

### *Chapter 3*

## Civil Rights and the Advertising Industry

*As a people, we must remember that we are not as weak as we have allowed ourselves to be painted, and we are not as strong as we can be.*

—John E. Jacob

For African Americans, the 1960s seemed destined to become a decade of momentous changes. Near the end of the 1950s, activists won victories in local protests throughout the South, and the Civil Rights Act of 1957 became the first piece of federal civil rights legislation in nearly eighty years. While this legislation lacked significant enforcement measures, it signaled that the federal government was taking the first halting and long overdue steps toward ensuring equal rights for all citizens. Alongside legislative victories, black students integrated public schools (sometimes forcibly); black families moved into previously all-white suburbs; and the nation narrowly elected a new, young, vigorous president, who seemed sympathetic to even further measures of racial advancement.

But these were not victories without cost or pressure. Blacks continued to be victims of racial terrorism and violence, and each victory they won came as the result of their direct action. Direct, nonviolent action was their tactic of choice, and marches, sit-ins, and pressure for legislative redress were the order of the day. Throughout the nation, African Americans organized themselves into groups to press for desired changes. American corporations and advertising agencies could no longer look at the civil rights movement as a strictly southern phenomenon. Instead, the pressure not only came northward, it soon came right into their boardrooms.

In protesting to receive equal treatment and to change existing practices, civil rights activists had more individual foes than allies. While racism stood at the root of much of this opposition, it also sometimes came from a general malaise or unwillingness to change traditional methods. In the case of the advertising industry, blacks faced entrenched ideology

that said that blacks and whites should not appear together in advertisements. This kind of imagery supposedly alienated both black and white consumers and, instead, ads should separate the two races with ads featuring black models reserved for ethnically targeted media. In contrast, activists realized that, for whites to view blacks as equals, blacks had to become part of the visual consumer landscape that advertisements depicted. Therefore, not only did they demand more blacks in advertisements in general, civil rights groups pressed agencies and advertisers to place them in integrated scenes with whites in mainstream media sources rather than just black-oriented ones. Civil rights activists wanted nothing less than for advertisements to become tools in the larger fight against racism and discrimination. A writer for *Sales Management* observed, "For a Negro to see a Negro on television or in an ad is for him to see a visible man. And that has never happened before." What he overlooked in his otherwise perceptive analysis is something that activists understood and intended—whites would see that visible man as well.<sup>1</sup>

This emphasis on a black presence in advertisements mirrored the larger civil rights goal: that African Americans be able to be present in various spaces in American life. Black children and white children should go to school together, blacks and whites should sit together on buses, and they should work side by side at equal pay in offices and factories. Once those goals were reached the casual interactions between the two groups would help to break down historical walls of racism and prejudice. As those walls fell, activists believed that even greater opportunities for development and advancement would emerge. In this sense, advertising and media were another public space in which blacks challenged their current status. The pressure on the advertising industry to employ more blacks in agencies would help activists fulfill the goal of placing blacks in responsible white-collar positions with the power to influence change. Simultaneously, pressure on the industry for integrated advertisements would both feature blacks as a visible part of the consumer landscape and help change the negative and pejorative image of them held by some in the larger society.

This chapter examines blacks' organizational efforts to change the advertising industry in the 1960s. Three major civil rights organizations, the National Urban League, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), worked separately but almost simultaneously in a multifront attack on discrimination in advertisements and in the advertising industry. The three groups shared information and tactics among themselves in this common struggle in a way that allowed for more far-reaching victories than if each had been working alone. What they wanted was simple: expanded employment opportunities and a visible change in the way

advertisements incorporated black models. Additionally, each group placed a strong emphasis on the creation of racially integrated advertisements in media directed at the general market. However, this organizational struggle against the advertising industry did not begin in the 1960s. Instead, the Urban League, CORE, and the NAACP built on the work initiated by the National Negro Congress in the years following World War II. What united these groups across the intervening years and across organizational lines was that each of them viewed advertising as a tool, a tool that could help change the negative image of African Americans and that could present them as equal citizens and consumers in the commercial landscape and thereby enhance their efforts for equality in America.

The pressure on many of America's largest advertisers formed a second but equally important element of activists' campaign against their media image. Like Claude Barnett and John H. Johnson, the civil rights organizations recognized that agency clients were the ultimate authority over the location and content of their advertisements. Moreover, that the largest advertisers had considerable influence over agency business practices. Thus they knew that getting the support of leading advertisers could give them more influence in forcing changes in advertisements and in agency employment. Specifically, the support of corporate clients of agencies prevented agencies from refusing to change based on fears clients would move their accounts if blacks appeared in their ads or worked on their campaigns.

An explosion in the number of boycotts and selective patronage campaigns demonstrated blacks' willingness to use their consumer dollars to achieve socioeconomic and political goals. These efforts greatly bolstered activists' appeals because they threatened economic loss to the companies affected and drew negative publicity against the targeted companies. This economic pressure helped to motivate advertisers and agencies to take action when lethargy or flat rejection had been their past responses. In fact, without the public and economic pressure generated by black consumers, it is unlikely that the campaign against the advertising industry would have experienced the success it did. Therefore, that activism is the first point that must be explored.<sup>2</sup>

### More Than a Hamburger

In February 1960, four black students at North Carolina A&T University decided that they had suffered indignity and discrimination long enough. After days of careful consideration, four young black men gathered their schoolbooks, went to the local Woolworth's, and sat down at the lunch counter. They did not receive service at the counter, instead

they sat quietly and completed their homework assignments; blacks could shop in Woolworth's but could not eat at its lunch counter. Within the local store, executives of the national chain accepted local Jim Crow practices that separated the races. The students' direct action at the lunch counter signaled that blacks were becoming more active and confrontational in their tactics, and their efforts encouraged similar protests around the region. As A. Philip Randolph had during World War II, these young activists perceived that real change would not come by waiting on government legislative action or a change of heart among their opposition; genuine change only came when they directly confronted the racism and discrimination that dominated their lives.<sup>3</sup>

The sit-in at the North Carolina store catalyzed activists across the country. It also aroused the anger of local white citizens in the following days as more students joined the protest. Whites routinely poured mustard, ketchup, salt, or sugar onto protesters, and jeered at them verbally in a pitiful attempt to elicit a response that they could respond to with violence. Yet, even under the painful and denigrating assaults, the protesters waited for service, sat quietly, and did not react to the taunts and threats. After six months, the lunch counter was desegregated and blacks could eat their hamburgers and hot dogs alongside other citizens. And with this move the young men ignited a sit-in movement that inspired students across the country of various racial backgrounds. Activists picketed national chains that supported segregation policies in their southern stores, eventually integrating hundreds of consumer spaces like Woolworth's.<sup>4</sup>

Black consumers in Greensboro faced a double standard; they could spend their money in some parts of stores but not in others. For example, in Woolworth's blacks paid for their store purchases a mere two feet away from the lunch counter that denied them service. In other stores, black shoppers could not try on clothes before they purchased them, as store managers feared whites would reject clothes blacks had worn even temporarily. In still other cases, blacks could eat in the same restaurant as whites but they had to do so in a separate section, usually cordoned off by a wall or curtain. Thus it was within these consumer spaces, where daily activities brought blacks and whites into proximity with one another, that activists launched some of their initial battles in the civil rights movement. Activists reasoned that in these spaces, the equality of dollars should have guaranteed equality of treatment but usually did not. For example, blacks did not pay a different price to ride the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, but they were forced to sit in a separate section or gave up their seats if there were no space in the "whites only" compartment. Thus, when blacks in Montgomery launched a bus boycott in 1955, they did so with the goal of matching the equality of treatment

with the equality of cost. In Montgomery and elsewhere, activists used this visible black consumer power to compel change, on the local, and eventually national, level.<sup>5</sup>

While the black consumer actions in Greensboro and Montgomery drew more public attention, the selective patronage campaign in Philadelphia provided a different, but no less effective, model. In 1961, a group of four hundred black ministers in Philadelphia organized a campaign to motivate area companies to employ more blacks in white-collar positions. To describe the effort they consciously selected the term “selective patronage” rather than “boycott.” Selective patronage, they felt, conveyed a more positive image because participants would continue to spend their money but would do so with selected merchants. Together the group of ministers reached nearly 250,000 people every Sunday, and they used their pulpits to inform congregants of the program. The local black newspaper also covered the effort so even those blacks that did not attend church services were aware of its goals.<sup>6</sup>

The focus of the Philadelphia campaign was not on securing general employment for blacks—A. Philip Randolph had pressed that case for years—instead it was about finding white-collar and executive positions for blacks. Additionally, the campaign targets included companies that had a history of soliciting black consumer patronage and of having open hiring policies. Also, by targeting companies in a northern city, the campaign brought the protest to the front doorstep of American corporations. Executives could no longer talk about the shame of the open racism in the South. The Philadelphia campaign forced company leaders to confront the hidden prejudice that singer Nat King Cole had argued was ever present in the North and had doomed his television show to failure.<sup>7</sup>

Blacks comprised nearly 30 percent of the population of the city but held less than 1 percent of the white-collar jobs in private industry. Leon Sullivan, one of the ministers involved in the effort observed, “You could walk Walnut Street and Chestnut Street in Philadelphia and you would hardly see a colored girl walk out of an office building with a job of any sensitive nature. Just a handful hired as tokens of some symbol, an effort of some company to appease its conscience.” Ministers wanted real, lasting changes, and they refused offers that involved only a single high-profile hiring. They also turned down company executives who tried to mollify them by buying tickets to church fund-raisers or other kinds of “get off my back” contributions. Over a one-year period, the campaign targeted companies that had black employees in production areas but lacked them in professional areas such as sales or the secretarial pool. Companies included both those that had resisted similar employment campaigns in the past and those who had a history of

actively courting black consumers. Thus even companies like Pepsi-Cola, whose policies had seemingly made them “friends of the Negro,” did not escape scrutiny.<sup>8</sup>

In campaigning for professional jobs for blacks, the ministers emphasized that they did not want white employees displaced or denied advancement. Instead, they requested that blacks receive either currently open jobs or newly created positions. Some company executives initially refused to work with the ministers. But the withdrawal of local black consumer patronage usually convinced even the staunchest opponent to reconsider. In fact, most companies, especially those with a history of actively soliciting sales in the Negro market, voluntarily cooperated with the effort and increased the numbers of blacks in requested areas. By the end of the program, ministers reported that over one thousand new positions were made available for blacks throughout the city. Also, the success of the Philadelphia effort led to similar programs in Detroit, Baltimore, and New York City. What separated these campaigns from other consumer boycotts was that they sought to develop a specific level of employment opportunities. Jobs were certainly important, but activists in Philadelphia and elsewhere now pressed corporations to open opportunities for blacks to fill professional-level positions. In doing so, they targeted companies with a history of activity and interest in the black consumer market.<sup>9</sup>

But what did this developing black consumer activism mean for the advertising industry? For the industry, the new black consumer activism meant that black consumers had gone beyond accepting the presence of advertisements in black publications as motivation for patronage or brand allegiance. The Philadelphia campaign signaled to agencies and their clients that black consumers now took note of their employment policies as well as their advertisements. “If an employer has an unfair employment policy, and it’s known to Negroes,” Clarence Holte warned a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, “he can advertise, he can promote, he can do anything he wants to, and he won’t sell merchandise.” Harvey Russell, vice president of special markets at Pepsi-Cola, went even further in the *National Bottlers’ Gazette*, calling a company’s employment policies the “fourth dimension” of their marketing program. “Negroes tend to support companies which employ Negroes,” he observed, “and no matter how great your advertising budget for a special market may be, you won’t get that market unless there is concrete evidence that employment opportunities are available.” Thus, blacks directly linked racially inclusive employment policies with favored companies and brands. As part of this broad quest for white-collar employment and for altered representations in advertisements, activists soon set their sights on the often-overlooked advertising industry itself. As one reporter observed,

“Though advertising has traditionally assumed that it could divorce itself from the nation’s social issues, the Negro revolution has proved otherwise.” To activists, the use of servile images of African Americans made advertisements a central actor in maintaining the racial status quo in which white society considered discrimination and black exclusion normal.<sup>10</sup>

### Joining the Affluent Society

The pacifist but determined black protests in Philadelphia, Greensboro, and other cities were evidence of changes within the larger black consumer population. The black population rose steadily throughout the 1950s, climbing 25 percent versus 16 percent for the white population. Not only had blacks become more active in using their consumer power to press for desired change, as a market they had also become more affluent. The value of the black consumer market had risen, with estimates topping \$19 billion per year. In terms of their location within the country, more than half of all blacks lived in 78 major cities and over one-third resided in the 25 largest cities in the nation. Within these 25 cities, black residents accounted for over 60 percent of all retail sales and 90 percent of all wholesale sales. Therefore, activists, Negro market consultants, and black publishers emphasized, black consumers had the market power to ensure the success or failure of many sales efforts. In short, devoting attention to black consumers through advertisements was becoming more than simply good community relations; it was becoming an economic necessity.<sup>11</sup>

The growth of ethnically specific media eased advertisers’ reach into the black consumer market. The era of the black newspaper as a major ethnic advertising medium was over, but, in the world of print, *Ebony* magazine continued its impressive growth. Negro radio mirrored *Ebony*’s rapid development. Between 1961 and 1966, advertising revenue on stations programming Negro radio increased by nearly 300 percent. With over seven hundred stations devoting at least some content to attract black listeners, advertisers had many choices to reach blacks with the intimacy of radio broadcasts. A growing number of advertisers took advantage of this access to black consumers.<sup>12</sup>

In advertising agencies, the growing interest in market segmentation—breaking down the mass market into smaller, more efficiently targeted segments—established the theoretical framework for ethnically targeted marketing. Writers in the trade press argued for creating products and promotions to reach specialized markets and to create advertising that would tell those in the market why the product was for them. The wealth and geographic concentration of African Americans made

them a textbook market segment, one that trade writers described as “the least understood, most controversial, and yet most promising consumer group in the nation.” Thus the question of the day was, in light of the rapid social changes ongoing among blacks, how to successfully reach them as a market segment without alienating white consumers in the process.<sup>13</sup>

While advertising executives weighed the challenges of the increasingly vocal but potentially profitable black consumer market, activist pressure was unrelenting. Although protestors considered a company’s profit needs in their demands, civil rights groups saw the ads as symbolic. Ads illustrated for blacks (and whites) exactly where blacks were not welcomed (or respected). Material goods and appeals to purchase the goods were symbols of where blacks stood in their quest for full status. As civil rights leader Ella Baker noted in the wake of the Greensboro protest, it was “crystal clear that the current sit-in and other demonstrations are concerned with something bigger than a hamburger . . . The Negro and white students, North and South, are seeking to rid America of the scourge of racial segregation and discrimination—not only at the lunch counters but in every aspect of American life.”<sup>14</sup>

The Negro market that David Sullivan and John Johnson introduced to corporate America in the years following World War II was one in transition. The interpretations of the market that Johnson and other recognized market experts provided now included the kinds of nuance and complexity they had only hinted at during the early 1950s. “What Negro consumers want now is recognition of their humanity and an industry wide respect for the Negro image,” Johnson surmised. “No Negro consumer asks for more; few, if any, Negro consumers are willing to accept less.” Blacks were unwilling to accept advertisers ignoring their purchasing power or taking it for granted. Instead, a new, aggressive black consumer was on the rise. And this new consumer was “no Uncle Tom shuffling down to the corner store for grits and chittlins,” but was instead “trim, well-groomed, and militant.” These new black consumers wanted see their desires accounted for by advertisers, or they would use their consumer power to show their displeasure. Thus the new black consumer expected more than the traditional “invitation” to purchase a company’s products represented by an advertisement in a black magazine or newspaper. Instead, black consumers filtered their actions through the lens of race. As a result, Johnson and others warned, advertisements now needed to position products not only as symbols of status but also of racial progress.<sup>15</sup>

During the 1950s, many advertisers and agencies assumed that blacks wanted to be white and that they mimicked whites in their habits and tastes. They had the same tastes and desires and, therefore, advertisers



simply needed to use black media to extend them an invitation for their patronage. John Johnson had used this argument to significant financial success, but the model that had proved so profitable for over a decade was quickly becoming irrelevant. Now, instead of even implying the same advertisements could reach whites and blacks, or that changing the models from white to black was enough, he and other black consumer market experts urged agencies to envision a different black consumer model. As Leonard Evans caustically noted to a white marketing manager, "We [blacks] have no great desire to become white. In fact, we tend to have more pride than ever in being Negroes. Integration does not mean the elimination of Negro culture." Advertisers and agencies needed to adjust to the new sense of racial pride that blacks felt or face sales repercussions. Specifically, they had to accept that blacks' consumption of expensive cars or liquor was not indicative of their desire to be white but of their efforts to own the goods symbolically representative of societal leadership. In fact, it was whites who had ascribed a racial categorization to consumer product choices, while blacks placed an economic one on them. So, to whites, consumption of a particular product was as an indication of blacks' desires to be white, but to blacks it simply demonstrated their desire to be middle class. Johnson, Holte, and others explained that it was an appeal to these middle-class aspirations and racial pride that blacks demanded to see in greater number.<sup>16</sup>

Ironically, at least some of the discontent that African Americans expressed could be laid at the feet of the advertising industry. Through the words and pictures created in advertisements, blacks received a daily reminder of just how deeply their second- (if not third-) class citizenship ran. In an article directed to advertisers, one writer noted, "Every time you [advertisers] buy a spot on television . . . you advertise the benefits of white society." Advertisements provided blacks with a daily reminder of their forced exclusion from areas of American life, of what opportunities and choices were available unless you were black. So, while the ubiquity of advertisements made them below the conscious view of most whites, to blacks they were a constant reminder of their status in America—something no Cadillac or bottle of expensive scotch could erase. "Nearly any movie, almost any page of *Life* magazine, the advertising on the billboards and in the newspapers, most of what we see each day on television—all of these constitute a kind of torture to many Negroes. For they know that this, or something like it, is what awaits the American who is willing to work for it—unless he is a Negro. American advertising is responsible for much of the Negro's current demand that he, too, be allowed to participate in the fulfillment of the American dream," observed Myrlie Evers. Blacks, Evers and others argued, wanted the opportunity to participate in the consumer lifestyle inherent in the

American dream. "Negroes want to share this life. They want to join the affluent society, not overthrow it."<sup>17</sup>

### Pressuring the Advertising Industry

The various consumer-based protests in the South and North caught the attention of market researchers. In 1963, the Center for Research in Marketing, a private research firm, conducted a study of the potential impact of a national black consumer boycott. After surveying 180,000 blacks in 15 states, researchers concluded that almost 90 percent of African Americans would support a product boycott if asked to do so by leaders of one of the major civil rights organizations: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Urban League, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The study indicated that, given the success of local campaigns such as that waged in Philadelphia, a black consumer boycott nationally could inflict significant profit losses on a targeted company. This was a key finding for activists because it demonstrated that they not only could use moral outrage to foster their goals but also could use potential loss of black consumer dollars to compel economic and other changes.<sup>18</sup>

By the early 1960s, the advertising industry had ceased using most of the pejorative and derogatory images that had been popular in the early portion of the century. But rather than featuring more realistic images of blacks, the industry simply eliminated blacks from most of the advertisements in mainstream media, rendering them invisible. In turn, that invisibility helped perpetuate the belief that blacks were not equal to whites. As one black advertising executive noted, "The advertising industry did not create discrimination, but is one of the most powerful influences for continuing it." It was this power that activists expected to challenge and, eventually, change. Certainly blacks could open an *Ebony* magazine and see blacks enjoying the material comforts of the consumer lifestyle; finding similar results in *Life* or the *Saturday Evening Post* was nearly impossible. Those few blacks that were present in ads in general interest media were either sports stars like Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis, or unnamed porters or domestics happily serving white clientele. To replace those images, activists wanted representations of the broader spectrum of black life. Not all blacks were doctors, lawyers, or executives, but neither were they all butlers like Uncle Ben (rice) or cooks like Aunt Jemima (pancake mix).<sup>19</sup>

The push against the advertising industry was part of a broader effort for job opportunities waged by the major civil rights organizations in the

1950s and '60s. Somewhat like the Double V campaign during World War II when blacks fought for victory abroad against fascism and at home against racism, blacks in the industry would perform a double duty: An African American presence there not only meant more blacks in white-collar positions but that they could have a direct impact on how blacks were pictured in the nation's consumer communications. Working independently but almost concurrently, the Urban League, CORE, and the NAACP pressed the advertising industry and their clients for what they defined as appropriate changes. But they were not treading new ground. In the years following World War II, one civil rights group, largely defunct by the 1960s, targeted the advertising industry and other media trades for just the changes sought by those active in the current struggle. Uniting the struggle across the years were the twin goals of opening job opportunities for blacks in the advertising industry and altering the depiction of blacks in advertisements. So civil rights groups of the 1960s were heirs to the battle started by the Cultural Division of the National Negro Congress (NNC).

#### THE NATIONAL NEGRO CONGRESS

The National Negro Congress first met in 1936. The interracial group of organizers envisioned the NNC as the umbrella organization for existing groups fighting to improve blacks' position in the United States. At the first meeting over 800 delegates from 28 states and representing nearly 600 separate organizations met in Chicago. Future March on Washington organizer A. Philip Randolph became the organization president with the overarching principle that any single political faction should never dominate the group. Unfortunately, group members failed to maintain that principle, and a few years later the group became affiliated with the Communist Party. Still, in the late 1940s the group became the first civil rights organization to draw attention to the racial hiring practices of the advertising industry.<sup>20</sup>

By 1947, the NNC was an organization in decline. Regardless, enough interest and energy in the group existed to support the creation of a new organizational division, the Cultural Division. This division was part of a larger effort to foster black employment in the arts and to use the arts to improve the images of blacks to whites, which the group viewed as the necessary first step to changing their behavior toward and treatment of them as well. The group's Statement of Principles concluded, "For generations in this country, the arts have been prostituted to help foster discrimination, the dangerous illusion of 'white supremacy' [and] to make the Negro people an object of scorn and contempt. . . . It is to root out these falsehoods that we are dedicated." So, alongside the fields of

music, radio, theater, literature, and motion pictures, activists focused on black employment in the advertising industry and their image in advertisements. In agency executives, though, activists faced opponents with entrenched ideas about the proper role of blacks in advertisements. "You'd lose your audience if a colored man appeared in the ad. However, in a picture of the Old South, whiskey ads and so forth, one puts in an Uncle Tom for atmosphere," one advertising executive observed. While the industry may not have been the bastion of "anti-Negro" feeling that some observers charged, it was one whose companies had seemingly little interest in opening their firms to black employees. The NNC's guiding principles focused on achieving "full freedom" for African Americans. That freedom, however, went beyond political, economic, or social goals to include issues of image and representation. Specifically, group leaders wanted to use the arts to as a way to eliminate racism and discrimination against blacks and other minority groups.<sup>21</sup>

Membership in the Cultural Division of the NNC included some of the leading figures in the artistic world of the 1940s. At the meeting to organize the group, over three hundred people wedged themselves into the Murray Hill hotel in New York City. As its specific mission, the division had a twofold role that future civil rights groups eventually mirrored: First, to increase black employment in seven artistic fields: music, radio, literature, theater, film, advertising, and art. Second, they wanted to change the manner in which each of the aforementioned fields incorporated images of blacks. For activists, artistic representations that featured blacks as objects of scorn and ridicule were too much the norm. But the group firmly believed the arts could be a source to motivate active changes, and they established specific goals to measure success. For example, members wanted a set number of black musicians employed in theaters by a specific date. They placed careful emphasis on reaching specific goals within a limited amount of time and on compiling detailed research information to guide their plans. To ascertain the status of blacks' employment in advertising, the division commissioned an industry study by the Biow advertising agency. Biow was also charged to examine the use of blacks in advertisements.<sup>22</sup>

Agency founder Milton Biow had a history of nondiscriminatory employment, but it is unclear if he had a prior connection to the NNC. Biow did not fit the traditional mold of an agency executive or owner. He lacked the Ivy League educational background, had no relatives in the industry, and when he entered the business had not even graduated from high school. In fact, he recalled that his only outstanding quality was the intense desire to enter the agency business and to find someone to give him the opportunity to do so. Despite his lack of a traditional education, Biow created one of the leading advertising agencies of the

1940s. Further, because of his own nontraditional entry into the industry, he established a hiring policy that interviewed people based upon desire and talent rather than racial, economic, or educational achievement. "My belief in giving Negroes the business opportunities to which they are entitled is not a matter of 'tolerance,'" he argued. "It's just a better way to do business. It gives you that many more people from which you can choose the best." Biow later worked with NAACP head Walter White to find black applicants for his agency, telling him, "Send me applicants for jobs and I'll judge them side by side with applicants of any other color, on their merits."<sup>23</sup>

Biow revealed the results of his agency study at a meeting of the Cultural Division. The finding that there were few blacks featured in advertising surprised few, but the study went further. Specifically, Biow concluded the low number of blacks in advertisements was due to agencies' reliance on "snob appeal." The emphasis on this approach led to an imagined world in which affluent settings dominated and blacks were little more than servants. This "white world" was one in which blacks had a specifically proscribed place and "that advertising, in its most representative statements presents a subtly biased picture of the world, the effect of which is to tell us, our children, and the Negro for that matter, of the Negroes second-class citizenship."<sup>24</sup> Beyond showing blacks in menial roles, advertisements failed to depict blacks as existing in even the most public scenes. For example, an advertisement set on a busy New York street included no blacks. Those involved in the Biow study did not expect that blacks would appear in advertisements in socially integrated situations depicting close involvement between the races. What they did expect was for them to appear in public scenes where their presence made sense. Where the NNC and the Biow study pioneered was in viewing advertisements as more than "salesmanship in print," but as a source of information and education that visually locked blacks outside American life and helped to maintain a discriminatory status quo.

Further, the study argued that advertising agencies replicated the white world depicted in advertisements in their employment policies. "This [snob appeal] has been such a potent factor in sales that the agencies have extended its use to their own mahogany-paneled precincts and to their selection of genteel, white [employees]." The Biow study was the first to make a case for racial diversity in advertising agencies and to estimate the current number of blacks in the industry. Across various advertising fields (including agencies, art service companies, department stores, and publications), Biow estimated there to be only a handful of blacks out of 20,000 employees in the New York advertising community. The *Advertising Age* report of Biow's findings erroneously put the number of blacks in agencies at 36. In fact, within advertising

agencies the number was even lower. The Biow study found only 21 blacks, 11 of whom were messengers, clerks, receptionists, or janitors, spread across ten agencies: Biow Advertising, Chernow, Albert Frank-Guenther Law, Grey Advertising, Duane Jones, McCann-Erickson, Redfield-Johnstone, Sterling, J. D. Tarcher & Company, and Young & Rubicam. Only a few of the dimly small number worked in production areas, with the others in administrative roles. One was a secretary to an art director, and the remainder worked in various roles as assistants. Thus, the remaining number of blacks doing anything connected to advertising in New York City was 15. Biow's analysis was admittedly "incomplete." However, in decision-making or executive-level positions, it is likely there was no black presence in mainstream New York agencies in the 1940s. Laughably, and perhaps sarcastically, however, writers for *Advertising Age* hailed the report as evidence of blacks' significant progress in advertising.<sup>25</sup>

To increase the low number of blacks in agencies, the Cultural Division crafted ambitious plans. Their strategy included: to establish a placement service to find qualified blacks; to set up a training program for blacks to gain experience in advertising; to publicize the advertising industry among blacks as a viable career; to maintain public pressure on the advertising industry to prevent discrimination; to award public marks of "honor" and "dishonor" for agencies' treatment of blacks as employees and advertising subjects; and to establish a code of fair practices for the industry.<sup>26</sup>

As part of the NNC and an advocate of equal employment opportunity within his own firm, Biow could have become an important voice in motivating change within the advertising industry. Unfortunately, by the early 1950s, health problems forced Biow into a reduced role at his agency. He was the sole owner of the firm and, true to his organizing principles (that he always be part of any firm bearing his name), he closed the agency in 1953 rather than have it continue without him. As a result, blacks lost a potentially important advocate for increasing their presence in the advertising industry. Had he remained in advertising, Biow could have hired African Americans and led others to a similar path by his principled example. Still, Biow continued working on issues of employment discrimination in advertising and other industries throughout the country. In recognition of this work, Wilberforce University, a historically black institution, awarded Biow an honorary doctorate in 1958.<sup>27</sup>

The NNC proposed nothing less than making the advertising industry more inclusive of African Americans and advertisements reflective of the nation's population. The group set an important model for future activists in that they directly linked black employment in the advertising

industry with their image in advertisements. Further, that linkage anticipated that of the coming spate of how-to articles in the trade press about reaching the black consumer market. Market advocates from John Johnson and David Sullivan to the men and women of the NAMD linked successful selling efforts among blacks to securing the advice of black consultants. While their arguments were often more economic than social, taken together with those of the NNC, they demonstrate how different, disconnected groups made parallel arguments correlating blacks' employment in advertising and their image in advertisements. Unfortunately, resistance to change and outside pressure limited the impact of the NNC efforts. Further, as a group, the larger NNC was weakened by the allegations of communism that had dogged the group for several years. When that pressure exploded in the McCarthy witch-hunts of the 1950s, the group disbanded.<sup>28</sup>

Following the demise of the NNC, the fight for black employment and representation in advertising lay dormant for much of the 1950s. In the early 1960s, led initially by the National Urban League, civil rights groups began building on the framework set by the NNC. Although there were no evident connections between the organizations, the goals of the Urban League, as well as those of CORE and the NAACP, greatly reflected those established by the NNC.

#### RENEWING THE FIGHT: THE URBAN LEAGUE

By the early 1960s, the Urban League had been active in issues of black employment for several decades. Working primarily through its local chapters, the group effectively waged protests for employment opportunities. Although their victories did not often gain national attention, they were, nonetheless, important steps toward ending employment discrimination. Also, in the 1940s, one chapter actively campaigned against the negative and derogatory images of blacks. An article in *Business Week* on the Los Angeles chapter described it as "an organization set up to guide advertisers and advertising agencies in their treatment of Negroes in copy, pictures, package labels, trademarks and radio programs." Floyd Covington, executive secretary of the Los Angeles chapter, intermittently acted as an adviser for local companies by examining their advertising copy for images and phrases offensive to blacks. Further, he played an active role in convincing a local baking company to target the Negro market by hiring black sales agents. Despite the limited success of Covington and the Los Angeles chapter, by the 1960s League pressure on the advertising industry had shifted east. Activists in the New York chapter led the struggle to increase the black presence in the advertising industry. In contrast to the future efforts of the CORE and the NAACP,

the Urban League focused solely on the issue of black employment in the industry.<sup>29</sup>

In 1963, the Urban League of Greater New York released the findings of a three-year study of the hiring practices of the ten largest New York-based advertising firms: J. Walter Thompson; McCann-Erickson; Young & Rubicam; Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn; Ted Bates and Company; Foote, Cone & Belding; Benton & Bowles; Compton Advertising; Grey Advertising; and Kenyon and Eckhardt. These ten agencies employed more than twenty thousand people combined, but fewer than twenty-five blacks were in “creative or executive positions.” In fact, three unnamed agencies employed over one-fourth of all the blacks that held these positions. Also, over one-third of the top-ranking blacks worked in areas related to the Negro market, a practice the League frowned upon. To them, restricting blacks to accounts directed at black consumers was “a form of segregated integration.” Consequently, the League made two demands: First, they wanted agencies to work proactively and increase the number of blacks in more than menial positions. Second, they wanted agency leaders to guarantee that blacks would be able to participate throughout the agency structure, including working on campaigns designed for white consumers as well as black ones.<sup>30</sup>

Although Urban League members viewed special-markets work negatively, some black admen disagreed. For example, both former agency owner David Sullivan and Clarence Holte, head of BBDO’s special-markets group, argued that working on the Negro market was an opportunity for black professionals. Sullivan had long believed that special markets work was not a mark of discrimination, but, instead, was valuable recognition of the unique attributes of black consumers. Echoing Sullivan, Holte argued that special-markets groups were a way to generate black employment in the industry. Moreover, if done appropriately, this targeted advertising responded to the desires and aspirations of the black community. To Sullivan, blacks working in special markets helped create campaigns that gave black consumers a sense of belonging and of being “a recognized member of society.” Hence instead of being the “segregated integration” the League charged, blacks who worked on Negro market campaigns filled an important industry niche in crafting effective campaigns and using images of blacks (albeit in black-oriented media) that were realistic and appealing to black consumers.<sup>31</sup>

Sullivan and Holte’s criticisms notwithstanding, the League presented its findings to agency executives and advertising organizations. In response, the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) initiated an employment survey of all agencies with more than 500 employees. In contrast to the League’s findings, the AAAA survey found 100 blacks working in agencies. While the figure was higher than that found



by the Urban League, the AAAA survey also counted blacks working as maids, mail clerks, and janitors, groups the League had not included in its tally. With those numbers removed, AAAA researchers had in fact found few additional blacks in creative or executive positions. Regardless of the number, whether 100 or 25, it was dismally small in an industry with more than 20,000 employees in New York City alone. More importantly, it was not a significant gain from the number the Biow study found over a decade earlier. Unfortunately, the League seems to have been unaware of the Biow study and did not use its findings to demonstrate the slow rate of black employment in the industry.<sup>32</sup>

Urban League members had limited their study to New York City, surmising that, if the agencies could not find qualified blacks working there, they would be highly unlikely to find them elsewhere. But in reality advertising firms did not actively seek out black employees. The League knew that agencies did no recruiting on black college campuses, nor did they reach out to attract black applicants to existing agency-based training programs. Therefore, rather than simply listen to AAAA members opine about the lack of qualified black applicants, League members took the proactive step of forwarding the resumes of twenty-seven blacks with advertising experience to the AAAA with the expectation that the group would help the applicants to find jobs. But the AAAA considered only five of the men to have the experience needed for advertising work. When League members questioned him about the quick elimination of twenty-two candidates, AAAA president John Crichton protested the group had “gone out of its way” to set up interviews for the five that it did. Further, that, since the League emphasized positions in either art or copy, the AAAA eliminated any candidate that did not fit those categories. He did not say whether or not any of the other candidates were suitable for other positions in the industry, just that they did not fit into the aforementioned categories.<sup>33</sup>

Aside from professional qualifications, implicit in Crichton’s statement was the centuries-old argument that blacks should be happy with what they got. Further, Crichton cautioned League members to lower their expectations because of the extremely competitive nature of the advertising business. Agencies, he said, often had more applicants than they had jobs available, and personnel managers could afford to be selective in whom they hired. And, rather than assume the race of the League’s twenty-seven applicants had anything to do with the AAAA’s rejection, they should recognize that “color is no barrier to talent” and advancement. Activists viewed Crichton’s comments as specious and condescending. Although the industry was different, they mirrored arguments that League members had heard for years: color was not the issue; the number of qualified black applicants was the problem. In con-

trast to Crichton's assumption, the League was not asking him to find positions for which people were not qualified. Indeed, they argued that black hires needed exceptional qualifications. They knew that any individual black integrating an all-white environment would stand as a representative of their entire race. If he or she failed, they knew observers, though they might not say so publicly, would argue that it was because blacks could not succeed in accounting, engineering, advertising, or whatever the particular field happened to be. The League did not imply that there were legions of experienced African American professionals available. Rather, what they wanted was for Crichton and others in the industry to recognize the dearth of black employment as a problem and enter into a constructive dialogue on how to change it. Thus what irritated them about Crichton's response was that he seemed unwilling to enter into that conversation. Unbowed, they moved forward with a plan to approach advertising agencies directly and get them to either justify their lack of black employees or to hire more black professionals.<sup>34</sup>

Some executives retreated to the traditional argument that there were simply no qualified blacks available. Edward Stern, owner of an agency staffing firm, condescendingly noted, "I have yet to meet a competent copywriter or account executive who is a Negro. There just aren't any. I don't feel there would be any discrimination on the executive or creative ends. It's just a complete lack of available talent." The record is silent as to whether the interviewer asked Stern how many Negroes he had ever met. When approaching individual advertising agencies, the experience of chapter activists mirrored that of the average black applicant—a cordial reception followed by a complete lack of action. Executives were more than willing to meet with the League to discuss their concerns but not to follow up with concrete steps to address them. "All the agencies we met with agreed discrimination is wrong, that Negroes should be hired. And yet they've done nothing."<sup>35</sup>

Other executives professed that they lacked any personal racial prejudice, but their clients and white consumers were far less enlightened. One creative director observed, "If an agency has a bias, it's because the client wants it that way."<sup>36</sup> So "if" prejudice existed in an agency, it was in deference to the bigotry of others that they had to maintain their position on black employment. The shifting of blame and responsibility by agency personnel was maddening, as one League member noted: "Most advertising executives regard themselves as enlightened, thinking people who are above such primitive attitudes. For them prejudice is a psychological, emotional factor that leads to irrational acts. On the other hand, however, the same unprejudiced executives enforce a covert policy of discrimination in employment, because it is the custom in the advertising industry."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, according to advertising executives, the lack of blacks in the industry and in advertisements was due to three causes (all of which were seemingly out of their control): First, there were no qualified blacks available. Second, even if they found qualified black applicants, they had to bow to the wishes and desires of their prejudiced clients and white consumers. Third, the dearth of blacks in the industry was, as the Biow study argued following World War II, an unwritten tradition that, outside the case of the most superqualified blacks, (like Roy Eaton or Georg Olden), executives were unwilling to break.

Not all those within the industry found the League's charges of discrimination and prejudice unfounded. Charles Davis, a white agency owner, wrote to *Advertising Age* in support of the League's efforts. He realized that the most serious impact of excluding black employees went beyond the walls of agencies. In particular, he saw that a lack of positive and realistic representations of blacks within advertisements went hand in hand with the lack of black agency professionals. Incorporating blacks into the largely all-white agency world would be admittedly difficult, but it was a clear necessity. He passionately argued, "The hiring practices of a relatively small employer group are minor compared with the harm of systematic exclusion of over 10 percent of the population from representation or reference in most advertising purporting to depict American scenes. The public is thus educated to accept such exclusion as normal and proper, and group prejudices are enforced."<sup>38</sup> Whites in the industry had not created racial discrimination, but their hiring policies and the racial homogeneity that was present in their work ensured its continuation. As much as League members may have appreciated Davis's support, within the industry his position was in the minority. Unfortunately, among the executives the League met with, innocence and indifference were the common response, and no firm offered to change its hiring practices.

But the League and advertising executives agreed on one point: blacks with significant advertising experience were few. That part of the low number was because of the discriminatory Jim Crow hiring patterns of most agencies went seemingly unmentioned in meetings between the two parties. Black employment specialists did not have such hesitancy or myopia. "Do I think there's discrimination in advertising? There's discrimination under every rock," one specialist concluded. Still, rather than angry rhetoric or large-scale street protests, League members adhered to their traditional organizational practice of trying to work with recalcitrant employers: They encouraged agencies to develop a pool of black personnel, to begin recruiting black college students, to enroll blacks in agency training programs, and to consider offering permanent positions to experienced black freelancers. The results from this

reasonable and organized program were minimal. Rather than finding executives willing to work out a plan within their agencies, the League met with the apologetic, but firm, argument that they would not alter their traditional employment practices.<sup>39</sup>

In response to the lethargy and disinterest they received from advertising executives and the AAAA, the League turned up the heat. They gave their statistical findings, as well as information from the AAAA and agency meetings, to the New York City Commission on Human Rights (NYCHR), the New York State Commission Against Discrimination (SCAD), and the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunities (PCEEO). They also sent the report to other civil rights organizations, black newspapers, corporate advertisers, and labor groups. On this step Urban League president Frederick Richmond said, "We have gotten nowhere after trying all the persuasion we could. It is now time for publicity and a little stronger action than persuasion." Like the NNC, the Urban League did not use the threat of boycotts or selective-purchasing campaigns by black consumers as motivation. They did, however, recognize the value of those tools, and they shared their information with groups, like CORE and the NAACP, that used them as part of their efforts to bring forth change.<sup>40</sup>

During the four-year period between when League members began their study of the industry and their public release of their findings, their efforts had frustratingly little impact. After all the meetings, phone calls, and letters, only one agency responded to the League's requests. Foote, Cone & Belding hired an African American into its research department. Unsurprisingly, one new black researcher out of twenty thousand agency employees was not something that excited League members. As a result, the League hoped that involving additional government and civil rights organizations in the effort would begin to catalyze greater changes within the industry.<sup>41</sup>

The broader civil rights activism that was part of the 1960s almost ensured that something would happen on black employment in advertising. In previous decades, advertising agencies might have been able to deflect activists' criticism long enough to avoid making any significant changes in their employment patterns. Yet what they found in the 1960s was that, as had been the case in Greensboro, Montgomery, and elsewhere, black consumers and civil rights organizations were willing to maintain their pressure until significant employment changes occurred. Hiring a token was far from enough to get blacks to reduce their pressure or attention. Although the members of the New York chapter turned their attention to employment issues in other industries in the mid-1960s, other civil rights organizations and equal employment opportunities committees filled the void. These groups, building upon

the information they had received from the Urban League, continued to press advertising agencies to take concrete steps toward racial inclusion.

#### PRESSURING ADVERTISERS: THE CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY

Founded by a group of interracial activists in Chicago in 1942, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) believed in using nonviolence and maintaining an interracial membership. In a variety of local instances during the 1940s and 50s, the group demanded equal employment opportunities and fair hiring policies. Like other civil rights organizations, CORE's long-range goal was an equal and integrated society. CORE activists linked the program that targeted the advertising industry directly to this larger organizational goal. The national organization became involved in the effort at some points, but, like the Urban League, the New York chapter primarily directed the effort. Led by chapter president Clarence Funnye, the group launched the TV Image Campaign in 1963. Funnye believed that part of the resistance to black participation throughout American life was the popular image of African Americans that presented them as either a nonexistent or barely human group. The goals of the campaign included providing a true and humane portrait of black life, promoting racially integrated commercials, and obtaining jobs for blacks in advertising and other media industries. Like the NNC and Urban League before them, CORE activists consciously sought to use advertising to change blacks' image in the nation and to create a more favorable depiction of black life in America.<sup>42</sup>

Funnye wanted racial integration to be the standard in all forms of advertising. But, rather than spread their attention too thin, they focused on a single area for improvement—television commercials. As a communications tool, television was the most intimate medium available. Unlike radio, newspapers, or magazines, television ads had the power to speak to consumers and present them with a visual image. Moreover, in their short history television commercials had replicated existing advertising patterns and presented blacks with images of their exclusion from mainstream society. One observer argued, "When the Negro looks at your TV commercial for a detergent . . . he has one eye on your product, but his other eye is on the background against which that product is displayed. The dishwasher, the freezer, the manicured lawn in Westport, the crystal clear swimming pool, the power mower, and all the other paraphernalia of what is considered the good white life today. Negroes want to share this life." But, beyond sharing in the consumer visions displayed in advertising, activists wanted the secondary

discourse of ads—the message behind the sales message—to communicate that blacks were equal citizens in America. In other words, like the NNC, Funnye and other CORE members believed that advertisements could do more than represent material culture and offer sales messages; they could also communicate the racial diversity already contained, yet overlooked, in American life. As black adman Leonard Evans critically observed, “You put Negroes on TV to educate the white man that the Negro is part of America.”<sup>43</sup>

Before launching the Image campaign, CORE members developed an unscientific but dramatic experiment to illustrate the low number of blacks within television commercials and the roles they played. On a Harlem street corner, they set up seven television sets with each one tuned to the seven major New York stations. Over the course of six Saturday afternoons they offered a silver dollar for every black face (outside sports stars) participants found. After six weeks and hundreds of participants, they gave away only fifteen dollars. While the program was not a controlled study, it attracted the attention of the community and the media and gave Funnye a point of departure in the first phase of the program.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast to the NNC and the Urban League, CORE activists focused their efforts on the clients of advertising agencies rather than the agencies themselves. Because agency clients ultimately controlled their own advertising budgets, they had the final control over their agencies’ output and some influence over television networks. Therefore, if activists were ever going to get beyond executives’ arguments that there were few blacks within television advertising because clients wanted it that way, they had to work with those very clients. Further, as Johnson had initially done when soliciting advertisements for *Ebony* magazine, Funnye chose to appeal to the top executives of each company—the people with the power to make immediate policy changes. Starting at the top also ensured that CORE expressed its goals in person rather than in a memo from a middle manager’s desk. With the results of the street study in hand, he initiated a round of meetings with three of the largest advertisers in the country.<sup>45</sup>

In the early 1960s, the largest packaged-goods advertisers in America were Procter & Gamble, Lever Brothers, Colgate-Palmolive. Together the three firms spent nearly \$300 million annually for advertising and over \$100 million on television alone. Funnye believed that if he could convince the largest advertisers to comply with CORE requests he would have greater success among smaller firms.

During the Image campaign, CORE had organizational allies among other civil rights groups, religious organizations, and labor groups. The hammer in their hands, though, was a series of selective-purchasing

committees throughout the nation that the national CORE organization could mobilize a community against any company unwilling to work to with the organization. So, when activists met with leaders of these three large consumer-product companies, whose sales relied on black consumers' dollars, they stressed the existence of these groups so executives knew the potential impact of a refusal to negotiate. Moreover, the cohesive and effective selective-purchasing campaigns waged in Philadelphia and elsewhere strengthened the threat these committees posed. Although CORE did not lead these protests, their existence and success demonstrated their potential. Consequently, when activists mentioned the possibility of a selective-purchasing effort they were doing much more than spouting empty rhetoric; they were providing a tangible threat to company profits and public image.<sup>46</sup>

The first company to meet with CORE was Lever Brothers, a firm with a long history of black professional employees and of maintaining advertising campaigns to black consumers. In the late 1940s Lever had announced that they were expanding advertising in black newspapers. Also, the so-called Jackie Robinson of advertising, BBDO's Clarence Holte, was a former employee at Lever Brothers. Therefore, CORE had ample reason to expect more than just a cordial reception at Lever; they expected action. What they encountered were upper-level executives already prepared to address the goals of the Image campaign. However, not all of that cordiality came solely from egalitarian feelings in the executive suite. Both the Urban League and the NYCHR had already approached the company about their advertising program. So, when CORE activists reached the company, executives had already begun establishing specific policies about the use of blacks in commercials. Before hearing CORE's requests, Lever executives had directed their six advertising agencies to submit plans for a more inclusive usage of blacks in their commercials. The company also took the proactive step of publicly announcing their new policies so no agency executive could claim ignorance of their plans. The directive included not only the ads from Lever Brothers but also those of all affiliate companies. Yet Lever executives did not stop at these measures: they also told their roster agencies to develop plans on using blacks in commercials and to report on the number of blacks at their firms and any supporting companies they used. The agencies for Lever Brothers included some of the largest in advertising, so the impact of such a directive from a major advertiser reverberated throughout the industry.<sup>47</sup>

The sweeping Lever announcement signaled a new level of action and interest in black employment and advertising imagery among agency clients. Further it was a key public relations victory for CORE. Although Lever executives initiated their plans in advance of meeting with Funnye

and other activists, reports in the trade press associated their decision to the meetings with CORE. Thus CORE was given credit beyond that which it may have deserved. Regardless, the front-page coverage of the meeting in the trade press and Lever's response served as immediate evidence that, as Funnye and others originally hypothesized, the actions of major advertisers could cause a powerful ripple effect of change among advertising agencies and other major advertisers.<sup>48</sup>

The first racially integrated Lever commercials appeared a few months after the initial announcement. Television host Art Linkletter asked a black woman in his studio audience about using a Lever detergent to take care of her family's laundry. He did not ask her for political commentary, a stance on civil rights, or any other potentially controversial matter, he asked for a simple testimonial about the product. This was exactly the representation that CORE could accept and that Lever executives wanted. It was a depiction of a naturally integrated scene and the black woman had a key role in the commercial. As one Lever executive noted, the firm wanted to use blacks only in scenes where it was "natural, but not controversial." "We are not trying to create change," a Lever executive cautioned, "we're trying to reflect it." Undoubtedly relieved, Lever executives proudly reported that they had experienced no adverse reaction from white consumers. This was an important finding because CORE, trade reporters, and other firms monitoring the effort believed the reaction of white consumers to these first ads would likely dictate the immediate future of integrated imagery in advertisements. As one executive admitted, "Everyone is afraid of repercussions in the South and is looking over their shoulders at their competitors."<sup>49</sup>

After meeting with Lever executives, the Image campaign moved on to its other targets. In mid-1963, Funnye's committee sent a letter to Colgate-Palmolive chairman George Lesch calling the company "one of the most flagrant offenders" of racial discrimination in advertising. As they had with Lever, CORE asked the company to begin using more blacks in its commercials, black actors on sponsored television programs, and black models in print advertising directed to the white consumer market. In closing, CORE requested that Lesch make a "good faith" effort to achieve these steps within thirty days. Lest he fail to take their concerns seriously, Funnye stressed the presence of CORE's selective-patronage committees and the potential impact of a boycott by black consumers.<sup>50</sup>

CORE activists walked a fine line between presenting the selective-patronage committees as an encouragement to executives to change their policies versus a threat to intimidate those who resisted their demands. Funnye's actions demonstrate that he believed the way to gain concessions was not through antagonizing company executives but in



steadily altering their view. Moreover, Funnye and CORE wanted integrated advertisements to be the beginning of a growing trend rather than an initiative that burned brightly in response to intense pressure and then quietly died. Like the ministers in the Philadelphia Selective Patronage campaign, Funnye and CORE wanted real, not token, changes. The ultimate goal of the Image campaign was that television, in commercials and, eventually, programming, reflect an accurate picture of the nation's racial diversity. Funnye reasoned, "What we want is for television to show things the way they are—all the way, in the shows and in commercials. We think it's unrealistic the way advertising is now. Now wouldn't it 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."<sup>51</sup> Therefore aggressively threatening company executives was a tactic of last resort. Instead activists preferred that executives listen and grow to understand the social and economic benefits of integrated advertising.

As they had with Lever Brothers, Funnye found Lesch and other Colgate executives to be willing to listen. Executives argued that, even before they had received CORE's letter, they had begun an internal study of integrated advertising. Further, like Lever Brothers, they requested that their agencies begin utilizing more blacks in their commercials. Also, they had increased their advertising budgets on stations programming to black listeners.<sup>52</sup>

The trade press lauded the immediate steps taken by Lever Brothers and Colgate. Two huge advertisers had agreed to take active steps to incorporate blacks into their advertisements and to go even further by trying to influence personnel changes within their advertising agencies. "[They] should be applauded and followed by other advertisers, many of whom have been dragging their heels," a reporter observed. Furthermore, if this new positive trend were to expand, "American advertising may, after all these years, begin to mirror American life reasonably faithfully, instead of presenting an idealized picture of American life as a handful of cloistered romanticists would like it to be."<sup>53</sup>

Funnye and the rest of the New York chapter were justifiably elated when the last of the initial three targets, Procter & Gamble, agreed to begin integrating their advertisements. In fewer than eight months the Image campaign achieved its initial goal—the three companies Funnye called the "giant killers" agreed to integrate their advertising. Also, each had gone beyond CORE's emphasis on blacks' role in advertisements to at least inquire about blacks' employment in their advertising agencies and to put some pressure on television networks to incorporate more black actors in their television programs.<sup>54</sup>

CORE used the momentum from the initial three companies to per-

suade other major companies to meet with them and discuss their advertising policies. In contrast to the individual meetings with the first three companies, CORE now met with company representatives in groups rather than individually. During these meetings, CORE described how companies at the meetings used blacks in past advertising campaigns and then explained how they expected them to use them in the future. The leaders of some selective-patronage committees were also present at this round of meetings. Also, CORE reinforced the impact of noncooperation with their goals. They ensured that meeting attendees received results from the updated survey from the Center for Research in Marketing showing that nearly 90 percent of blacks would participate in a consumer boycott and that almost 10 percent would permanently stop using the products of the company being boycotted. In response, representatives at this second stage expressed a willingness to cooperate similar to that of CORE's first targets. After attending the CORE meetings, representatives told reporters that their firms would begin to look for more ways to include blacks in their advertising work. Perhaps even more revealing, none expressed any sentiment that the group's objectives were excessive or would be difficult to implement.<sup>55</sup>

By the end of the first two phases of the Image campaign, CORE had met with representatives from thirty-six major advertisers. Companies including Coca-Cola, Kellogg's, Gillette, and Philip Morris had sent representatives to meet with the group and the parties had reached a mutual agreement. These agreements called for each company to begin to integrate its advertisements to the general market. CORE activists were specific that rather than seeing more whites in advertisements in *Ebony* and other black publications, they wanted more blacks appearing in white publications and on television shows. An agreement between CORE and a company was not a written contract. Instead it was an understanding that the company would begin to craft integrated advertisements within the CORE-established time frame of ninety days. During the ninety-day period, advertisers were asked to submit progress reports every thirty days. CORE members contacted any advertiser whose report was more than three days overdue and requested an immediate update. Companies fulfilled their side of the agreement when they could produce either advertising storyboards or completed commercials featuring black characters. While this did not guarantee production of the advertisements, these agreements brought the issue of racial integration to the forefront. Moreover, the agreements were evidence that, on the client side, the tide had shifted toward a greater incorporation of racial diversity in advertising than ever before.<sup>56</sup>

In September 1963, forty major advertisers announced that they had begun preparing integrated advertisements. The impact of the pressure



## “Dig up 42nd Street?”

Yep. We're digging up 42nd Street. But only because we have to. Take a look down that famous thoroughfare. The UN stands at the eastern end. Skyscrapers line both sides. And renewal projects are changing the face of the West Side. All this progress brings the need for more electric energy. So, we'll be digging up 42nd Street, east to west, during the next few months.

We're bringing in new high-voltage cables to deliver more electricity to the new substation on W. 42nd Street between 10th and 11th Avenues. "Dig we must" for the growing West Side of a growing New York.

A big job like this is bound to get in somebody's way. But we'll do our best (and we've had lots of practice) to work fast and safely and get out of the way as quickly as possible.

We've spent months planning the job with City agencies, stockpiling materials, selecting the most direct route. We found other, narrower, cross-town streets would affect traffic even more. And along 42nd Street we can use abandoned trolley lanes to save time.

Con Edison  
POWER FOR PROGRESS

Figure 11. An “acceptable” form of integration in advertisements, two men discussing street construction within the context of their daily routines. Con-Edison advertisement, *Advertising Age* (September 23, 1963): 115.

brought by CORE and the Urban League had clearly done more than generate meaningless agreements between executives and activists. In fact, things had progressed so steadily that Funnye optimistically observed that integrated advertising would become “commonplace by the end of 1964.” While history shows that he was overly sanguine in this prediction, by the end of 1963 anecdotal evidence convinced Funnye and other activists that there had been a considerable increase in the number of integrated advertisements. In television, print, and on billboards blacks discussed typical consumer problems with detergents, toothpastes, vacations, or public utilities. With the successful second phase complete, CORE moved on to the next part of the campaign.<sup>57</sup>

During the third portion of the Image campaign, CORE met with the final sixty-four companies that made up the one hundred largest advertisers in the country. As in the first two phases, they largely found willing representatives. One representative noted, “Their requests are not unreasonable. This [integrated advertising] is coming, and you didn’t have to go to that meeting to figure it out. The soaps [companies] have shown us the way; now for us, it’s just a matter of when and how.” Continuing their initial model, CORE secured agreements with the remaining firms. Importantly, during this stage executives learned that failure to fulfill their agreements meant direct action by CORE and that the organization did not play favorites among targeted firms. During a brief “misunderstanding” between the group and the Pepsi-Cola Company, activists began preparations for a selective patronage campaign against the cola giant.<sup>58</sup>

On the surface, Pepsi’s actions signified that its leadership implicitly agreed with CORE’s goals: They had a highly placed black executive, Harvey Russell, and a special-markets group staffed with black representatives; they also produced phonographic records on black history and funded scholarships for black students. Yet, for all of their support of African Americans and the black consumer market, Pepsi did not use black models in advertisements to white consumers. Although the company did use black models, they only appeared in advertisements in black magazines and newspapers. That segregation aside, what precipitated the present conflict with Pepsi-Cola was the company’s failure to submit a progress report. In response, Funnye contacted company president Donald Kendall and set a deadline for receipt. This action was an unambiguous message that history had little to do with CORE’s present expectations. In his letter, Funnye warned Kendall that Pepsi had two weeks to submit its report or face a selective-purchasing campaign. The matter never got that far. Within a week, Russell phoned Funnye with Pepsi’s verbal agreement to use blacks in advertisements to all consumers and defused the potential conflict. Nonetheless, the developing rift

between the two sides illustrated to other companies (whose history on black employment and within the black consumer market was often far weaker than Pepsi's) the seriousness with which CORE took their effort to alter advertising practices.<sup>59</sup>

The Image campaign was tremendously successful in reaching its original goals. Major advertisers agreed to begin increasing the number of integrated advertisements, and the campaign helped initiate a discussion in the trade press about blacks' presence in commercials and within advertising agencies. After the campaign's success with advertisers, Funnye planned to move on to advertising agencies to press for expanded black employment, which he and fellow activists knew would be a much tougher prospect. "We feel many companies will concede on the advertising issue. But such progress will still be only relatively token. Real progress comes with jobs," observed one CORE member. After gaining compliance from advertisers he wanted to use that power and publicity to force changes within agencies. In 1965, Funnye began conducting preliminary research into discrimination in the advertising industry. But, as the national CORE organization took a Black Nationalist turn in the mid-1960s, Funnye found his influence within the organization waning. CORE began to move away from integration and interracial cooperation as organizational goals, and organizational support for the Image campaign (as well as those connected to it) dwindled. Tragically, Funnye died in a plane crash in 1970.<sup>60</sup>

Fortunately for those interested in the issues the Funnye and CORE raised, the struggle for integration in advertisements and a broader black presence in the advertising industry had other organizational advocates. Alongside CORE, the NAACP also addressed the issue of black representation in advertisements. Further, it incorporated the original goals of the Urban League to increase black professional employment in the advertising industry. Thus, by combining the two goals into one organizational push, the NAACP mirrored the work started by the NNC as well as complemented and extended that done by the Urban League and CORE.

#### IMAGES AND EMPLOYMENT: THE NAACP

Like to the NNC campaign, the NAACP action against the advertising industry was part of a broader effort to increase the number of blacks employed in three media industries: television, radio, and motion pictures. Specific to advertising, it wanted to get advertisers and agencies to agree to include more blacks in their sponsored television shows and the accompanying commercials. Like CORE, the organization met with advertisers to convince them to use their power to compel agencies to

include more blacks in advertisements. And, like CORE, the primary weapon went beyond moral suasion to threats of boycotts or selective-purchasing campaigns. However, in contrast to CORE and the Urban League efforts, the national organization, rather than local chapters, led the NAACP's program. Before meeting with representatives from advertisers or advertising agencies, it established a list of eight major demands. Of these demands, the one related to the advertising industry was the third: "Negroes *must* [emphasis mine] be used on television commercials." The NAACP initiative against the advertising industry developed out of this single overarching demand.<sup>61</sup>

In August 1963, the NAACP met in Los Angeles with 125 representatives from radio and television stations as well as advertising agencies. The media industries, it charged, were "flagrantly and openly discriminatory to blacks," and worse they had made "pitifully few indications of even token hiring." Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP, informed the group that he expected blacks to receive the same opportunities as whites. Directing his comments to representatives from ad agencies, Wilkins expanded on the NAACP's initial eight demands. He asked representatives to return to their agencies and develop training programs for blacks and to increase recruitment efforts among them. He cautioned that agencies should not hire blacks as "tokens" or as a way to appease protest groups. Instead, he recommended selecting qualified and promotable hires. As the Urban League had done, he cautioned executives to either find already qualified blacks or to be willing to provide the necessary training but not to lower their employment standards to do so. "Hiring any unqualified Negro," activists cautioned, "can be quite as bad as hiring none. More importantly, it convinces those who want to be convinced that 'Negroes aren't ready to be advanced.'" Wilkins also reminded the audience that agencies had a responsibility to present a realistic depiction of life in and the racial makeup of the United States. Bringing more blacks into advertising agencies, he reasoned, would lead to reminders of the nation's racial diversity being present on a daily basis and that awareness would be communicated in advertisements.<sup>62</sup>

One month after the Los Angeles meeting, NAACP officials met with officers from the AAAA and representatives from leading agencies. The purpose of this second gathering was to discuss the specific issue of black employment within agencies and the images of blacks in advertisements. Afterward the AAAA agreed to assemble a larger body of agency representatives to hear and discuss the NAACP's concerns. A few weeks later the AAAA called a meeting of representatives from the fifty-six largest advertising agencies in the country. In front of more than one hundred agency executives, Herbert Hill, national labor secretary of the NAACP,

charged the representatives with maintaining a vision of blacks lagging far behind that of the rest of society. He pressed the body to return to their firms and begin to present blacks in a more positive and realistic manner. James Tolbert, president of the Beverly Hills NAACP, told the agency men that their own apathy and prejudiced actions had led to the organization's demands. It was the "unawareness, habit, apathy and a few instances of out and out racial prejudice" that had led the organization to this point. "No segment in America has done so much to make Negro Americans the invisible men as the advertising industry." Beyond rhetoric and accusations, the NAACP presented the representatives with a five-point program designed to lead to increased black employment in agencies and better representations in advertising:

1) Recognition of "the simple truth" that 20,000,000 American citizens are Negro consumers, and therefore ads in basic media must reflect the fact that Negroes are represented in every walk of life. 2) Sponsorship of TV and radio programs and commercials that eliminate all racial barriers and permit the unrestricted use of Negro performers. 3) Ad agency employment based upon merit, with Negroes participating in on-the-job training and/or apprenticeship programs. 4) Use of Negro models in national and local campaigns for general media, not only for Negro appeal media. 5) Formation of a Four A's committee to help implement this program and resolve present and future problems.<sup>63</sup>

The NAACP designed its program specifically to force advertising agencies to become part of the "fundamental alteration" of the black image. While recognizing that only a limited number of blacks currently had advertising experience, the organization knew there were potentially thousands more with the desire and interest to work in agencies and in commercials. Therefore, it focused upon both training and creating positive images of blacks alone and in integrated scenes in all forms of media. Officials also cleverly placed responsibility for monitoring compliance of their demands at the feet of the AAAA. For that reason, if the program faltered, activists had a central organization to deal with rather than the leaders of individual agencies.<sup>64</sup>

Following the meeting, AAAA's president Crichton announced that several member agencies had already agreed to maintain antidiscrimination policies. However, as he had done during meetings with the Urban League, he cautioned the NAACP and other observers that an immediate increase in black employment levels was not possible. Crichton argued that the hiring of professional blacks in a wide variety of industries had made it difficult for agencies to find qualified black applicants. Although some agencies maintained an active recruitment policy among black college students, they were in the minority. Instead, he observed that most firms searched for black employees through the traditional

channels of employment agencies or employee referrals. What he failed to acknowledge was that in the past these channels had located precious few experienced black candidates. But simple statements of a desire to do better were no longer enough to satisfy black activists, especially if they were accompanied by the protest that there were no qualified blacks available. Instead activists viewed such declarations as a preemptive declaration of failure before any program of remediation even began. Accordingly, as CORE had done in its dealings with major advertisers, NAACP activists insisted that their satisfaction was dependent on evidence of concrete action by the AAAA and its member agencies. Lacking that evidence, the organization would maintain their pressure on the industry.<sup>65</sup>

In November 1963, the AAAA held true to its agreement and invited the NAACP to address a body of advertising representatives. The occasion was the eastern meeting of the AAAA during which a special day-long session was held on the Negro market. The meeting was unprecedented and one reporter hailed it as evidence that “the color line has been irrevocably splintered in national advertising.” While more of an overstatement than an accurate assessment, the sentiment mirrored that of other observers. New York was the center of the advertising universe and, accordingly, the eastern meeting was the largest regional assembly held in the country. Placing the Negro market as the subject of a keynote session at the meeting conveyed the importance of the subject and Wilkins’s presence demonstrated how seriously the NAACP viewed the meeting.<sup>66</sup>

Wilkins was the keynote speaker for the eastern conference, and two advertising executives joined him on the dais. Wilkins painted a picture of the black community seething in disillusionment and anger over the current conditions and slow pace of change in America. However, Wilkins did more than just describe current conditions: he laid the responsibility for the white perception of blacks and resistance to granting them full equality at the feet of the communications industries. Part of what blacks were struggling to alter was the “white man’s image of the Negro” as lazy, morally deficient, ignorant, or happy with his current status in America. “What we in the Negro protest movement ask is realistic treatment of the Negro in the roles he actually plays in American life today. Only recently, and still too rarely, has the viewer of television commercials had any reason to believe that the United States is populated by any persons other than White Anglo-Saxon Protestants . . . Only when one turns to *Ebony* magazine or to the Negro newspapers is one made aware of the existence of Negro consumers,” Wilkins asserted. He challenged the gathered body to return to their agencies and change their current depiction of blacks. Reinforcing the NAACP’s prior list of



demands, he urged them to place ads featuring blacks in both white and black publications. This subtle but important action would fulfill the corporate goal of revenue generation and of black consumers' demands for evidence of change and of a desire to see a realistic image of them as a people. "Not all [are] doctors and lawyers and businessmen, to be sure. But, also, not all [are] menials and clowns and criminals." Further, opening employment opportunities for black models and others connected to advertising production work would lead to more disposable income in the general economy. "Negroes," he observed, "do not enjoy a reputation as hoarders of money." Thus more jobs for blacks meant more spending power for goods and more purchases of goods meant more jobs for all American workers. To Wilkins, employing more African Americans not only made good social sense but good economic sense as well.<sup>67</sup>

In summation, Wilkins warned that the changes that he and the NAACP were requesting were nearly inevitable. So the actions of the people in the room could dictate the future outcome. Change could either come through summits and negotiations or through protests and pickets. He warned, "The NAACP and other civil rights organizations are prepared to mobilize the Negro's considerable purchasing power in the fight for jobs and freedom."<sup>68</sup> Black consumers were already consciously choosing to spend their money with firms that projected a positive image of blacks or had a nondiscriminatory hiring policy. All of this was without the direction of a national organization or structured boycott. What was possible with that organization, he implied, was even more dangerous to the clients of the agencies at the conference.

Other speakers echoed and supported Wilkins's comments. Each reasoned that advertisers and agencies should seek out black employees because they brought a degree of insight and creativity currently lacking in agencies. One white executive, from C. J. LaRoche Advertising, argued that blacks could help fill the overall scarcity of young creative talent facing the industry. "I often think what a matchless copywriter James Baldwin would have made," he mused. "Baldwin is almost the sum total of the good copywriters I have observed. He would have been hell to get along with, but my, oh my, what campaigns he would have turned out."<sup>69</sup> Not all aspiring black copywriters would have Baldwin's literary skill, he allowed, but they could still ably contribute to developing advertising campaigns.

Within a few days of the meeting, the AAAA placed a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* with the heading "An Invitation to All Bright Young Men and Women to Consider Advertising as a Career." The newspaper's publishers offered the space free of charge as a gesture of concern for the racial crisis. Above the copy was a drawing of a group

of young persons including a black man and woman. The copy assured readers that the only requirements for an advertising career were “intelligence . . . enthusiasm . . . common sense . . . and persuasiveness.”<sup>70</sup> It concluded that experience was not as important as potential and that a college education was not a requirement. Over the course of the next few weeks, forty other newspapers reprinted the advertisement. The AAAA advertisement was a direct response to the session held at the eastern meeting and the agreement the group reached with the NAACP. Admittedly it was a passive step since it required people to contact the organization, but, nonetheless, it was an initial effort to attract black candidates to the industry. It was also the first time any advertising organization had published a recruitment advertisement featuring an interracial cast, and it was a small step toward countering the image of advertising as a whites-only industry.

One week after the AAAA regional meeting, the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) held its annual conference. Some of the largest advertisers in the country were members of the ANA, and the group discussed the issue of blacks in advertisements. Several of the gathered members had already participated in meetings with either CORE or the NAACP. Their consensus was that there was no longer any question about whether to include blacks in advertisements; the question was now how best to incorporate them. Executives from companies that had already run integrated advertisements spoke and reported no significant adverse response from white consumers. While the national ANA stopped short of taking an official stance on the inclusion of blacks in advertisements, the implication was that they supported the practice.<sup>71</sup>

Despite public pronouncements of support or plans for change, among major advertising agencies, the use of integrated scenes for the general market had a mixed reception. Most agencies deferred to the wishes of clients rather than establishing an internal policy. The CORE Image campaign was ongoing but the transition from an advertiser’s agreement with CORE to a visible impact on its advertisements moved slowly. Some agencies, like J. Walter Thompson, developed a policy of actively seeking ways to use blacks in their advertisements with the only stipulations being that such scenes fit the needs of the client and be natural, rather than forced.<sup>72</sup>

Regardless of the agency, the use of integrated scenes held to the practice of avoiding intimate social scenes. Agency leaders viewed interactions between blacks and whites as acceptable as long as it took place within a public space such as baseball stadiums, airports, or busy city streets. Intimate social scenes in private spaces such as homes or bars, especially when using noncelebrity blacks, were not. Blacks like John John-

son supported this approach. "To be believable," he argued, "you should not contrive an ad, you should not show as integrated something that is not. If it is normally integrated, then show it; if it is not integrated, then don't show it as such. Tell the truth." As the decade wore on, however, Johnson's arguments became those of the minority. Black activists began challenging agencies not only to use blacks in "natural" scenes depicting current reality but also in social scenes showing how things could become.<sup>73</sup>

Activists with the NAACP were among those who viewed advertising as another tool to speed African Americans' elevation to first-class citizenship. Carol Taylor, president of Negro Women on the March, felt that many of the new images coming from advertisers had not gone past the tokenism of earlier decades. She argued, "As far as I'm concerned, big business will have to take the stand that they should help lead the country, even in TV commercials. Sure they may find themselves portraying social scenes with Negroes in commercials that are not quite normal, but they should take a chance and do so." Harvey Russell, one of the few blacks at the executive level with a mainstream firm, viewed advertising as having the potential to lift blacks out of "cultural isolation." Advertising, if used appropriately, could present to blacks an image of the United States that not only included them, but also welcomed them to become a part of the national life. Advertising could improve both the white majority's image of blacks and blacks' image of themselves. As a writer for *Sales Management* explained, "For a Negro to see a Negro on television or in an ad is for him to see a visible man. And that has never happened before." An American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) study echoed this point, noting that advertisements "should go further and portray the Negro not only as he is, but as he should be as an equal member of a culturally and racially-mixed society in which Negroes and Caucasians work together, play together, go to school together and live as neighbors." But social integration within advertising scenes was a powder keg with which no advertiser or agency wanted to experiment. Most believed that both whites and blacks would reject scenes of social integration, possibly even to the point of boycotting products. Consequently, what integrated advertisements appeared were carefully constructed in broad public spaces.<sup>74</sup>

The NAACP continued to monitor the presence of blacks in television commercials and in agencies, but, like other groups, found their attention drawn to other pressing social issues in the mid-1960s. Activists could hardly devote attention to blacks' representations in advertisements after several consecutive summers of urban riots by blacks fed up with continued racism and discrimination against them. In 1967, the NAACP issued its last major pronouncement on the issue. Leaders criti-

cized the continued lack of blacks on television, especially during programming with a high number of minority viewers. Although they agreed there had been improvements, the current state of minority participation seemed little more than tokenism. The group concluded that if advertisers and agencies continued to move at a glacial pace, the only remaining alternative was for the government to become involved. Beyond this final pronouncement, however, the NAACP's involvement in matters of black employment in and depiction by the advertising industry had peaked. In the late 1960s, the organization briefly returned to the issue of blacks' depictions in advertisements, but this attention never matched that which they displayed earlier in the decade.<sup>75</sup>

#### A View of Reality from David Sullivan

By the mid-1960s some advertisers and agencies had taken visible steps to change the portrayal of blacks in advertisements, to develop integrated advertisements, and to increase their employment numbers in the advertising industry. However, despite the celebratory pronouncements of the AAAA and other organizations, one man viewed the results with a more critical eye. In 1964, black advertising veteran David Sullivan wrote to an open letter to AAAA president Crichton. He sent copies of the correspondence to Whitney Young, head of the National Urban League, and Wilkins, head of the NAACP. Editors at *Advertising Age* also printed a portion of the letter, but its unclear whether or not Sullivan sent them a copy of the entire letter. In this bitter but heartfelt statement, Sullivan chronicled his own experiences in the industry. There had been strides toward racial inclusion, he charged, but there was still a long way to go.<sup>76</sup>

Sullivan's topic was black employment within the advertising industry, and his central theme was that hypocrisy filled the advertising business industry. On one hand, agency leaders complained about the lack of qualified, employable personnel, but on the other, they refused to hire an experienced African American. Sullivan had carefully followed the developments of 1963, especially as they related to increasing the number of blacks in agencies. He owned one agency for six years, briefly opened a second, and had once been a nationally recognized expert on black consumers. But, when he closed his first agency in 1949 he was unable to parlay his experiences into a job with a mainstream firm. After looking for over fifteen years and distributing twelve hundred resumes, he had only been able to secure one "nearly firm" offer. His lone offer then vanished as the company hired a freelance black consultant rather than bring him into the firm as a permanent employee. Although several in the industry had told him that he was a "better than average

copywriter,” none were willing to give him a job. One agency executive went so far as to tell him that, although he was “quite sure you [could] contribute to any agency in the country,” there were no jobs at his firm. Therefore, rather than finding permanent employment, financial necessity forced him to accept the role of consultant and freelancer.<sup>77</sup>

He argued that even for those blacks able to find positions in mainstream firms, their experiences were more difficult than those of their white counterparts. Blacks had fewer opportunities for job mobility, and they often had to accept lower pay. This was particularly troubling, he pointed out, because job mobility was a key source of gaining experience on multiple account types that led to promotions and higher salaries. Racism and discrimination barred them from the primary avenue through which they could increase their salary, responsibility, or professional advancement. Even those who had won awards for their work found their salary falling behind those of less recognized white employees. “My work salary range has been around \$20,000, sometimes a bit lower,” one of Sullivan’s colleagues angrily recounted, “but I’ve seen my white colleagues go up to \$30,000 with far less to offer.” This experience, as well as Sullivan’s own, was, unfortunately, far from rare. Instead, he argued that the experiences of some of the more documented and celebrated blacks in the industry like Clarence Holte, Georg Olden, and Roy Eaton were unique. Although Sullivan’s experiences only represent those of one man, his story is instructive, whether or not his contemporaries believed his tale. He was an experienced advertising man looking for work in New York City, the center of the American advertising community, to no avail. Even more distressing, the reasons that he had been turned down by multiple agencies had less to do with his talent or experience than with his skin color. To Sullivan, the AAAA should do more to aid the multitude of less celebrated black figures, among whom feelings of frustration and disillusionment were more common than were ones of professional satisfaction.<sup>78</sup>

Sullivan’s purpose in writing the six-page letter was not to lament his career, but to prod his recipients to further action. He feared that the AAAA and individual agencies would eventually fail to meet the agreement they had reached with civil rights groups or that agencies might point to the existence of training programs as evidence of their desire to hire more blacks and stop there instead of pursuing creative recruitment measures. Instead of passivity, Sullivan wanted consistent action. “To wave blithely at the trainee recruiting program as an action in being, at this time and tide of events is a travesty of the first order.” He emphasized that agency leaders needed consistent prodding to increase minority employment. For they had the power to compel personnel directors and account managers—the front line of most employment

decisions—to increase the number of minority employees. Should such action be lacking he predicted that public pressure on the advertising industry would increase. “In the circumstances,” he concluded, “it is small wonder not that the ‘pressures outside’ have been put on the industry of advertising and marketing, but, rather that it was so late in coming on the one hand, while being as gentle as it is on the other hand.”<sup>79</sup>

In fact, Sullivan’s arguments foreshadowed growing pressure on the advertising industry in the mid-1960s. Although the New York chapter of CORE, like the NAACP, turned its attention to the urban crises, the national organization took up the cause. As the Image campaign faded in the mid-to-late 1960s, the national CORE organization partnered with a local black consumer organization in a direct action campaign against selected advertising agencies.

### CORE and Consumer Information Services

In 1966, the national CORE organization and the media information arm of Consumer Information Services (CIS) launched a joint protest. CIS was an urban-based organization whose stated mission was to improve the relationship between corporate America and urban consumers. CORE and CIS joined forces to protest the “high cost of Jim Crow advertising and the segregated media.” The joint campaign targeted the Benton & Bowles (B&B) agency, the lead advertising agency for Procter & Gamble (P&G). The stated basis for their protest was that P&G made considerable revenue from black consumers but did not invest directly into the black community. Although the firm had agreed a few years earlier to begin using integrated advertisements, this new campaign sought direct community investments from the company and an increase in the number of blacks working at B&B. While the Image campaign pursued the goal of increasing the use of integrated advertisements, the CORE/CIS campaign centered on improving the lives of underclass blacks. Activists pressed for lower prices for urban residents and training programs as a way to open employment choices for the black underclass. Also, they viewed the Image campaign something that only aided the black upper and middle classes who had the professional flexibility or education to take advantage of new employment choices. In contrast, the new campaign also focused on jobs, but it stressed poor blacks as its beneficiaries, an effort deemed worthy of CORE’s emphasis on aiding the black underclass.<sup>80</sup>

Flo Kennedy led the CIS portion of the campaign. Known for her aggressive and flamboyant tactics, Kennedy had a long history of battling consumer products companies for greater investment into the black

community. After graduating from high school, she organized a successful boycott against a Coca-Cola bottler who refused to hire black truck drivers. Later, she forced Columbia Law School to admit her after she threatened to file a discrimination suit, and she became one of the first black women to graduate from the school. Kennedy developed her tactics to grab attention and was unapologetic about her methods. She believed that any successful protest against a hesitant corporation depended upon generating the public attention that forced executives to the bargaining table. "When you want to get in the suites, start in the streets," she reasoned. "Be patient. It may take thirty years, but sooner or later they'll listen to you, and in the meantime, [you] keep kicking ass." Often clad in a cowboy hat or pink sunglasses, Kennedy was easily conspicuous within a crowd. With her strong sense of political theater, Kennedy was a difficult adversary for those who stood against her chosen causes. B&B executives faced an opponent who was willing to wage a boisterous publicity campaign designed to shame the company into negotiations. Unlike the years of the Image campaign in which opponents gathered quietly in meeting rooms and later announced their agreements to the press, Kennedy and CIS waged their battle against B&B on the sidewalk in front of the agency in full view of television cameras.<sup>81</sup>

Kennedy and CORE argued that P&G should return a portion of their \$250 million annual advertising budget to the black community in one of two ways: either through a hiring policy that increased the number of blacks at the company or a graduated pricing structure that lowered prices for blacks living in urban ghettos. However, the call for graduated pricing was a feint masking the primary goal. The primary goal of the CORE/CIS protest was to convince B&B to sponsoring a training program for blacks interested in entering the advertising industry. It was a manipulative, but clever, strategy. Picketers lined up outside B&B with placards reading: "Have you got a bigot in your shopping bag," and "Black buyers can't afford Madison Avenue parasites." B&B was the target because Kennedy considered them a "liberal, modern agency with a neat complement of Negroes on its payrolls." The agency was the home of Roy Eaton, easily one of the highest-ranking blacks in advertising at the time, and had a host of blacks working in other capacities. In fact, Eaton, unaware of the hidden reason for the choice of B&B, confronted the protesters one day telling them that they had chosen the wrong agency. B&B, he argued, was an agency with a strong policy of hiring blacks and placing them in important positions in the agency. Unwittingly the frustrated Eaton was simply confirming what protesters already knew. Kennedy knew of B&B's hiring policies but smartly reasoned that "if we got nowhere with them, we had no reason to believe

other agencies would treat us any better.” Hence, in this way the CORE/CIS tandem used Funnye’s tactics although he did not participate in the protest against B&B. Where the two efforts differed was that CIS now focused specifically on agencies and wanted B&B to agree to train what they and protestors called the black “underclass.” CORE and CIS targeted a single representative company with hopes that a successful action against them would lead to other agencies following its policies, this time on the agency side. The only reason Kennedy even mentioned P&G was to raise the possibility of a product boycott in the minds of B&B executives and convince them to meet with the group rather than face negative publicity.<sup>82</sup>

The larger advertising community and reporters in the trade press recognized the shift in CORE’s strategy. CIS was a newcomer to protests against the industry, but the reporters had met with CORE activists during the Image campaign and reported favorably on their goals and strategy. In contrast to the near-universal support for the Image campaign, opinions differed on whether the CORE/CIS effort was appropriate. While some argued picketers’ motives were correct, but that they were unfair in marching outside B&B, others went further, calling the protest a “mild form of extortion” or evidence of black “bigotry.” Among those in the trade press who agreed that there was a need to involve more blacks in the advertising business, they differed on the route through which it should take place. On one side were those who argued that protesters should let individual agencies develop their policies voluntarily. Protesters anticipated and countered that position by arguing that voluntarism had been in practice since the inception of the industry and had effectively failed to increase the number of blacks in the industry. On the other side were those who viewed marches and demonstrations as the only alternative available. One writer summed up the sentiment against protestors noting, “More Negroes should be brought into agency work, and more should be employed as models and actors in advertising. Many agencies are bending over backwards to do just that. But bending over is different from being sledge-hammered over.”<sup>83</sup>

The public debate had no impact on Kennedy and CORE’s tactics. In fact, if anything it strengthened their resolve that they were on the right track. The letters and articles, even if they were against the protests, demonstrated that many in the industry recognized the need to employ more black professionals. The problem, as Kennedy and CORE viewed it, was that little action had accompanied that realization. Instead, they believed that if agencies were going to address the issue of black employment in the industry voluntarily, they would have already done so. Madison Avenue, Kennedy charged, had no genuine desire to see blacks gain positions of power and control in advertising. The tactic of voluntarism



was a failure and consistent pressure was the only true means to ensure changes.<sup>84</sup>

With pickets arrayed outside B&B, company executives agreed to meet with Kennedy and other activists as a sign of their willingness to hear her demands. B&B leaders also asked them for an outline of their demands and proposed solutions to the issues in contention. The meeting was held inside the agency. What Kennedy brought to the meeting was an outline for a Media Workshop Institute in Harlem. With an expected \$5 million first-year investment from B&B, the Institute could provide training for blacks and other minorities interested in working in advertising. Further, the plan called for executives from B&B and other interested agencies to serve as instructors for the various classes. After successful completion of the six-week workshops, interested students would enter the industry.<sup>85</sup>

The proposed workshop may have surprised B&B executives, but it complemented CORE's broader organizational focus on community organizing. A training program that incorporated poor blacks into their own uplift fit squarely within this broader goal as well as President Lyndon B. Johnson's ongoing War on Poverty and, if successful, gave blacks a way out of their economic deprivation. Also, apart from the necessity of having white instructors for the program, it was a program organized by blacks for blacks, another part of CORE's shifting focus. In the past the group's guiding ideology emphasized racial integration with whites and blacks working together, but the new organizational direction emphasized militancy and nationalism to the exclusion of significant white involvement. While this did not extend to complete racial separation, it did stress blacks helping blacks without the direct control of whites.<sup>86</sup>

During the initial meeting between B&B and the CORE/CIS group, the agency balked at providing the \$5 million for the Institute, but they agreed to work with the group to set up a training program. They also agreed to interview anyone that CIS recommended who had the qualifications to work in an advertising firm. Executives concluded, "It is our earnest hope that out of these activities will emerge recognizable progress for the people you represent. You may be sure that we shall for our part see that this comes about."<sup>87</sup> With the agreement for a training program reached, the demonstrations around B&B ceased.

Much to the consternation of B&B executives, four months after reaching the agreement with the Kennedy and CORE, protesters returned. Agency leaders were surprised by their sudden return because they felt they were in compliance with the original agreement they had reached with Kennedy. Executives had worked directly with Kennedy and James Haughton, head of the Harlem Unemployment Center, on

the initial planning for the training program and in the interim hired three black youths into the agency as clerks. While these were not the professional-level positions that protesters wanted, part of that responsibility was theirs as they had failed to send B&B the names of any blacks with greater qualifications. Further, instead of protesting the hiring rate for blacks or the current state of the training program, Kennedy and the protesters appeared figuratively with their hands out asking for more money. However, this time it was to have the agency sponsor a local black television show. Even in light of this additional request, executives met with the group and agreed to recommend to clients that they buy time on the program. Kennedy was unwilling to stop there, however. She unwisely pressed even further and insisted the agency underwrite all the production costs associated with the program. Even supporters of the original goals found her request outlandish. After this new request, B&B executives withdrew from the discussion.<sup>88</sup>

Instead of taking their withdrawal as an opportunity to alter her approach and renew discussions with the firm, she wrote to some of B&B's clients and later carried the same demands to other advertising firms. Warning both agencies and advertisers of possible "direct consumer action against your company, its image, service and/or products," Kennedy overplayed her hand. Her threats drew little response. Over the next few weeks she met with advertising agency executives, as well as client-side advertising managers, but all refused to support the program. Though she had once dealt with executives sympathetic to her larger goals, this time they ignored her. In his time, Funnye had the backing of the selective-patronage committees, but in her renewed battle against B&B, Kennedy lacked the support of CORE and its committees. It is unclear why CORE severed ties with CIS, but its absence meant that Kennedy was, at best, able to organize a local boycott against the company but that she had little power to mobilize the national campaign that would have drawn the attention of B&B or its clients.<sup>89</sup>

By choosing to press B&B for more funds, Kennedy and CIS may have lost a genuine opportunity. In B&B they had an agency with an existing liberal hiring policy and a willingness to go even further. Executives at the agency took CIS and CORE seriously and admitted that their work with the group led to "intensive soul-searching" and a recommitment to an open hiring and promotion policy. Further, at the time when the final round of meetings took place between B&B and CIS, black and white advertising professionals in Chicago were in discussions for what became the Basic Advertising Course. Thus, had B&B and CIS been able to continue making strides in the development of their original training program, an effort similar to the Chicago course may have been possible in New York. Unfortunately, because the two groups chose to diffuse

their efforts into developing community television programming, rather than the agency work, they missed an effort that might have generated significant changes.

## Conclusion

Although the CORE/CIS effort eventually fell apart it foreshadowed more aggressive tactics against advertising agencies and professional organizations. To his credit, AAAA's president Crichton did not shy away from meeting with civil rights organizations or with using his position to publicly advocate industry support for their goals. He used his office to press for greater employment of blacks in the advertising industry. Crichton also continually urged advertising agencies to establish training and recruitment programs for blacks and to incorporate them into integrated advertisements where possible.<sup>90</sup>

Still, during the 1960s the media were a contested battleground. Not only did agencies face the demands of civil rights activists, they also faced southern whites displeased about programming that depicted "all white Southerners as ignorant, degenerate and villainous and all Negroes as straight out of Oxford."<sup>91</sup> An executive with the Ted Bates agency likely summed up the thoughts of many others in the industry when he lamented to an interviewer, "You must understand that the businessman does not wish to antagonize anybody—even the bigots."<sup>92</sup>

The grassroots activism blacks maintained in the early 1960s was a key component in supporting civil rights organizations' agreements with major corporations. Whether in the case of the protest at Woolworth's, against companies in Philadelphia, or, eventually, the equally successful campaigns waged by Jesse Jackson's Chicago-based Operation Breadbasket, black consumer activism was directly responsible for the expansion in employment opportunities in the advertising industry and elsewhere. Without these supportive efforts, civil rights groups would have undoubtedly had a much more difficult time convincing corporate leaders to meet their demands.<sup>93</sup>

Collectively, the efforts of the Urban League, CORE, and the NAACP each enhanced the other. On one side was CORE, working with advertisers to convince them to utilize more inclusive advertising policies. On the other side was the NAACP, working with advertising agencies to foster employment and image changes. Both of these organizational campaigns benefited from the earlier work of the Urban League and the NNC that had combined issues related to both advertisers and agencies. Additionally, although their protest eventually foundered due to poor strategic decisions, the CORE/CIS protest foreshadowed a growing interest in the experiences of poor consumers. Further, each these

groups gained results within a short period of time. These organizations successfully encouraged the business community to embrace the concept of immediate action as a way to make up for the impact of historic discrimination and to generate immediate results. Additionally, the use of black models in advertisements in general-market media sources increased, and several agency executives expressed an interest in increasing their numbers of black employees.<sup>94</sup>

Civil rights activity alone was not responsible for all the changes realized in the industry during the 1960s. The attention from civil rights groups directly helped bring about that of state and federal legislators and commissioners. As these local and federal government organizations became involved in equal employment opportunity programs they complemented activists' efforts and led to important measures of legislative redress and protection to ensure fair employment policies. Their involvement insured that agencies had to comply not only with agreements reached with private organizations but also with the dictates of public laws. In addition, the combined action of civil rights organizations fostered a major shift in public opinion to one of support for an end to discriminatory hiring practices. Thus, equal employment opportunity became not only a matter of compliance with the law but also a legitimate expression of social responsibility.<sup>95</sup>