Spring after Butts finished a sermon condemning Big Tobacco for targeting their community, Abyssinian parishioners would whitewash local billboards featuring tobacco advertisements. In response to the whitewashing, the Association of National Advertisers pressed New York City Mayor David Dinkins to arrest the parishioners for vandalism. There was little Dinkins could do, however. In New York, a misdemeanor arrest required a complaint and no billboard owner or advertiser had filled one. No firms were willing to risk the damage to their public image. Instead, billboard and alcohol companies conceded to the community. Their owners quickly offered up their signage as community announcement spaces instead.¹ The Abyssinian action led Sale Point Posters, which saw 5 of its 250 billboards in Harlem painted over, to refund \$2,500 in advertising to clients and lose \$86,000 in contracts cancelled. One liquor importer, Schieffelin & Somerset, which also saw ads whitewashed in the action, announced that it would no longer advertise on billboards in any low-income neighborhoods.²

Reverend Butts, having only recently assumed his position as the pastor of Abyssinian, used the pulpit to critique the over-saturation of billboard advertising in Harlem.³ His and his

¹ Stephanie Strom, "Billboard Owners Switching, Not Fighting," *New York Times*, April 4, 1990, B1, cont. on B4.

² Strom, "Billboard Owners Switching, Not Fighting," *New York Times*, April 4, 1990, B1, cont. on B4.

³ Joel Dreyfus, "Harlem's Ardent Voice" *New York Times*, January 20, 1991. Indeed, billboard advertising was an issue across the urban United States. In 1990, a Baltimore survey found 76% of billboards in black communities featured tobacco products while white neighborhoods had both less billboards and less tobacco advertisements overall, sitting at 20%. See Michael Quinn, "Don't Aim that

parishioners actions carried on a tradition of media criticism that CORE had also participated in. The protestors refused tobacco and alcohol advertisements, arguing that their community—not billboard companies, marketing firms, or advertising agencies—should control which kinds of advertisements appeared in their neighborhoods.

The campaign was a direct response to a new line of menthol cigarette from R.J. Reynolds-Nabisco, the snack and tobacco conglomerate responsible for Chips Ahoy! Cookies and Newport, Camel, and Pall Mall cigarettes. Six months earlier in December 1989, RJR-Nabisco had announced Uptown cigarettes, a sleek new menthol brand explicitly designed to target African American consumers. Uptown would be introduced in a six-month trial market run in downtown Philadelphia the following February. Philadelphia-area protesters condemned the brand, arguing that Uptown was both racist and exploitive as the brand was built to aggressively target addictive tobacco products at black youth. Community organizations across Philadelphia banded together to form the Uptown Coalition, countering the tobacco corporation's public relations machine and spurring Health and Human Services Secretary, Louis Sullivan, to pen a public letter condemning the brand. Within weeks, the Coalition saw their goal realized. Reynolds cancelled the Uptown test market and shelved the brand. In the months that followed, however, Butts' Harlem-based protests began. Uptown's dramatic failure became a catalyst for a new, very public conversation over the uneven stakes of market segmentation in the early 1990s.

This chapter examines the creation of the Uptown cigarette brand, its dramatic downfall, and the public debates over market segmentation which followed. First, I argue that RJR-

Pack at Us," *Time*, January 29, 1990, p. 60. Similar actions took place across the United States throughout the early 1990s, including on Chicago's South Side, where Henry McNeil Brown Jr., a court reporter, worked under the alias "Mandrake," whitewashing billboards advertising tobacco and alcohol as well. "Fighting Ads in the Inner City: A Grass-Roots Battle Against 'Minority Marketing' *Newsweek*, February 8, 1990, 18; Kenan Heise, "Henry McNeil Brown, 61, Activist", *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 1996.

Nabisco's consumer profile for Uptown was a market fantasy of pathological blackness. It drew together psychographics and other forms of market research to frame economic precarity, downward mobility, and social alienation as commercial opportunities for the tobacco and confection giant. The composite's downward mobility was precisely its appeal to RJR-Nabisco. Operating at the intersection of branding and addiction, one executive charged with developing Uptown described the new cigarette's young black male market as "an annuity, paying dividends far into the future due to brand loyalty."⁴

Second, I argue that the demise of Uptown occasioned a significant shift in how market segmentation was thought about in U.S. public culture. When RJR-Nabisco publicly named Uptown as a cigarette brand for black consumers during its launch, Philadelphia-area community activists rejected it. They drew upon a history of community organizing in the city to join with anti-tobacco associations. They seized upon the Uptown brand, naming it as a racist and classist marketing strategy undertaken by Big Tobacco to exploit working-class young black men who lived in the inner-city. The addictive nature of tobacco and the well-known ways in which it exacerbated health inequities between the general population and African Americans enabled community activists to frame Uptown, and therefore market segmentation, as a form "target marketing" designed to amplify these inequities. This shift in language to "targeting" laid bare the ways segmentation unevenly distributed the benefits of a consumer society. What's more, it forced marketers, advertisers, and merchandisers alike to openly discuss the techniques they used to construct markets.⁵

⁴ WP Whitlatch, JD Weber, EC Leary, LK Breininger, "MRD Research Proposal, brand Management for Project Delta: Exploratory Focus Groups and In-Depth Interviews", September 19, 1989. RJ Reynolds Collection. Accessed January 28, 2018. <https://www.industrydocumentslibrary.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/tzck0081>.

⁵ Vance Packard, *The Naked Society* (New York, 1964); "If You've Got A Name and an Address, You're on Somebody's List" *News Front*, January 1970, J. Walter Thompson Chicago Information Center Flash,

Third and finally, I examine the target marketing ‘crisis’ which followed Uptown. The debate over targeting looked decidedly different from Harlem’s Lennox Avenue than it did on Manhattan’s Madison Avenue. While Reverend Butts called for community control, the African American advertising and marketing executive Caroline Jones proposed a different argument about the failure of Uptown. Jones argued that targeting was not the problem. Rather, in pieces for *Penthouse*, *Adweek*, and elsewhere, Jones claimed that Uptown failed because African American communities had become frustrated by the lack of advertisements for everyday goods. Her own market research suggested that even when merchandisers had a strong share of black consumers for a specific product, they sought white consumers anyways. In her estimation, more advertising, not less, would solve the concerns the Uptown protestors raised.

Uptown and the target marketing crisis went as far as Congress, where executives from some of the largest national advertising and marketing associations in the United States would be forced to defend their practices against the risk of possible regulation. This chapters demonstrates how across news media, in the streets of Philadelphia and New York, and even in Congress, protestors succeeded in bringing into public life the race work that segmented marketing and advertising strategies performed. Their protests showed, in no uncertain terms, how marketing served to reproduce and exacerbate inequalities in American society.

Advertising Tobacco to the Black Consumer

February 13, 1970. J Walter Thompson Collection, Rubinstein Library, Duke University. On consumer surveillance in the 1980s, see Josh Lauer, *Creditworthy: A History of Consumer Surveillance in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 242-269; on direct mail marketing and consumer data collection see Andrew N. Case, “‘The Solid Gold Mailbox’: Direct Mail and the Changing Nature of Buying and Selling in the Postwar United States,” *History of Retailing and Consumption* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2015): 28–46.

During the second half of the twentieth century, tobacco became the heavyweight of the advertising and marketing industry. Their advertising dollars and the ability to direct them to some firms and not others rendered them immensely influential. In this section, I follow a series of critical market research studies which first began to delineate the 'ethnic' consumer market for tobacco firms. I address the political manoeuvring that gave them particularly impressive sway in the black periodical market. And finally, I attend to the formation of RJR-Nabisco in the mid-1980s. The corporate conglomerate used its massive scale to pressure major advertising and marketing industry actors into refusing to work with anti-smoking groups or the government on anti-smoking media campaigns.

While African Americans had defined the labor force of American tobacco for much of the twentieth century, it was only in the years after the Second World War that such workers were recognized as a viable tobacco market in the United States. During the Second World War R.J. Reynolds became the first tobacco company to advertise in the black press, breaking a long-held agreement between major U.S. tobacco corporations to not spend ad dollars on African American mediums.⁶ This decision was spurred by a number of factors, including a growing number of marketers who had begun to pitch black consumers to American merchandisers. The black marketer David J. Sullivan, for example, was one of the first to forward studies that emphasized the consuming power of African Americans in the United States.

In 1969, Reynolds conducted its first study on ethnic markets, defined as African Americans, Jewish people, and Latino consumers.⁷ The study drew upon work from a number of market research and advertising agencies which specialized in these markets, including the African American advertising firm D. Parke Gibson and Associates and the Jewish marketing

⁶ V.J. Dallaire, "U.S. Negro growing market growing target for advertisers" *Printers Ink*, 252 (1955): 52–62.

⁷ Gerhrmann Holland, "A Study of Ethnic Markets," September 1969, Joe Camel Collection. Accessed online February 15, 2019, <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/rnvv0095>

and advertising consultancy, Joseph Jacobs Associates. In an admission of the slippery nature of marketing data deployed to construct consumer types, the author of the report noted that “quantitatively, this presentation is not intended to represent the actual situation. The accuracy of available standardized data on these groups is hampered by the shortcomings of both research availability and measurement methodology, as well as by obsolescence.”⁸ As with all marketing, the report gained value when it was put to work to construct a consumer type.

The study examined how ethnic communities navigated a media economy defined by a powerful investment in whiteness. It argued that advertising images and campaigns developed by Reynolds for such communities would have to be tailored to mediums which spoke to these consumers in some substantive, meaningful way. In an admission of the race logic of American commercial print media, radio and television, the author argued that “most media basically reflect the interests, desires, and aspirations of their majority audience, which is largely middle-class white. Classification of these media as ‘white-oriented,’ would be far more accurate and functional than their more frequent classification as ‘general media.’”⁹ Indeed, to get the most bang for their buck out of ethnic consumer markets, the study argued that Reynolds ought advertise in mediums which allowed ethnic consumers and consumers of color to identify in the same manner as white consumers did with the mass market. “The consensus of opinion today is that if brand awareness is the primary advertising objective,” the report argued, “then national advertising does generally reach this audience in proportion to their place in the total population [...] However, if the key objective is to sell more of Product A to more negroes, then they must be communicated with, not merely reached.”¹⁰ For black consumers across the United States, the

⁸ Holland, “A Study of Ethnic Markets,” September 1969.

⁹ Holland, “A Study of Ethnic Markets,” September 1969.

¹⁰ Holland, “A Study of Ethnic Markets,” September 1969. Emphasis original.

study insisted that magazine and radio markets would be the ideal mediums for speaking meaningfully to such consumers.

In the same year that Reynolds internally published their study of ethnic markets prizing magazines and radio as the best mediums for capturing black consumers, the federal government had begun taking active steps to regulate tobacco advertisements. In 1967 a FCC ruling known as the “fairness doctrine” determined that for every three tobacco advertisements, an anti-smoking PSA would have to be produced and aired. In response, Joseph F. Cullman III, then president of Philip Morris and the Chairman of the coordinated lobbyist group, the Tobacco Institute, committed to Congress that his firm would exit television and radio advertising by 1971. In doing so, the tobacco industry gave up television and radio, but also successfully ended the “fairness doctrine” decision that forced the industry to pay for anti-smoking PSAs. With the passage of the Public Health Cigarette Smoking Act in 1970, tobacco advertising was effectively banned on both mediums one day into the new year, on January 2, 1971.¹¹

With television and radio out of the picture, tobacco advertising dollars began flowing into other mediums. One *Newsweek* report on the ban suggested magazines would be the beneficiaries of industry spending, though they remained “wary about provoking health-warning requirements for cigarette ads—a possibility that has been threatened by the Federal Trade Commission.”¹² Indeed, the *New York Times* had estimated an annual loss of \$500,000 in tobacco ad revenues for 1970 alone when they began requiring cigarette ads to display the same warnings that had been legally mandated to appear on the product cartons. Well aware of shifting public opinion, Philip Morris magazine director Jack Landry attempted to massage the narrative in favor of a restrained approach: “Any huge increase there [in magazine tobacco advertising]

¹¹ “The Last Drag” *Newsweek*, January 4, 1971, 65.

¹² “The Last Drag” *Newsweek*, January 4, 1971, 65.

would lead to drowning the magazines in cigarette advertising[.]” Following suit, his counterpart at R.J. Reynolds agreed: “the magazines don’t want that and it just wouldn’t make good marketing sense.”¹³ The statements from Morris and Reynolds representatives were a deep contrast to what the journalist Thomas Whiteside would later reveal was the intense push to court magazine publishers in the first months of 1971.¹⁴ A March profile by Whiteside in *The New Republic* found that within the first few weeks of that year, magazine revenue for tobacco advertisers had boomed.¹⁵ Indeed, throughout the 1970s, the magazine industry would see a six-fold increase in advertising revenue from tobacco companies.

Among African American magazines and periodicals, those numbers would reach even higher. Big tobacco found a powerful vehicle for commercial marketing in black periodicals like *Ebony*, *Jet*, *Our World*, and *Tan*. While many consumer goods firms began to buy space in *Ebony* between 1956 and 1962, by 1962, tobacco firms had become “an estimated 6.5% of *Ebony*’s 1962 total ad income.”¹⁶ Indeed, by the mid 1960s, all six large tobacco firms in the United States were advertising in *Ebony*, with cigarette advertising in *Ebony* greatly outstripping the number that appeared in *Life*. By the mid-1980s, cigarette advertising alone would constitute nearly 12% of *Essence*’s total advertising income and nearly 3 million in yearly ad-revenue for *Ebony*.¹⁷ Partly, this was a product of *Ebony*’s scale. African American magazines had a much smaller circulation compared to large, nationally-circulated magazines like *Life*, and therefore had a more difficult time either giving up or reducing their tobacco advertising revenue.

¹³ “The Last Drag” *Newsweek*, January 4, 1971, 65.

¹⁴ Thomas Whiteside, *Selling Death* (Liveright: New York, 1971).

¹⁵ Thomas Whiteside, “Selling Death” *The New Republic*, March 27, 1971, 15-17.

¹⁶ Content analysis and ad revenue estimation completed by Richard Polly, Jung Sook Lee, and David Carter-Whitney, “Separate But Not Equal: Racial Segmenting in Cigarette Advertising,” *Journal of Advertising*, Vol 16 (1992): 45-57.

¹⁷ Cooper, R. and B. E. Simmons, “Cigarette Smoking and Ill Health Among Black Americans,” *New York State Journal of Medicine*, 85, (1985): 344-349.

By the 1980s, the sheer scale of tobacco spending in advertising writ large gave these firms enormous power in American media markets. In 1985, when R.J. Reynolds merged with Nabisco, the newly formed RJR-Nabisco conglomerate became the fourth largest advertiser in the United States.¹⁸ Three years later in 1987, the conglomerate flexed its new-found influence when it fired and blacklisted one of the largest advertising agencies in the U.S, Saatchi & Saatchi. The agency had produced a 9-week TV commercial for Northwest Airlines in which passengers applauded the airline's in-flight smoking ban. Since Saatchi and Saatchi did not represent any of RJR-Nabisco's tobacco brands, the conglomerate punished the ad agency instead by cancelling \$80 million dollars' worth of Nabisco-related snack accounts held by the advertising agency and banning them from future work for any of RJR-Nabisco's brands, including Oreo's, Chips Ahoy!, Bubble Yum, CareFree gum, and Life-Savers. While RJR-Nabisco's immediate cancellation of the Saatchi & Saatchi Nabisco accounts made front page news in *Advertising Age*, it was by no means the first corporation to do such a thing. In the mid-1970s, for example, Brown & Williamson had dismissed Grey Advertising from its Viceroy cigarette account within 24 hours of a Grey branch office completing an anti-smoking PSA for a government organization. Tobacco corporations held enormous sway over the cultural and corporate intermediaries which shaped modern American commercial culture, with the power to influence major publishing houses editorial decisions and, if need be, cripple some of the largest advertising agencies operating in the United States.¹⁹

Constructing the Uptown Consumer

¹⁸ Judann Dagnoli, "Reynolds Smoulders; Saatchi dismissal prompts look at all agencies" *Advertising Age*, April 11, 1988, p 1.

¹⁹ Dagnoli, "Reynolds Smoulders," *Advertising Age*, 1.

The targeting of African American consumers with Uptown was not a particularly new phenomenon, nor was it out of line with the strategic marketing approach cigarette corporations had ran with for 30 years. By the 1980s, the vast majority of promotional and special market spending at some of the largest US tobacco firms went to African American community associations and legislative organizations at the state and federal level.²⁰ What was unique at the end of the twentieth century, however, was the growing sense of how marketing operated in American culture and how RJR-Nabisco *named* African Americans as the primary market for the new brand and the specific type of young, black, abject consumer they constructed for the product.

Throughout the 1980s, tobacco corporations were forced to recalibrate their marketing strategies in response to a growing recognition of the dangers of cigarette smoking, what one tobacco company called an ‘emerging temperance movement’ that touched upon not only tobacco, but drunk-driving and other forms of substance abuse as well. In response, the tobacco industry writ large pivoted to new arguments to justify the introduction of new brands like Uptown. Emphasizing the sheer number of tobacco brands, line-extensions, and sub brands on the market, nearly 350 by 1989, firms like RJR-Nabisco argued that new lines like Uptown were not designed to attract new smokers, but rather to claw away ‘market share’ lost to competitors. This public relations spin was built out of the financial data on market share value, noting that in a shrinking cigarette market with hundreds of brands, a 1% market share equated to roughly \$358 million dollars.²¹ These claims made it into countless news items regarding the announcement of new cigarette lines. Internal market research used to develop Uptown suggests

²⁰ “1988 Constituent organization annual report,” January 5, 1989. Philip Morris Records. Accessed January 25, 2018. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/zymj0045>; G.L. Smith, “September Report”, October 11, 1990. Philip Morris Records. Accessed January 25, 2018. <https://www.industrydocumentslibrary.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/sxbw0124>.

²¹ Richard C. Nordine, “Summary of Black / Hispanic Research.” Marketing Development Department, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Incorporated, December 20, 1985, Joe Camel Collection. Accessed January 25, 2018. <https://www.industrydocumentslibrary.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/tmpg0097>.

otherwise. The brand was built on the explicit assumption that it would garner new smokers who fit the specifically young, overwhelming black and male consumer market profile which RJR-Nabisco had constructed for it,

In his July 1988 remarks regarding the first steps toward creating a new youth oriented brand, John T. Wienbrenner, senior vice president for marketing at Reynolds, parroted the typical narrative of post-war market segmentation. “[U]ntil the mid-1950s,” he argued, “smokers were a fairly homogeneous group, with a handful of cigarette brands and styles satisfying the vast majority of smokers [...]”²² In the ensuing 40 years, nearly 300 brands had been produced, “catering to a wide variety of consumer subgroups with unique product desires and perceptions.”²³ Turning on the intersection of brand and identity, Wienbrenner and his research team argued that “definite differences in the product preferences and purchasing patterns of various subgroups of smokers” were increasingly central to consumer choice.²⁴

In his remarks, Wienbrenner summarized decades of research on the low-income black consumer. “[E]xperience,” he argued, “has shown that tailoring our advertising and promotional efforts to specifically meet these consumer preferences gives us our best possible chance for success.”²⁵ Weinbrenner noted that these consumers were relatively concentrated in urban enclaves in states like California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New York. This segmented approach was not only the logical conclusion of two decades of marketing that sought to capitalize on various social movements and subject positions, but also on the heels of the 1980 census, which had indicated that these urban consumers also had access to more and more disposable income. Reynolds’ top brass argued that blacks were therefore a “growth sectors on

²² J.T. Winebrenner, “Special Efforts for Special Markets,” July 21, 1988. RJ Reynolds Records. Accessed January 25, 2018. <https://www.industrydocumentslibrary.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/jtv10094>.

²³ Winebrenner, “Special Efforts for Special Markets,” July 21, 1988.

²⁴ Winebrenner, “Special Efforts for Special Markets,” July 21, 1988.

²⁵ Winebrenner, “Special Efforts for Special Markets,” July 21, 1988.

the U.S. market,” with various experts debating multiple strategies for capturing a highly urban, localized communities.²⁶

Reynolds sought new lines for the black youth market because their own menthol brand, Salem, had suffered a significant loss in market share over the 1980s. Philip Morris’ more popular Newport cigarette had come to hold nearly 40% of the market during that same period, with its growth largely attributed to “its popularity among younger adult Black smokers[.]”²⁷ In response to these losses, Reynolds developed a number of tracking studies to be launched in April 1989 in Chicago, Memphis, and Cleveland.²⁸ These studies followed the purchases of Newport smokers in these cities in order to construct their habits and lifestyle preferences, and in particular, the ways in which smoking fit into their lives and when, or if, they made brand switches.

This data would form the basis of psychographic profiles that animated tastes and preferences for the imagined Uptown consumer. Research summaries prepared for their studies made clear the blue-collar orientation of the youth they counted as potential consumers: “It is important to differentiate young adult smokers from young adults in general. Preppy, ‘good,’ conservative young adults do not smoke and are not our target. Our target is rebellious, lives on the edge, is today rather than future oriented, and is afraid of getting stuck in a rut. Our target is composed of nonconformists who are suspicious of anything vaguely phony.”²⁹

To examine the promise of young ‘rebellious’ adult smokers as a long-term investment vehicle, Reynolds had developed a 1988 research taskforce known as a “Project Delta.” Delta was charged with beginning to construct a set of coherent consumer composites for potential

²⁶ Winebrenner, “Special Efforts for Special Markets,” July 21, 1988.

²⁷ Winebrenner, “Special Efforts for Special Markets,” July 21, 1988.

²⁸ Addendum Proposal: “Inner City Black Tracker,” 1989, RJ Reynolds Records. Accessed January 25, 2018. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/kthk0023>.

²⁹ Gloria Eskridge and Tammie Greene, “Project Delta – Suggestions,” September 14, 1988. RJ Reynolds Records. Accessed January 25, 2018. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/rrkg0087>.

youth brands. The taskforce would set up an exploratory series of focus group and in-depth interviews to better understand the values and interests of young adult smokers, or what they called the “YAS” market.³⁰ Yet the task force research proposal constructed its ideal smoker before any research had been completed. The proposal suggested that these young people were “often motivated by their peers to go along with the crowd. This is witnessed by the fact that younger adult smokers tend to smoke the same product as their friends.”³¹ Crucially, these young consumer were “starting to smoke @ [sic] 10-14 y o.” [sic] Most lived at home with parents and grand parents, were decidedly blue collar, and often worked two jobs.³² They did not attend college and they quickly “increase[d] in [cigarette] usage from ½ pack to 3 packs a day.”³³ One draft sketch argued that 42% of young people who took up smoking never changed brands, meaning these consumers generated long-term returns.³⁴ Over six months, the Delta findings resulted in four potential premium brands targeting the youth market, with Reynolds leadership concluding that the premium brand for the black young adult market, Uptown, was the firm’s best bet. Following Uptown was Dakota, a brand for young mid-western white women which was also green-lit, as well as two brands targeting young white men, Prime and Jolt, both of which the company wanted to examine further before a decision was made.³⁵

³⁰ Eskridge and Greene, “Project Delta – Suggestions,” September 14, 1988.

³¹ Eskridge and Greene, “Project Delta – Suggestions,” September 14, 1988.

³² Gloria Eskridge and Tammie Greene, “Project Delta – Suggestions,” September 14, 1988.

³³ WP Whitlatch, JD Weber, EC Leary, LK Breininger, “MRD Research Proposal, brand Management for Project Delta: Exploratory Focus Groups and In-Depth Interviews”, September 19, 1989. RJ Reynolds Records. Accessed January 28, 2018. <https://www.industrydocumentslibrary.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/tzck0081>.

³⁴ “Project Delta” Notes, RJ Reynolds Records, 1989. Accessed January 23, 2018. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/xppg0087>.

³⁵ J.T. Winebrenner, “RE: Project Delta” March 2, 1989.

In 1988, Reynolds had also hired the market researcher Kelvin Wall as a consultant to advise on positioning their African American brands against others on the market.³⁶ Wall, who had worked with Caroline Jones for the Black Creative Group, offered up a first-person narrative composite for Reynolds to work from. While the composite was developed to explain the appeal of Salem, another Reynolds' brand, the profile offers insights into the constructions of blackness that RJR-Nabisco was mobilizing in their strategy. Much like "Mrs. Washington's New Home," the composite offered readers a specific vision of low-income blackness as abject, but profitable. "I am twenty years old and live in Harlem. Like many of my friends school did not work out for me, so I dropped out. Now work is not working. I cannot get a job that makes me feel good about myself. Downtown doors of success are closed to me."³⁷ Wall's composite was unable to find either social or economic success through school or work and so he looked to consumption to satisfy these needs and his sense of self: "

My special way to getting over is carefully picking the things people will notice about me. My Clothes, my gym shoes, their lacings, my haircut or style, my brand of cigarette or jewelry all say something about me [...] Off the street, I relax by listening to my favorite radio station or records. During basketball season, when I am not playing, I watch it on TV. I'm as good under the basket as on the disco floor.³⁸

Whether or not Wall's composite bore any resemblance to the young men who actually lived in Philadelphia ("disco floor" suggests Wall's insights were perhaps dated by 1988, when the document was submitted to Reynolds), it nonetheless turned on a number of the same signifiers which Reynolds would build into the Uptown brand. The composite also adopted positioning into its narrative, offering Reynolds a sense of the relationships between different brands on the market. "Using Newport is the 'in thing' with my group. It is a brand we pick over Kool. To get

³⁶ Kelvin Wall, "Black Young Adult Smoker Profile," November 28, 1988. RJ Reynolds Records. Unknown. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/gyy10092>.

³⁷ Kelvin Wall, "Black Young Adult Smoker Profile," November 28, 1988.

³⁸ Wall, "Black Young Adult Smoker Profile," November 28, 1988.

me to switch to Salem, you'd have to convince me that Salem smokers have more going for them than I think. They would have to be winner. But winners I could relate to, because they faced the same odds I do."³⁹ This signposting suggested to Reynolds where they might locate Uptown within such a constellation of brands.

The merchandising and marketing plans for Uptown put the Delta findings to work. Uptown was a significant departure from mid-century tobacco advertising targeted to black consumers. Earlier brands were often sold through a generalized, but implicitly middle-class black aesthetic of magazines like *Ebony*, or by the 1980s, *Essence*. Reynolds concluded that middle-class brands built on respectability did not speak to the young, economically precarious, and inner-city consumer they imagined, such as the composite Wall put forward. Design and branding choices reflected the needs of the consumer which Reynolds had conjured up. First, the name Uptown was chosen because it rendered the brand "local in scope" while insuring it had the "ability to translate nationally" across the urban centers its demographic occupied. Second, in terms of product design, the packaging departed from the classic teals and greens which had signaled menthol cigarettes for much of the mid-twentieth century. Instead, Reynolds used black and gold to construct what it called an "ownable" look, banking on "nightlife" and "entertainment" as key signifiers. This color scheme signaled the premium position of the brand, signposting that Uptown was a menthol for a very specific, younger generation of black men. To deal with the premium price point – central to the economic fulfillment its imagined consumer was hungry for – Reynolds sold the cigarette in half packs, reducing the cost per unit and rendering it accessible to a youth market with little-to-no access to income.⁴⁰

³⁹ Wall, "Black Young Adult Smoker Profile," November 28, 1988.

⁴⁰ Leber Katz, "Project UT Photography Pre-Production," June 7, 1989, RJ Reynolds Records. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/gpyl0092>.

Taken together, the branding strategy was designed to articulate a sense of place accessible through the cigarette. Branded with the tagline “The Place, the Taste,” Reynolds developed campaign visuals that positioned “UT [Uptown] as a ‘classy,’ ‘quality’ product which is an integral part of the targets’ perception of an ideal ‘fantasy world’[.]” Campaign photographs featured “target users in an elevated mood en route to a place of entertainment[.]” They offered a “sharp focus on couples suggesting they are celebrities” often shot against an urban background using a “paparazzi technique[.]” These couples photographed “dusk to dark” communicated an “urban, mystical, exciting, vibrant” party atmosphere that all contributed to framing Uptown itself “as a place’ and which target consumers could come to.⁴¹ Mock-up advertisements were planned for billboards, magazines, and popular forms of early 1990s mobile retail, such as party vans that would distribute samples of the cigarette as they drove through club districts.

Reynolds undertook a careful community relations strategy to soften the arrival of a new tobacco product on the market, managing both consumers response and public health actors, scholars, and activists. It maintained a trove of data on what they called tobacco “zealots,” which included those who might slander the industry and the brand in Philadelphia. Since the 1960s, in addition to commercial strategies that included aggressive supporting black media, cigarette corporations had sought to surveil and control national Civil Rights organizations, in particular the NAACP, the United Negro College Fund, and the National Urban League and their particular responses to anti-tobacco legislation. For Uptown in particular, Reynolds recognized that some would object to a cigarette designed to appeal solely to young black men and women. The “[i]ntroduction of the brand,” the company warned, “carries with it the potential for a great deal

⁴¹ Katz, “Project UT Photography Pre-Production,” June 7, 1989.

of controversy. Black leaders may object to a cigarette designed to appeal solely to younger blacks. Anti-tobacco groups can be expected to portray the [Philadelphia-area] market test as a racial/health issue. The use of a ten-pack may lead to public health debate over whether to product is designed to appeal to underage smokers who frequently lack the funds to purchase a full pack.”⁴² A sensible concern – since it was.

To manage community responses in Philadelphia, Reynolds sought to minimize criticism of Uptown from either community or government officials by providing what it called an “environment of acceptance by black leaders of UT and RJR’s marketing program.”⁴³ This began by hiring Lynn M. Fields of Commonwealth Consultants, who would advise Uptown on the Philadelphia black community, identifying community leaders, city council members, and administrative personnel in the city who could be recruited to endorse, or at minimum, strategically ignore, the brand. Under the heading “Tactics - Media Activities,” Reynolds explored restoring advertising in key black publications to previous levels and developing a series of meetings with publishers and editors; donating billboard space and other advertising materials to local black community organizations in the test market; and possibly donating \$250,000.00 to the United Negro College Fund (UNDF) during the UNDF’s annual national telethon in December. On this last point, Reynolds external relations also sought to tie the grant into letters “to black opinion leaders, enclosing a copy of the release on UNCF contribution, stressing RJRN’s continuing commitment to minority support [...]”⁴⁴ The telethon promised a

⁴² “Government Relations/PR Plan Project UT,” 1989. R.J. Reynolds Records. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/kfck0084>.

⁴³ “Government Relations/PR Plan Project UT,” 1989. R.J. Reynolds Records.

⁴⁴ “Government Relations/PR Plan Project UT,” 1989.

second potential tie-in as well, with Reynolds purchasing local commercial airtime to donate to local black organizations.⁴⁵

How Uptown Went Down in Flames

RJR-Nabisco publicly announced Uptown in December 1989 through a press release carried in the *Philadelphia Daily News*, Philadelphia's African American newspaper, with its multimillion dollar test market ready to begin on February 5th 1990.⁴⁶ The press release made no mention that Uptown was explicitly designed to target young adults, even though the branding and merchandising strategy skewed much younger by departing from the more traditional aesthetic used to advertise menthols. "We expect Uptown to appeal most strongly to black smokers," announced Lynn Beasley, vice president of strategic marketing for Reynolds. "Our research leads us to believe that Uptown's blend [...] will be an appealing alternative to smokers currently choosing a competitive brand. We have developed a product based on research that shows that a significant percentage of black smokers are currently choosing a brand that offers a lighter menthol flavor than our major menthol brand, Salem."⁴⁷ Reynolds' public announcements noted that Philadelphia, with its 40 percent black population, would serve as Uptown's test market for six months and emphasized that advertising funds would be funneled into black newspapers, *The Philadelphia New Observer*, *The Tribune*, *Ebony*, and *Jet*.

The response from African American community groups in the Philadelphia area was immediate. Members of over 30 organizations began to put together a rally to protest Uptown's downtown test market, citing not only the firm's blatant targeting of black consumers, but the

⁴⁵ "Government Relations/PR Plan Project UT," 1989.

⁴⁶ Judann Dagnoli, "RJR's New Smokes Look Uptown," *Advertising Age*, June 6, 1990, 6.

⁴⁷ No title, *Philadelphia Daily News*, December 1989.

sheer saturation of tobacco advertisements already plastering African American neighbourhoods in the city. For example, not a half-mile from City Hall, Philadelphia's Ridge Avenue was saturated with Newport billboards standing between and in front of buildings, while storefronts were plastered with the brand's paraphernalia and other product lines.⁴⁸

Philadelphia-area community organizations quickly came together to form the Uptown Coalition. According to one Uptown Coalition organizer and spokesperson, the journalist and public relations expert Charyn Sutton, the Uptown Coalition's speedy emergence was the result of the city's large network of black churches and their decades-long history with community action. With the support of the pulpit, the Coalition used Sunday sermons as a communication vehicle instead of relying on the press to organize a potential boycott or rallies. "We'll rely on the community organizations and the preachers to ring out from the pulpits not to buy or accept as a gift Uptown cigarettes," argued one Coalition leader, the Reverend Jesse Brown, in a statement to the *Philadelphia Daily News*.⁴⁹ Sutton connected this strategy to a longer history of urban organizing in Philadelphia, including the Reverend Leon H. Sullivan, who as pastor of Zion Baptist in 1963, had led a collective community action called "400 Colored Preachers" wherein he used the pulpit to identify and shame companies with weak black employment records.⁵⁰

In addition to Philadelphia's network of black churches and their history of community action, Coalition organizers also came from the ranks of the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association, the Fox Chase Cancer Center, and the Graduate Hospital in

⁴⁸ "In Philadelphia, R.J. Reynolds Made All the Wrong Moves" *Adweek*, January 25, 1990, 8.

⁴⁹ Cited in Charyn Hutton, "The Coalition Against Uptown Cigarettes: Marketing Practices and Community Mobilization" November 29, 1993.

⁵⁰ Hutton, "The Coalition Against Uptown Cigarettes," November 23, 1993.

Philadelphia. These organizations had spent years developing coordinated anti-smoking outreach programs designed to bring local voices into their anti-tobacco messaging at both the local and national level, electing African American community members to executive leadership positions within regional and city chapters. In this way, critiques of the new brand would come from the community itself, rather than a broad network of national organizations which were often heavily surveilled by industry-funded organizations like the Tobacco Institute.⁵¹

Thanks to these relationships, the Coalition was able to present a coordinated and rapid response to the new brand. In mid-January, the Coalition called for Reynolds to cancel its test market and pull the brand. “We want to halt it before Feb. 5th”, said Patti LePera, vice president of marketing and communications for the Philadelphia branch of the American Cancer Society. “We want R.J. Reynolds to know we don’t want it here.” The president of the North Carolina branch of the NAACP argued that Uptown would only further exacerbate health disparities between African Americans and other communities: “With the poor health among black folks today, we do not need anything else to cause even more health problems. R.J. Reynolds’s [sic] targeting of blacks is unethical.”⁵² Robert Robinson, president of the National Black Leadership Initiative on Cancer in Philadelphia followed suit: “The African American community is already suffering the highest rate of cancer in the country. They develop more cancer and die from cancer more than anyone else, especially from smoking-related cancers.”⁵³

RJR-Nabisco attempted to manage the negative response by deploying a number of different PR strategies, all of which were reproduced in the national press. As the *New York*

⁵¹ Hutton, “The Coalition Against Uptown Cigarettes,” November 23, 1993.

⁵² Hutton, “The Coalition Against Uptown Cigarettes,” November 23, 1993.

⁵³ Dan Blake, “Uptown: Downtown, They Want no Part of It,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 26, 1990, p. 7A; “Philadelphians Want Tobacco Company to Avoid Other Cities,” *Chicago Defender*, January 27, 1990, p. 8

Times reported in early January 1990, RJR-Nabisco argued that it was not targeting black consumers necessary, but rather Uptown was “a cigarette for the entire market but which is likely to attract a disproportionate number of black smokers.”⁵⁴ RJR-Nabisco executives offered comments designed to suggest they were not interested in recruiting new smokers, but snatching them away from other brands, a well-trodden argument undercut by their market research. Reynolds senior VP for marketing, D.N. Iauco, offered a similar refrain in an interview with the *Times*: “Everything we do is going to be assaulted and picked at by the anti-smokers [...] But taking away business from our competitors is the only thing that Uptown is about.”⁵⁵ When this argument failed to quell calls to shelve the brand, the company shifted to freedom of choice, arguing that the firm believed that black smokers have the right to buy products that fit their preferences.

The Coalition responded to these arguments and the new brand using a variety of different strategies, many of which were drawn from a longer history of Black Power and calls for community control. Connecting Uptown to concerns over the self-determination of urban communities, Coalition members argued that “[t]he Uptown struggle was one of ‘taking back’ the issue of choice and redefining it in a larger, community context.” No one “in the community asked for this new cigarette,” or the “[e]xcessive billboard advertising in African-American communities” that pushed “tobacco products.” Instead of continuing to endure a barrage of tobacco advertising, they argued that communities should “have the right to choose what products enter their neighborhoods.” When Reynolds sought to argue that they were uninterested in growing the total number of smokers in the U.S., the Coalition turned marketing

⁵⁴ Anthony Ramirez, “A Cigarette Campaign Under Fire,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 1990, D1.

⁵⁵ Ramirez, “A Cigarette Campaign Under Fire,” D1.

statistics back on them, arguing that so few brand switches happened that this made little sense from a commercial perspective. Since publicly available data suggested that “most smokers begin when they are less than 19 years old, marketing fundamentals would dictate that marketers attempt to reach potential smokers during their teenage years,” argued the Coalition.⁵⁶

The Coalition helped make Uptown into a national news story. After their call for Reynolds to pull the brand, two national broadcast network news teams and a national news magazine had come to Philadelphia to cover the story and the community response. As the Coalition planned to hold its first major news conference and begin community actions on January 29th, Dr. Louis W. Sullivan, Secretary of Health and Human Services under President George Bush and president of Morehouse College, lent activists his support. He condemned the Uptown brand’s test market decision in a public letter which described Uptown as purposeful targeting. “The brand,” he argued, “is cynically and deliberately targeted toward black Americans at a time when our people desperately need the message of health promotion. Uptown’s message is more disease, more suffering and more death for a group already bearing more than its share of smoking-related illness and mortality [...] expressing my grave concern and urging them to cancel their plans to market this brand.” The secretary went on: “A marketing strategy such as the one apparently planned for Uptown would severely undermine the kinds of health promoting attitudes that Americans, especially Black Americans, today need to understand.”⁵⁷ As two public health scholars have noted, even more direct that Sullivan was the

⁵⁶ Hutton, “The Coalition Against Uptown Cigarettes,” November 23, 1993.

⁵⁷ “Dr. Sullivan’s Unfiltered Anger,” *New York Times*, January 21, 1990; Philip J. Hilts, “Health Chief Assails Reynolds Co. for Ads That Target Blacks,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1990; Rick Christie, “RJR Unit Blasted for New Cigarette Aimed at Blacks,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 19, 1990; Marlene Cimon, “New Cigarette Condemned by Health Secretary Marketing: Louis Sullivan Says the Promotion

comedian Jay Leno, who suggested that R. J. Reynolds selected Uptown not for its Harlem connotations, but "because the word 'Genocide' was already taken."⁵⁸

On January 20th, a month after the announcement of the Uptown test market, the Coalition saw its goals realized when Reynolds announced the cancellation of the test market in Philadelphia and the permanent shelving the brand. As a community organization, the Uptown Coalition was the result of the confluence of a growing anti-tobacco movement and Philadelphia's history of local black activism. Their campaigns challenged the racist tropes which Reynolds' market research was built upon. They called for community control over the kinds of advertising images that filled their neighborhoods. And what's more, they succeeded in shifting the language of market segmentation. In doing so, they set off a troubling conversation for the marketing profession, one which centered on the ethics of market segmentation and the inequitable nature of "target marketing" in the late 1990s.

"After Uptown, Are Some Niches Out?": The Target Marketing Crisis

As Reverend Butts began his billboard campaign in New York City in April 1990 and the Uptown Coalition began to prepare to take Reynolds to court, coverage of the now failed brand ignited the "crisis" of target marketing. Some marketing professionals suggested that Reynolds had functionally compromised the very nature of marketing by drawing into public discourse how corporations used aggregate consumer data to construct specific kinds of consumer categories: "After Uptown, are some niches out?"⁵⁹ "Suddenly everywhere," wrote another critic

Campaign for a New R.J. Reynolds Brand Targeted to Blacks Is 'Slick and Sinister' and Promotes a 'Culture of Cancer,'" *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1990.

⁵⁸ Referenced in Richard Pollay, Jung Sook Lee, and David Carter-Whitney "Separate, But Not Equal: Racial Segmentation in Cigarette Advertising," *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 16 (1992): 45-57.

⁵⁹ James R. Schiffman, "After Uptown, Are Some Niches Out?" *The Wall Street Journal*, January 22, 1990, 3.

in *Adweek*, “advertising is under the gun. After eight years of Reagan administration’s hands-off attitude that insulated marketers from regulation, anti-advertising legislation is popping up in Congress again.” Former Federal Trade Commissioner under Reagan, James E. Miller, suggested that thanks to Uptown, tobacco companies ought to fear “a lower threshold for [federal] intervention” for the 1990s. “The fact that the White House let Secretary Lou Sullivan [sic] say what he did is a signal of encouragement for the FTC.”⁶⁰ Activist actions and a flurry of headlines about targeting drew segmentation into public conversation, shifting the language of marketing to “targeting” as a form of pernicious exploitation.

In April 1990, the House Subcommittee on Transportation and Hazardous Material argued about the risks of target advertising, especially when it came to using data to target specific demographic niches. “At stake,” suggested Howard Schlossberg of *Marketing News*, was “much of the future course of targeted marketing and advertising.”⁶¹ The tobacco industry and the Association of National Advertisers, the latter of which counted among its membership nearly 80% of all national merchandisers in the United States, attacked the committee’s interest in targeting at all, arguing that attempts to regulate marketing to consumers of color was “bordering on racism, let alone censorship,” with ANA Executive vice-president of government relations Dan Jaffe going as far as to argue that constraining consumer choice was an attack on the fundamental liberty of the buyer as a citizen: “to suggest that adult black women can’t discern about cigarettes is saying they can’t decide on a congressman either.”⁶² John O’Toole, president of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), followed this argument in his own remarks regarding the hearing, publicly acknowledging the way race was put to work

⁶⁰ Steven Colfard, “Ad-bashing is Back in Style” *Adweek*, April 30, 1990.

⁶¹ Howard Schlossberg, “Segmenting becomes constitutional issue” *Marketing News*, April 16, 1990, 1.

⁶² Schlossberg, “Segmenting becomes constitutional issue,” 1.

in target marketing: “As long as the product is legally sold, advertisers will continue to target the most prolific segments. Blacks smoke three times as many menthol [cigarettes] as whites, so who do you think they are going to target? People who don’t want the product?”⁶³ Such commentary coming from some of the most important marketing and advertising executives in the United States was in effect an admission of the racial logic which the activists had so deplored.

RJR-Nabisco competitors followed Uptown and the target marketing crisis closely. In 1990, the Philip Morris tobacco company issued an internal report on how the crisis had unfolded and its impact on their own marketing strategies. Titled “Anatomy of a Failure,” the report cited a number of different professional and magazine reviews where journalists and marketers alike had attempted to understand where Uptown had gone wrong. “RJR was foolish to announce it was targeting blacks” suggested the report. “Uptown isn’t the first cigarette directly or even indirectly to target minorities. Name brands like Virginia Slims, More, Rio, Dorado, Salem, and Newport are heavily marketed in the inner city. Most are supported by advertising as well as billboards and promotions.” The study went on to note that “[i]n recent years, a number of new generic and sub-generic brands have been introduced. The makers of these cigarettes have never said they were targeting minorities. But their critics have said these very low-priced cigarettes are an effort to bring in or keep in the market, blacks, Hispanics, and children. Unlike Uptown, however, the introduction of generic and sub-generics did not prompt a public backlash.”⁶⁴

Perhaps most pressing, however, was how the activists had succeeded in pulling marketing into public life and, in the process, transformed the language of segmentation. “In

⁶³ Schlossberg, “Segmenting becomes constitutional issue,” 1.

⁶⁴ “Anatomy of a Failure – Uptown Cigarettes,” no date., Philip Morris Records. Accessed January 25, 2018. <https://www.industrydocumentslibrary.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/npjh0124>.

reality, ‘segmented marketing’, as it’s called, is an accepted and normally uncontroversial method of selling products” noted the report. “You could argue that the cigarette companies would be foolish to spend their advertising dollars across the board when only selected groups continue to smoke in increasing numbers. So the RJR strategy makes sense from a marketing point of view, but as it discovered, little sense from a political point of view.”⁶⁵ Morris attributed this paradox to changes in the political landscape of the 1990s. The firm argued, “[t]here are issues that have become touchstones for public outrage in the black community: advertising of smoking and liquor products targeted to the inner city, particular to teenagers” were now considered a risk. Moving forward, Tobacco corporations were now forced to reckon with “[t]he concept of stewardship” which had increasingly become organized around community engagement. “Respected leaders like the Rev. Calvin Butts in Harlem have fought against the use of billboards in their communities to advertising smoking and liquor products. There is much more sensitivity to issue.”⁶⁶ The Coalition, then, had not only forced a public conversation on targeting, but shifted the discourse within tobacco corporations themselves.

In an *Adweek* article regarding the soon-to-arrive 1990 census, president and publisher of the marketing periodical *American Demographics*, Peter Francese, worried over the ethics of target marketing in public life. The 1990 census was to be the “motherlode of all databases, the benchmark of all consumer databases and research[.]” Yet Uptown raised questions about the ethics of constructing consumer categories. Francese worried that even if marketers claimed they were simply satisfying demands that their research showed already existed in a population, the very accuracy of new marketing techniques used by companies like RJR-Nabisco exacerbated

⁶⁵ “Anatomy of a Failure – Uptown Cigarettes,” Philip Morris Records. No Date.

⁶⁶ “Anatomy of a Failure – Uptown Cigarettes,” Philip Morris Records. No Date.

these potential weaknesses. What's more, headlines condemning them further cast marketers and advertisers as a gang of hidden persuaders. This deep suspicion over the kinds of information held on ordinary people fuelled demands for regulation, while the uneven effects of that data when deployed complicated merchandisers relationships with minority communities. "If I choose to market to [specific communities], am I just being a good target marketer—or am I exploiting that population?" For Francese, the idiom "information is power" defined the dangers that lay waiting. In his estimation, marketing experts would have to reckon with this concern as data continued to become more granular and particular.⁶⁷

The failure of Uptown, then, dragged into public life the many different strategies which merchandisers used to sell their products to particular communities. In the process, the Uptown Coalition succeeded in transforming both the public discourse around market segmentation and internal marketing discussions as well. The Coalition's actions revealed how marketing did not distribute the benefits of a consumer society evenly. They forced marketing professionals themselves to think through the impact of their work, leading some to wonder over the ethics of new information resources like the coming census. What's more, As Philip Morris' internal review of the Uptown brand suggested, these contestations limited the immediate movements of merchandisers looking to capitalize upon young, black urban consumers.

"Target Marketing: Racist or Right?"

In the middle of the target marketing crisis, Reverend Butts began his whitewashing protest. As media attention grew, Butts called for a "nationwide halt of all alcohol and cigarette billboard

⁶⁷ Debra Goldman, "Census Data Poses Ethical Questions," *Adweek - Southwest Edition*, April 8, 1991, 1, cont. on 4.

advertising” and began a series of periodic demonstrations at the Philip Morris headquarters in Manhattan.⁶⁸ Butts’ call to end target marketing secured attention from a number of different media outlets, many of which covered his bombastic sermons and the condemnations of corporate marketing which he offered in them. His arguments competed with those made by the African American advertising executive Caroline Jones, who responded to the Uptown crisis with speeches at trade events and publications in magazines such as *Penthouse*’s “Advise and Dissent” column.

Since 1986, when Jones had opened Caroline Jones Advertising, her firm had amassed a wealth of market research data on African American, Latino, and Asian American consumer market preferences. Jones herself had frequently appeared in the *New York Times* as a talking head for black advertising and marketing experts, critiquing mass merchandisers’ continued lack of interest in advertising to black consumers beyond tobacco and alcohol products. In an essay titled “Target Marketing: Racist or Right?” that followed Uptown, Jones resisted Butts’ claim that targeting ought to be dismissed outright. It was not that targeted marketing was producing racist results, she argued. Rather, most product brands had strategically ignored evidence and indicators which suggested their products were well-used by people of color. Jones argued that all marketing was targeted, and more, not less of this sort of careful segmenting was required. Criticizing the words of Health and Human Services Secretary Louis Sullivan and Senator Frank Lautenberg, the latter of which had responded to Uptown by arguing that minority consumers were “not as aware and [...] not as educated” when it came to interpreting advertisements, Jones positioned her own work as essential to resolving the debate: it was not that targeted marketing was racist, it was that it was race conscious, she argued. In the context of product categories

⁶⁸ Mireya Navarro, “Tobacco Companies Find Harlem Wary,” *New York Times*, August 8, 1990.

African Americans used, the continued lack of appreciation for black consumers was partly why merchandisers did not pursue them.

Jones developed a marketing report that documented the lack of advertising to black consumers across a number of product categories, from orange juice to stereos. “If all the cigarette brands spent all this money on black people,” Jones argued, “I would be rich just doing cigarette advertising, but they do not spend great sums targeting Black consumers. It’s a drop in the bucket compared to the billions of dollars spent advertising to the general market.”⁶⁹ “Black families spend more than whites on food, recreation, clothing, household furniture, personal care products, automobiles, audio-visual equipment, alcoholic beverages and a host of other products,” argued Jones, yet advertisers ignored these buyers.⁷⁰

Connecting the debate to Uptown, Jones argued that products like Uptown were so alienating because it was white merchandisers, white advertisers, white creatives, and white consultants that produced campaigns, generated research, and developed creative strategies for black consumer markets. Without engagement with ethnic media outlets or experts of color with in-group community awareness or knowledge, Jones warned that advertisers would find themselves increasingly alienated from these markets regardless of the product. For Jones, creative was not the only avenue wherein black advertising and marketing experts could be of use. She suggested the very knowledge production and conception of the black consumer ought to come from researchers of color who could help many merchandisers better appreciate the role

⁶⁹ Caroline Jones, “Targeted Marketing, or Why Did Uptown Go Down in Flames,” Jones Papers, Series 2, Box 3, Folder 30.

⁷⁰ Cigarettes editorial for *New York Daily News*, October 5, 1990. Jones claims were backed up by indexing data which suggested black consumers outstripped white buyers for Pan American Airlines, Busch Gardens, Beech Nut infant cereal, and Florida Gold grapefruit juice. Advertising for each of these sectors (and products) had failed to feature black consumers. Caroline Jones Papers, Series 2, Box 4, Folder 7.

of these buyers in their market share. “[T]he recent uproar about cigarette and alcoholic beverages billboard advertising is one indication that normally complacent Black consumers are waking up” argued Jones, “And yet, I would caution advertisers and their advertising agencies to understand one thing: Just because some Blacks say, ‘do not target us for cigarettes,’ does not mean ‘do not target us period.’”⁷¹

Yet Jones’ arguments would go up against the enduring marketing tropes that had shaped Uptown in the first place. These concepts were supported by a tobacco corporation that controlled one of every four dollars spent in American advertising industry writ large. Indeed, the construction of the black consumer as downwardly mobile, easily convinced to smoke, and keen for brand recognition maintained more purchase than Jones’ framing. Merchandisers chose to ignore black consumers not simply because they did not know they had them, as Jones argued, but because they understood black consumers as a risk to the commercial viability of what were considered otherwise “white” brands. A report from the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, published one year after the Uptown blunder and the target marketing crisis, suggested as much. Titled *Invisible People*, the report argued, as New York *Times* advertising critic Randall Rothenberg suggested, that “[t]he slippage in black representation in magazine advertising lends support to a theory heretofore cautiously advanced by marketing experts: Marketers’ improving ability to reach specific consumer targets in specialized media is leading to the disappearance of minority images in many media with broader appeal.”⁷² *Invisible People* had found that in most major periodicals, such as *Time*, *Esquire*, and *Vogue*, the proportion of black models had declined since the activist push of the 1960s and early 1970s. By 1991, the

⁷¹ “Target Marketing: Or Why Did Uptown Go Down in Flames?” Caroline Jones Papers, Series 2.1, Box 3, Folder 30.

⁷² Randall Rothenberg, “Blacks are found to be still scarce in advertisements in major magazines” *New York Times*, 23 July 1991, A18

largest proportion of African Americans were depicted as athletes, musicians, or subjects of philanthropy.

Ad executives stressed that this state of affairs was not the result of their racist bent, but the outcome of new forms of advanced market segmentation built through data analysis and other computational techniques. Jones contested this. "The argument is always on the side of going with the white images in the white media," remarked Jones in the press. "People want to talk to the consumers they want rather than the consumers they have or the consumers they could have. And the consumers they want are 'people like me.'"⁷³ Even as both black buying power had grown and popular cultural aesthetics increasingly turned to the urban, models of the black consumer as abject persisted and the general market remained defined by whiteness. Under this model of market segmentation, only those firms which sought black consumers would encounter them. More often than not, those firms sold tobacco, alcohol, and as the millennium approached, and payday loans as well.

Conclusion

In 1998, The Uptown Coalition for Tobacco Control and Public Health joined the National Association of African Americans for Positive Imagery (NAAAPI) in a landmark national civil rights lawsuit against tobacco companies that manufactured mentholated tobacco products. The class action lawsuit, with Reverend Jesse W. Brown, Jr. and the Uptown Coalition as lead plaintiffs, was filed in Federal District Court in Philadelphia on October 19th of that year.⁷⁴

⁷³ Rothenberg, "Blacks are found to be still scarce in advertisements in major magazines," A18.

⁷⁴ National Association of African Americans for Positive Imagery New Release, "African American Activists Seek End to Menthol Cigarettes in Civil Rights Lawsuit Against Tobacco Companies" October 21, 1998.

RJR-Nabisco had constructed Uptown Cigarettes through a vision of abject blackness. Seizing on growing anti-tobacco sentiment within their community, Philadelphia activists succeeded in mobilizing against the tobacco conglomerate, forcing the firm to cancel the brand's test market by pointing to the ways in which the targeting of tobacco products at black communities would worsen already existing inequalities. Their success shook the marketing profession, forcing a public discussion over how segmentation shaped American life. As it boiled over, the Uptown affair put on a collision course differing visions of black life under late twentieth century capitalism. Where Caroline Jones called for more robust engagement with black consumers, activists following the Uptown fiasco called for community control, drawing upon a Black Power tradition to argue that they knew what was right for their own community.

The popular press of the early 1990s had been full concerns over direct mail advertising and the amount of junk mail it produced. The Uptown affair challenged this story by animating the ways in which American corporations used and thought about race in their work. The Coalition laid bare the uneven effects of market segmentation and the different futures marketers imagined for consumers of color.

Conclusion

Nearly thirty years after the Uptown crisis and the resulting debate over whether target marketing was, as Caroline Jones put it, “racist or right,” market segmentation has become ubiquitous in American life.¹ The primary difference between today and 1990, however, is that marketing has gone online. The enclosure of the Internet by a handful of massive social media platforms means that on a day-to-day basis, the universe of advertisements we each encounter are personalized, based on the accumulated information such platforms, in conjunction with the state, retail credit systems, and more have gathered on us.

Today, marketing is dominated by Facebook, which uses a proprietary algorithm to rectify the segments requested by potential advertisers against the data collected on their platform. Facebook has been the center of near constant marketing controversy since it first expanded, although in recent years these headlines feel near constant. In 2016, Facebook allowed American realtors to hide their ads from accounts which Facebook believed belonged to African Americans, a move which contravened Civil Rights legislation around housing.² In late 2017, the press uncovered a knowing relationship between Facebook and Cambridge Analytica, which used a personality survey app to develop psychographic data for the 2016 Trump Campaign. In 2018, their platform allowed researchers posing as merchandisers to segment out accounts which had ‘liked’ content related to far-right conspiracy theories such as white genocide. When this story broke, Facebook cancelled the faux campaign and ‘erased’ the market segment.³ A year

¹ Caroline R. Jones, “Target Marketing: Racist or Right?” *Penthouse Magazine*, reprint, 1991.

² Julia Angwin and Terry Parris, Jr., “Facebook Lets Advertisers Exclude Users by Race” *ProPublica*, October 28, 2016.

³ Sam Biddle, “Facebook Allowed Advertisers to Target Users Interested in ‘White Genocide,’ Even in the wake of the Pittsburgh Massacre,” *The Intercept*, November 2, 2018. Accessed: November 2, 2018. <https://theintercept.com/2018/11/02/facebook-ads-white-supremacy-pittsburgh-shooting>.

later in 2019, a second set of researchers found that when they submitted faux advertising campaigns to Facebook and asked for those ads to be shown to every account in a specific state (the ‘general market’), the bulk of the fake ads concerned with housing opportunities were still delivered to an audience that was over 85% white.⁴ Even when merchandisers asked otherwise, Facebook’s model, banking on the fantasy of objective big data, reproduced the very same racial exclusions that had shaped ideas about the general market for well over a century.

“Segmenting America” has provided one of the many histories of such platforms. It has explored the longer history of market research and the enduring power of the racialized, classed and gendered market categories which marketers deploy. As I have argued throughout, these categories are not organic. Rather, they are cultural and social constructions, conjured up by marketing professionals who, much like Facebook today, promise profound insights into the needs, wants, and future direction of the American public.

When I began to research this project, I started with a set of questions regarding the role of marketing in driving consumer capitalism. How do marketers go about constructing and forwarding their own elaborations of the ideal consumer, and what happens to these concepts as marketers parlay them into other domains of culture? Which marketers can speak to the national, or general, and which are boxed into the niche or segmented? Equally important to these concerns, I wanted to examine moments when marketing constructions had been taken up and naturalized in our collective public memory and culture as well as moments when marketing constructions have failed. I also sought to understand how marketing professionals themselves became a kind of expert—especially those who stood outside of the normative bounds of a white,

⁴ Muhammad Ali et al, “Discrimination through Optimization: How Facebook’s Ad Delivery System Can Lead to Skewed Outcomes,” *Computers and Society*, September 29, 2019. See <https://facebook-targeting.ccs.neu.edu/>.

American public culture. How did professionals like Estelle Ellis or Caroline Jones construct their expertise and how did it relate to their own subject position?

In addition to these research questions, my interest in marketing also came about through my own experience participating in marketing surveys and roundtables for a local youth-marketing firms throughout my teens and twenties. During my undergrad, I had made money participating in weekly roundtables with other men aged 18-29 whose parents were immigrants to Canada. During these sessions, the interlocutors would ask us participants to discuss our relationship to all manner of products, from expensive sneakers to cheap cologne, discount beer, and off-brand pizza pockets. These discussions felt contrived and silly, but the interlocutors took our responses seriously. They asked us to delve deeper into the feelings and memories that particular products and brands stirred in us. The absurdity of such discussions later inspired research questions that shaped this project, too: why were some of the largest and most powerful corporations in the world so interested in our experiences? How would this marketing firm take a room of ten distinct people and shape us into a particular *kind* of consumer? And, of course, how would mobilize those findings to discuss our needs, wants, and future? While this project has not examined the participants in market research, it has sought to document how marketing professionals do the work they do, and the limits and opportunities which the idea of segmentation afforded them.

“Segmenting America” argued that post-war marketing evolved through a tension between the desire to incorporate new kinds of consumers and publics into mass consumption and the ongoing maintenance of an explicitly white, normative mass or general market. It has demonstrated this tension in three ways. First, this study has showed how segmentation shifted in meaning over the second half of the twentieth century. It has documented how early modes of

segmentation operated within an overwhelmingly white public culture. It has examined how, in response to the Civil Rights Movement and activist bids on the field, marketing professionals began to augment their approach to segmentation, using the concept to isolate race difference and sustain a white, general market. This study then turned to consider how the idea of market segmentation expanded in the late twentieth century through new forms of computational analysis. It explored how, despite the promise of statistical objectivity, new modes of ‘psychographic’ marketing in fact reified the very categories that it promised to move the field beyond.

Second, this project illustrated the opportunities and constraints that market segmentation provided for marketing professionals themselves. It has followed how marketers capitalized upon moments of social contestation, promising to make sense of difference for merchandisers and CEOs who feared they had fallen out of lockstep with the everyday American. Of course, a marketer’s ability to make their claims was predicated upon the kinds of consumers that they themselves packaged and sold. Estelle Ellis and Caroline Jones were both constrained by merchandisers’ narrow ideas about post-war white womanhood and black life, respectively. However even with these limitations, they managed to transform themselves into experts on the needs and concerns of these populations. In doing so, they presented their marketing concepts as social facts; they advanced the agendas of their clients; and they built their own expertise and image as well.

Third, this project charted the development and circulation of the marketing concepts and consumer composites that these professionals forwarded. I have shown how marketing composites from Teena to *The Workingman’s Wife* to “Roger and the Big Time” moved through culture, becoming part of how we collectively remember and think about the historical past.

These composites were ideological in nature, they obfuscate lived experience in favor of highly homogenized, generic ideas about who people are and what they desire. The definitions of gender, race, and class they carry with them are purpose-built; predicated upon the needs of specific marketers and their clients. What's more, these composites had a flattening effect which served to erase the ways in which people exceed their categories: Teena was knowable, and therefore valuable to merchandisers, but the young women who read *Seventeen* lived lives well beyond the magazine. By deconstructing figures like Teena as carefully designed marketing concepts, "Segmenting America" shows how the encoding of meaning is an active, capitalist endeavor designed to articulate a very specific set of commercially-profitable ideas about who the consumer is. In this way, *Seventeen* was not just for teenage girls, but the merchandisers who wanted to court them. To miss the latter is to fall into the marketer's trap.

To demonstrate these claims, this dissertation followed the rise of market segmentation from the 1950s to the 1990s. Section one, which included chapters one and two, examined how market segmentation emerged within the white mass market. Chapter one focused on Estelle Ellis. It examined the particular vision of the post-war white women's life cycle she forwarded and the ways in which her marketing work defied enduring ideas about the white housewife-as-consumer. It showed how Ellis worked her marketing ideas into institutions far beyond the consumer marketplace. Chapter two charted the role of marketing in shifting mid-century ideas about class within the mass market. It examined how the consultants at Social Research, Inc. capitalized upon their quasi-academic position to lend their marketing firm legitimacy and in the process, construct a vision of post-war women's consumption that was indebted to longer histories of colonial control. As *Printer's Ink* put it, these academics turned their anthropological eye to "the taboos, totems, and voodoo rites of U.S corporations executives, housewives, and

other bizarre indigenes[.]”⁵ In doing so, they invited readers of their work in *Life*, *Printer’s Ink*, and *Advertising Age* to imagine their marketing ideas as anthropological fact.

Section two, which includes chapters three and four, showed how segmentation changed as Civil Rights activists called for the integration of mass marketing images. It followed the effect of the shift of black marketing and advertising professionals. Chapter three documented how marketers mobilized segmentation in response to calls made by CORE. It looked at how CORE seized upon popular currents in marketing thought to argue that the field had an ethical obligation to present more realistic depictions of a multiracial United States. In their response to the TV Image Campaign, however, marketers established blackness as a kind of risk for products in the mass market. The profession embraced segmentation as a strategy for maintaining a sense of the normative, white, and general, measuring the stakes of integration on the response of these consumers. Chapter four followed the results of this marketing model through Caroline Jones’ career. It examined how her work was both enabled and constrained by segmentation: accolades without opportunity, even as urban aesthetics took off during the prime of her career. This chapter argued that the particularity of blackness as both Jones and the industry understood it limited her ability to secure general market accounts in the 1980s and 1990s.

The final section of this dissertation, which includes chapters five and six, followed this segmentation model to its limits. During the 1970s and the 1980s the practice of market research shifted toward a more statistically oriented framework grounded in computational power and the accumulation of evermore personal data. Marketers argued that such approaches rendered their conclusions more ‘real’ than earlier, qualitative models cast along lines of identity had ever done. At the same time, marketing had become more accessible to a consuming public, generating new

⁵ “Burleigh Gardner: selling the U.S by Class” *Printer’s Ink*, March 25, 1960, 80.

anxieties over its long-term impacts. Chapter five charted the rise of psychographics and the professions' embrace of data as a vision for the real. It documented how psychographics erased the structural power of race and class in favor of highly individuated explanations predicated upon personality and culture. Chapter six examined the result of psychographic profiling through the making of Uptown cigarettes. It examined how activist critiques of the brand succeeded in shifting the language of market segmentation to "target marketing." This shift occurred not only in public culture, but within corporations as well. Across both sites, marketers were now forced to reckon with the differential effects of their work in different communities.

As "Segmenting America" has argued, the very function by which modern capitalist systems draw difference in is itself a fundamental mechanism and driver of inequality. Early boosters of marketing and market segmentation saw it as a great, democratic tool for bringing new kinds of communities into the market. Marketing professionals often ran with some iteration of this claim: they promised their clients they could make sense of social change, bringing blue-chip firms into conversation with an increasingly unknowable public. This was not the democratic promise of participation, but one defined by management and control. What's more, throughout this period, the limits on market segmentation remained tethered to the maintenance and endurance of a highly profitable vision of a white general market. In this way, market segmentation did not 'break up' the United States. Rather, "Segmenting America" has illustrated how such an approach to "seeing" consumers fueled inequities rather than resolving them.

Since the 1990s, an onslaught of headlines regarding new, perpetually more sophisticated and complex marketing techniques have defined our media landscape.⁶ Today marketing turns

⁶ Safiya Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: NYU Press, 2018); Luke Stark, "Algorithmic psychometrics and the Scalable Subject," *Social Studies of Science* Vol. 48, No. 2 (2018): 204-231.

on the promise of the individual as a specific subject produced through data analysis. Contemporary marketing promises totalized ways of seeing the individual – the ability to pinpoint a kind of person and to know them fully. To make this promise, marketers continue to bank on fancier methods, from pre-cognitive, affective brand measurement techniques to neuromarketing strategies which they claim reveal our most intimate desires. Such narratives turn on the suggestion that marketers can know us better than we know ourselves.⁷ As this dissertation has documented, however, such claims are a fantasy. Marketing constructions, like all economic relationships, remain socially and culturally embedded. They are dependent upon human interpretation. Marketing remains wedded to enduring, highly racialized, classed, and gendered constructions that shape how the benefits of a consumer society are distributed, if at all.

⁷ Christophe Morin, "Neuromarketing: The New Science of Consumer Behavior," *Society*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2011): 131-135; Eben Harrell, "Neuromarketing: What You Need to Know" *Harvard Business Review*, January 23, 2019. Date Accessed: October 10, 2019. <https://hbr.org/2019/01/neuromarketing-what-you-need-to-know>.

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