

Appeals and Social Implications via Nineteenth-Century Advertising

A lot was happening in the 1800s, with the ad industry's maturation on top of that. But advertising and society were interacting in new ways. Gender is a good example. While advertising was very much an industry of men, women did have a presence.

ADVERTISING'S FEMININE SIDE

I mentioned James "Jem" White as maybe the second agency head ever, in 1800. He died at age forty-five, so in 1820 his wife, Margaret (Faulder) White, became the first woman to head an ad agency. Margaret then married Richard Barker, who helped manage the agency.

The next woman-owned agency came in 1877 Stockholm, Sweden. Sofia Gumaelius, a newspaper publisher's daughter, founded the agency Gumaelius Annonsbyrå. It became the first agency founded by a woman, and it still operates today.

In 1880, a German immigrant to the United States, Mathilde C. Weil, opened the M.C. Weil agency in New York. Weil started in advertising by buying and selling ad space for a German newspaper. Some claim this was the first woman-owned agency, missing both White and Gumaelius (e.g., Krismann 2005). But *Printers' Ink* magazine (1896, vol. 16)—referring to New York—declared:

Two of the city advertising agencies are owned and controlled by women. These are both located in the Times Building, and each controls an important line of local advertising, besides considerable general business. The first one to go into the business was Miss M. Volkman, a German lady of good business ability, just now abroad; the other is Miss M. C. Weil, who is also German. The business handled by these two ladies is almost exclusively of English firms of the best standing.

Reference to an earlier agency by M. Volkman is unclear, but appears to refer to Meta Volkman, whose brother owned the newspaper where Weil worked. She was a close friend of Weil. Clearly both were influential in advertising.

Women took other roles in advertising, too. J. Walter Thompson hired its first woman space buyer in 1885: Alice Stoddard. And the 1897 book, *Occupations for Women*, included a chapter titled “Women in Advertising,” suggesting that women pursue advertising jobs (Willard, Winslow, & White 1897).

Women gained ground as an important consumer segment, too. In 1800, they had relatively little impact, since they bought mostly necessities and there was no brand competition.

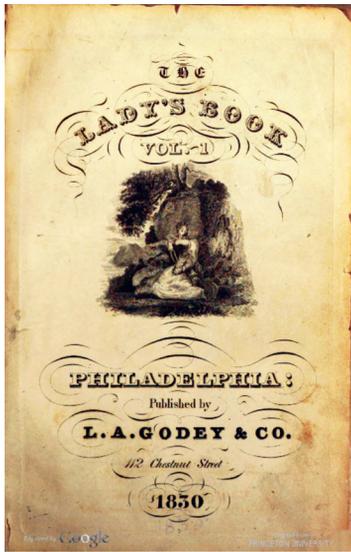


FIGURE 8.1. The first edition of *Godey's Lady's Book*, from 1830.

But when the Industrial Revolution brought new opportunities, like sewing machines and washing machines, their consumer roles changed (Jones 1955). In 1830, a magazine targeting women began: *Godey's Lady's Book* (Figure 8.1). If you recall, the first women's magazine was the *Ladies' Mercury*, in 1693, though it was short lived. *Godey's* became a serious entrée into the women's market.

By mid-century, women were on the rise in society. Some claim the women's suffrage movement began in 1903, but it really began at an 1848 women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York. After that convention (circa 1851), Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were circulating petitions for a constitutional amendment to guarantee women's rights.

By the Civil War's end, technologies were making women's household workloads more manageable. Bicycles gave them easier mobility. Even gas lighting meant no carrying coal or wood to lengthen their day (Gallo 1972). And colleges for women were becoming accessible. They now had some tools to help liberate them. Suffrage wasn't limited to the United States; in New Zealand women received voting rights in 1893.

By late century women were appearing in ads, because they were both readers and shoppers. Newspaper publishers and advertisers were paying more attention to women. And women weren't the only ones finding new paths in society. African American roles, too, shifted.

SLAVE IN A BOX

When the century began, African Americans' place in the ad industry was almost exclusively in ads seeking the sale or retrieval of slaves. That continued for decades.

Harriet Tubman escaped slavery with her brothers, Ben and Henry (“Harry”), in 1849. The *Cambridge Democrat* ran an ad by her owner, calling Harriet “Minty,” her birth name:

THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD. RAN AWAY from the subscriber on Monday the 17th ult., three negroes, named as follows: HARRY, aged about 19 years, has on one side of his neck a wen, just under the ear, he is of a dark chestnut color, about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high; BEN, aged about 25 years, is very quick to speak when spoken to, he is of a chestnut color, about

six feet high; MINTY, aged about 27 years, is of a chestnut color, fine looking and about 5 feet high. One hundred dollars reward will be given for each of the above named negroes, if taken out of the state, and \$50 each if taken in the State. They must be lodged in Baltimore, Easton or Cambridge Jail, in Maryland. ELIZA ANN BRODESS Near Bucktown, Dorchester county, Md. Oct. 3d, 1849.

Harriet led perhaps three hundred slaves to freedom via the “underground railroad,” and slave owners ran ads offering a \$40,000 bounty for her death or capture (Kern-Foxworth 1994).

Even before slavery ended, in 1827 John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish founded *Freedom's Journal*, the first African American newspaper in the United States. It provided much more positive images of African Americans in its ads than seen previously (Moss 2003).

US slavery ended in 1865. By the 1870s, African Americans appeared regularly in advertisements, particularly on trade cards. Kern-Foxworth (1994) suggests, “The first large-scale use of blacks in advertising actually came with the introduction of trade cards” (Figure 8.2). Those cards led to African American characters in other advertising. Characters like the Gold Dust Twins, Aunt Jemima (Figure 8.3), and Rastus the Cream of Wheat chef, introduced in 1892,

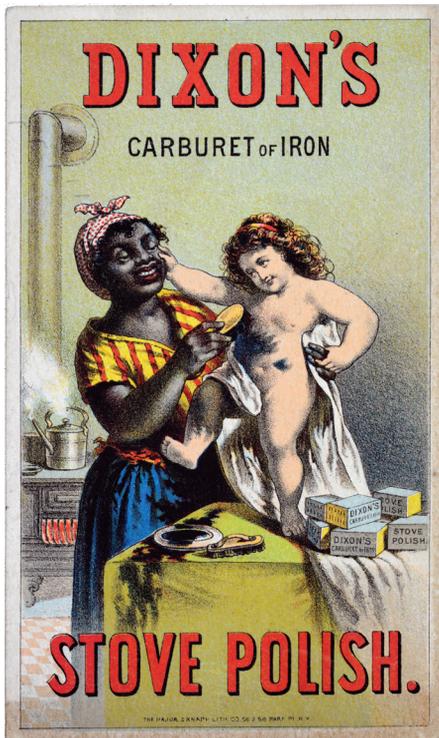


FIGURE 8.2. African Americans frequently were shown on trade cards in slave-type roles, as on this Dixon's card from 1880.

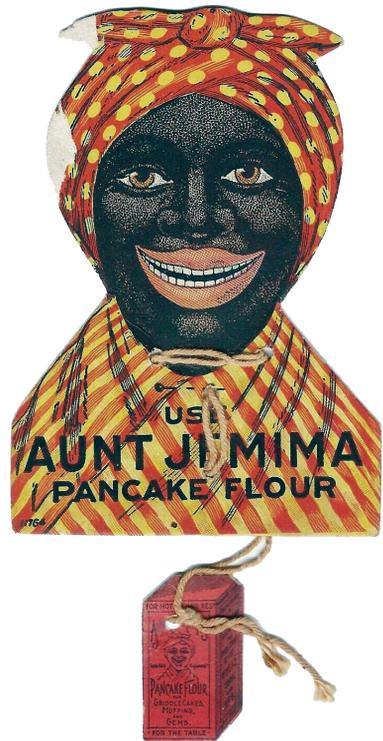


FIGURE 8.3. Aunt Jemima, as she appeared early in her career as an ad spokes-character.

1893, and 1895, respectively, became fixtures in American advertising. Each offered White people a “slave in a box” (Bosarge 2015), as the product would do much of the work.

The food industry made good use of this because of stereotypes that African Americans were good cooks (Moss 2003). They frequently were portrayed as entertainers, and their facial characteristics typically were exaggerated and unflattering. But those ads were about selling to White people, not to African Americans.

While both Blacks and women were playing bigger roles, some things stayed the same. Some of the biggest advertisers were the same as the previous century. As before, lotteries were dominant.

SHIFTING LEADERSHIP

Lotteries were leading advertisers in Britain for the first quarter century, until they were banned. American states started banning lotteries in 1833, and all but Louisiana followed suit by 1860 (Presbrey 1929). Unfortunately, lotteries didn’t help advertising’s reputation, as most people lost money on them.

As lotteries diminished, circuses grew. The first American circus advertising was in 1793. It was straightforward advertising for John Bill Rickett’s Circus, which performed with George and Martha Washington in the audience that year (Foster 1967). But circuses were leading outdoor advertisers by 1800, using broadsides (Hendon & Muhs 1985).

Their greatest influence began in 1835, with Phineas T. Barnum. On July 15 he ran an ad in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* promising anyone visiting the local Masonic Hall would experience “one of the greatest natural curiosities every witnessed”: Joice Heth, an African American woman he claimed was 161 years old and had been a slave of George Washington’s father. This was one of his earliest outrageous ad claims. He bought Ms. Heth for \$1,000 and ended up making \$1,500 *per week* from this show.

Barnum learned selling by working as a clerk at his father’s grocery. He was a genius at selling lottery tickets! For that purpose, he experimented with advertising (Presbrey 1929). By the 1840s, he already had a reputation for being more flamboyant than his competitors. Recall that he was the first to build an illuminated sign in 1840, and he put his face on posters larger than life. M. R. Werner claimed, “Barnum was one of the first men in the United States to realize the power of the paid adjective in advertising theatrical attractions” (Applegate 1998). Even his newspaper ads were hard to miss (Figure 8.4). As he transitioned from museum owner to circus owner, his advertising became even more colorful, literally and figuratively. Other circuses followed (Hendon & Muhs 1985).

Barnum also was king of publicity stunts. One time he sent a man around placing bricks on several street corners. The man returned, replacing the brick he’d put there with a different one. He said nothing. On the hour, he presented a ticket and entered Barnum’s museum. Supposedly, five hundred people followed him and bought a ticket in the very first hour, hoping to find out what was happening. The police eventually stopped him, but news reporters wrote about it for weeks (Applegate 1998).

Another time Barnum's ads announced he had a preserved mermaid. And after he created "The Greatest Show on Earth" in 1871, he featured Jumbo the "giant" African elephant. Some called him "The Prince of Humbug" (Cutlip & Baker 2012). While excess and questionable ethics were his hallmark, P. T. Barnum was one of the most influential figures in nineteenth-century advertising. The lessons learned by others, however, often were that truth is of questionable value. Nowhere was that more obvious than with patent medicines.

SCAM MEDICINES, CONTINUED

In 1800, New York City consisted of 60,000 people. By 1900, the population was 3.8 million. London, already large in 1800, went from 950,000 residents to 6 million during that time. Besides being crowded into confined spaces, the rapid growth was complicated by issues like water treatment and health care delivery (Sivulka 2001). Disease flourished, creating more opportunities for medical scam artists. Not all patent medicines were frauds, but most were (Figure 8.5).

These fraudsters actually advanced the advertising field as they innovated their sales methods. They were among the largest and most effective advertisers. Of course, that efficacy was often thanks to fraudulent claims, but they also created groundbreaking ad designs and appeals, and reached for a national market before most advertisers saw that potential.

Thomas Holloway sold an "Ointment and Universal Pill," and in a few years he made a fortune advertising them (Elliott 1962). Turner (1953) concludes:

It has been said that in the second half of the nineteenth century anyone with £10,000 to spend on pushing a patent medicine could not fail to make [a] large fortune. Whether or not the medicine had any virtue of small consequence.

CHICAGO TRIBUNE WEDNESDAY

AMUSEMENTS.
THE WORLD'S FAIR!
Chicago, 4 Days Only!
Commencing MONDAY, Oct. 7, and Not Before That Time!



P. T. Barnum's
Great Travelling
Museum, Menagerie,
 Caravan, Hippodrome, Polytechnic Institute & International Zoological Garden,
 With Free admission to
DAN CASTELLO'S MAMMOTH CIRCUS.
Seven Superior Exhibitions!
In Six Separate Colossal Tents!
 Ten Times Larger than Any Other Show Ever Seen on Earth!
 Will exhibit in Chicago MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY and THURSDAY, Oct. 7, 8, 9 and 10 on ST. PETERS, extending from Twenty-second to nearly Third Street; and on FRIDAY, the only grounds in Chicago large enough for his Colossal Exposition. Three entertainments each day—morning, afternoon and evening.
 Doors open at 10 a. m. and 1 and 6 1/2 p. m. Hippodrome performances commence at 11 a. m. and 2 and 5 p. m.
 Admission to the Seven Colossal Shows only 50 cts. Children under 5 years, half price.
 The entire Pavilions are brilliantly illuminated in the evening by 200 gas jets.
 Excursion trains will run on all the railroads for a distance of 70 miles to bring in the audience.
 Will also exhibit at La Crosse, Wis., Saturday, Sept. 21; Madison, 23; Rockford, 24; Elgin, 25; Janesville, 26; Fond du Lac, 27; Green Bay, 28; Neenah, Mon. Oct. 29th.
 Outlook, Oct. 1; Watertown, 2; Milwaukee, 3 and 4; Racine, Saturday, 5th.
 Aurora, 11; Friday, Oct. 11; Ottawa, 12; Joliet, 13; Kankakee, 14; Champaign, 15; Danville, 17; Lafayette, 18; Loganport, 19; Fort Wayne, Monday, Oct. 21.

The Great Shows!
 Every Afternoon and Night
 AND ALL THIS WEEK.



Cor. State and Twenty-second-sts.
(GREAT PACIFIC)
Museum, Menagerie,
CARAVAN, AND CIRCUS.

FIGURE 8.4. An 1872 newspaper ad for P.T. Barnum's museum.